

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, February 24, 2008**

A PRAYER TO THE GOD WHO IS

Psalm 18

INTRODUCTION

Today is my last Sunday in the pulpit for a while. I expect to be out of action for the next 6-7 weeks recovering from the surgery scheduled for this Thursday at Johns Hopkins University Hospital in Baltimore to remove this cranial tumor known as an acoustic neuroma.

Your prayers for me and my family are appreciated more than I know how to say. We're looking at this situation as an "opportunity to trust God." We're trusting in the absolute sufficiency of His grace and power, confident that His grace will abound to us – and to all of you as well.

For several weeks now, we have been looking at the life of David – this shepherd, poet, musician, giant-killer and military hero chosen by God to succeed Saul as King of Israel – and the only person in the Bible described as a "man after God's own heart."

Today I want you to look with me at one of the many psalms in the Bible written by David. The heading for Psalm 18 reads:

Of David the servant of the LORD. He sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

This psalm is almost identical to the song of David recorded in 2 Samuel 22, near the end of David's life.

I'm going to read selected verses of Psalm 18, beginning at the beginning with verse 1 and reading verses 1-6, 16-19, 25-31, and 46-49.

The life of David was punctuated with prayer. Many of his prayers and songs are preserved for us in the Book of Psalms, as well as 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. These prayers and songs reveal the personal nature of David's worship life and his relationship with God.

As an example, listen again to the opening two verses of Psalm 18, where David says:

I love You, O LORD, my strength.
The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

David begins by expressing to the Lord his love *for* the Lord. The message of the Bible is a message of love. A message of *God's* love for the world. A message of God's redeeming love. A message of the depth of God's love and the length to which He has gone in His love to save lost sinners and to redeem for Himself a people of His own.

Having experienced God's amazing love and sovereign grace in his own life, David is moved in his spirit to respond in love. To express his love for God.

How about you? Have you told God lately – have you told God *today* – that you love Him? In the midst of busy days, demanding schedules and hurried lives, have you stopped to say to the Lord Jesus: “I love you”?

Let me encourage you to follow David's example and tell God often of your love for Him.

After expressing his love to God, David uses several words to describe the ministry of the Lord in his life. Words such as:

strength
rock
fortress
deliverer
refuge
shield
stronghold

We're going to look at just three of them this morning.

Mary Sue and I have been enormously blessed by a devotional book called *The Satisfied Heart*, written by Ruth Myers, a former missionary to Singapore and staff member with the Navigators ministry. She makes the point in this book that God wants us to take the truth of what we know about Him – what we know Him to be both in Himself and in His relationship to us – and to apply it to *our* lives. To *our* situations and circumstances. In other words, God wants to be *to us* and *for us* what He Himself truly is.

Myers says: “To really know God [as David did] means that we see what He wants to be in relationship to us, and then, more and more in the experiences of daily life, (we) *let* Him be that to us. Count on Him to be that.”

She suggests that we take what God in His Word says about Himself, about His character and power, and then pray this prayer:

Be to me what You are.

Be to me – in my life, in my circumstances, in my needs – the rock You are. Be to me the shield, the fortress, the refuge You are.

David himself prays this kind of prayer in Psalm 31. He says to the Lord:

Be my rock of refuge,
 a strong fortress to save me.
 Since You are my rock and my fortress,
 for the sake of Your name lead me and guide me.
 Free me from the trap that is set for me,
 for You are my refuge.
 Into Your hands I commit my spirit,
 redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.
 (Psalm 31:2-5)

Since You are my rock and my fortress, since You are my refuge, be to me what You are.

Make that your prayer as you meditate on God's Word and contemplate what His Word says about Him. Be to me – in my life, in my circumstances, in this situation – what You are.

1. MY ROCK

David says that the Lord is his rock (18:2). Later in Psalm 18 he says: “For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God?” (18:31).

In Psalm 62:6-7, David says:

(The Lord) alone is my rock and my salvation.
 He is my mighty rock...

In Psalm 144:1 he says:

Praise be to the Lord my Rock.

When I was growing up, my dad worked for the Prudential Insurance Company. Prudential's logo was the Rock of Gibraltar. Probably the most famous rock in the world. The Strait of Gibraltar separates the continent of Europe (Spain) from North Africa. The Rock itself is situated at the crossroads of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.

