

Our Lord of the storm

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[0 : 00] This morning we were giving thought to a passage in Mark's Gospel that carries as its title, Jesus calms the storm.

And the big truth that we were able to draw from this ability of Jesus, as indicated in the very title of the passage, His ability to calm the storm, concern His identity.

Only God has the power and the authority to calm storms in the manner that Jesus calmed the storm, as we were thinking about this morning.

The conclusion was inescapable. Jesus is gone. We also noticed the manner in which Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves, where the storm is presented as representing in a manner evil powers intent on destruction.

Well, tonight we turn to a passage in the Old Testament that presents God as the God who both stirs and calms the storm.

[1 : 26] The conclusion we came to this morning, that this power to calm the storm was evidence, that pointed towards Jesus' divinity, is grounded in what we find in the Old Testament, concerning this power and capacity of God.

But in this psalm, there is this interesting additional element, a God who not only calms the storm, but a God who stirs up the storm to fulfill His own purposes on behalf of His people.

And as we turn to the passage, we'll see how these elements can be identified. 2 Samuel chapter 22, and as we noted just as we introduced the reading, Psalm 18 is a psalm, as the opening verse indicates, penned by David.

In particular circumstances, we can just remind ourselves of what David himself says at the beginning of the psalm, or introducing the psalm, David sang to the Lord the words of this psalm, when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

There's a particular reference to Saul, but there's also this reference to him having been delivered from all his enemies. And so it does seem to suggest that this was a psalm that was written that was thinking not of any one particular deliverance, but a whole series of deliverances in the midst of the many battles that David fought.

[2 : 56] And now he knows peace, and the nation knows peace, and he can look back from some distance, maybe not a great distance, and consider and give thanks for many deliverances, from being delivered from, in the very words that he uses or that are used here, the hand of all his enemies.

I want to consider the first part of the psalm through to verse 20, and do so using this picture or theme of the storm to guide our thoughts.

We want to notice and consider the storm that David faced. He speaks of that in verses 5 to 7, the nature of the storm that he endured, that he went through, that he was delivered from.

So the nature of the storm that he faced, or the storm that David faced, but also the storm that David witnessed, that was actually part of God's answer to his crime, part of God's deliverance involved, a storm that God raised up, but with saving purposes.

And David witnesses and describes in metaphors and in picture language this storm that God raised up in his favor.

[4 : 20] So the storm that David faced, the storm that David witnessed, but then the storm stilled by God in deliverance. God calms the storm, and there we're back to David's storm, and the way in which God calms that storm in David's experience.

So in that way we can think about what we find, or at least elements of what we find in this first part of the chapter of the psalm. First of all then, the storm that David faced.

There's a couple of things that we can maybe draw out. First of all, the nature of the storm, but then also in a moment noticing the response to the storm, how David responds to the storm. But first of all, what can we say about the nature of this storm that David remembers and was delivered from? And there in verses 5 and 6, the language is very dramatic, it's very vivid. The waves of death swirled about me. The torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

The cords of the grave coiled around me. The snares of death confronted me. These two verses are made up of four lines, and each of these lines speak of death in one way or another.

[5 : 39] In verse 5, the language is storm language, the language of waves and torrents. And in verse 6, it's clear that the storm, whatever it was, brought David face to face with imminent and seemingly inescapable death.

Death almost seems to have taken hold of him. There seems to be no turning back from this fatal fate that he is confronted with.

Not so unlike the disciples in the boat this morning before Jesus calmed the storm. They too were in the grip of death until they were freed or liberated from its grip by Jesus.

Now it seems, in the light of the introduction to the psalm, it seems clear that David, as he speaks of this storm that he faced, that he has in mind the physical deathly danger posed by his enemies.

Many different enemies. As I say, the psalm begins by very clearly identifying that as the context of the psalm. But I think it's also true that the language that David employs, this picture language, is one that could reasonably be applied to any number of storms or trials that David himself may have faced, including physical battles and physical enemies, but also to the storms and trials that we can face that may be very different in character, including spiritual storms that we can confront.

[7 : 25] As believers, we are not always spared such storms in our life. Indeed, we are ordinarily not spared such storms in our life.

It may not be a danger to our physical integrity, though it may be on occasion, but it may be equally fierce and deadly in other ways, the storms that we face.

Maybe a storm that you are going through and confronting and in the eye of, even now. So the storm that David faced was intense in nature.

It was deathly in character. But then we also have the manner in which, or the record of David responding to that storm. In verse 7, we read, David recalls what he did in those circumstances.

In my distress, I called to the Lord. I called out to God. From his temple, he heard my voice. My cry came to his ears.

[8 : 30] What does David do in the midst of the storm as the waves and the torrents near overwhelm him? Well, he cries out to God. He cries out, notice, to my God, the Lord, his covenant God, upon whom he can call in the confidence that he will be heard, that he will be granted a sympathetic hearing.

And God does hear. The cry of David reaches heaven itself. I think there's reference to God answering or hearing from his temple. It is a reference to God enthroned in heaven.

And there, even there, he hears the cry of David. The cry of David reaches the ears of God. And of course, that is true for us also.

We too can approach God with that confidence. And as we cry out to God, we do so resting in the merits and intercession of Jesus.

And as we do, we know that our cry will be heard, that it will reach his ears and will be answered. That then concerning the storm that David faced.

[9 : 42] But then we turn to another storm, a different storm. And it's the storm that David witnessed as God answers his cry.

And I'm speaking about the language, the very vivid, dramatic language that occupies the next several verses from verse 8 through to verse 16. It's clear that this is a description, a poetic description filled with pictures and metaphors, but a description nonetheless of God answering David's cry as he calls out for help in the face of his many enemies.

And the description that is painted here, we've read it already, we won't read it again, but it's a terrifying description of God's response to David's storm.

Indeed, the response of God is itself compared to a raging storm. From verse 15, we see how David employs these pictures, these storm pictures, to describe the manner in which God deals with David's enemies.

And the metaphors there, they're vivid, they're dramatic. In verses 8 and 9, he seems to be describing an earthquake or a volcano, perhaps both. The earth trembled and quaked, the foundations of the heavens shook.

[11:06] They trembled because he was angry. Smoke rose from his nostrils. Consuming fire came from his mouth. Burning coals blazed out of it. Some seismic event that provokes this volcanic eruption or something of that character.

It's from verses 8 and 9. But then as we move on in verses 10 to 