When my dad worked for Prudential, their motto was:

Own a piece of the Rock.

The idea was that with Prudential your insurance (or investments, after it became a stock company) would provide financial security. It would give the policy owner a sense of stability and confidence. It was something you could count on, like a rock.

David found in the Lord his rock. His security. His source of confidence. His stability. His solid foundation.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about the importance of building your life on the sure, solid, bedrock foundation of God and His Word. A house – or a life – built on a foundation of sand will not withstand the tests, trials, challenges and storms that every one of us will encounter in life. What is needed is for each of us to build on the rock of God’s Word, His promises and His character.

David found in the Lord his rock. And the Lord gave David a firm place to stand. He can be the same for you. He can be the rock in your life and mine.

If you’re going through a stormy season in your life – or *when* you go through a storm, ask the Lord to be to you what He is. Ask Him to be your rock. And trust Him to bring you through it.

2. MY SHIELD

David also says in verse 2 that the Lord is his shield. He refers to the Lord as his shield in several other places as well.

In Psalm 3:3: You are a shield around me, O Lord.

In Psalm 28:7: The Lord is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in Him,
and I am helped.

In Psalm 140:7 he refers to the Lord as the One “who shields my head in the day of battle.”

In Psalm 144:2: (He is) my shield in whom I take refuge...

It is the Lord who protects David from the attacks of his enemies. And it is the Lord who protects us from the spiritual attacks of the enemy of our souls. Spiritual battles must be fought with spiritual weapons. And God has given us the weapons and resources we need.

In Ephesians 6, Paul urges us – and all God’s people – not only to take up the shield of faith with which we can deflect and extinguish all the flaming arrows of our arch-enemy Satan, but to put on the whole armor of God from the top of our heads to the bottom of our feet, and to utilize all the weapons and resources of the kingdom of heaven to fight against our spiritual foe.

The shield of faith – a biblically-grounded faith in the one true and living God, a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving work on our behalf – can protect us from the

arrows or bullets or grenades of doubt or error or disappointment or deception with which the devil will target us.

The Lord Himself – the source and object of our faith – was David’s shield. As someone put it: “The God who rules the stars guards the heart of David.” And yours. And mine.

If you find yourself under some kind of attack from the enemy of our soul – or when you find yourself under some kind of spiritual attack, when Satan’s arrows are coming at you fast and furious – let this be your prayer:

Be to me what You are, O Lord.
 Since You are my shield –
 a shield for all who take refuge in You –
 be my shield and defender.
 Be to me what You are.

3. MY REFUGE

Third, David says that God is the One in whom he takes refuge (18:2).

In Psalm 46, the sons of Korah remind us that “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (46:1).

In Psalm 142, written by David when he was in the cave on the run from Saul, David said to the Lord: “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living” (142:6).

In Psalm 9, David says:

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,
 a stronghold in times of trouble.
 Those who know Your name will trust in You,
 for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You
 (9:9-10).

In *The Message* it says:

God is a safe-house for the battered,
 a sanctuary during bad times.

A refuge is a place of safety. A place of protection and security. A secure fortress. And that is what the Lord is for His people. He is “a refuge for the oppressed.”

Do you ever feel oppressed?

Oppressed by fear?
 Oppressed by worry?
 Oppressed by doubt?

Oppressed by loneliness?
 Oppressed by grief?
 Oppressed by depression?
 Oppressed by a problem or situation that won't go away, or is just too big for you to handle?

God can handle it. It is not too big for Him. Let Him be to you what He is. A refuge – a safe place – for the oppressed, and a stronghold – a secure fortress – in times of trouble. Let this be your prayer:

Lord, be to me what You are. Since You are a refuge for the oppressed, be my refuge in times of trouble and stress. Let me find my rest and my hope in You.

My rock. My shield. My refuge. God is all of these. And mine. He is our strength when we are weak. He is our light and our salvation, as David says in Psalm 27:1. He is the “father of orphans (and the) champion of widows,” as it says in Psalm 68:5 (*The Message*). He is our shepherd, our Savior, our friend.

Let me simply urge you today to think about who and what God is. And make this your prayer each day to the God who is:

In my life – in my circumstances, in this situation – be to me what You are.

Lord, let it be so, to the glory of Your name. Amen.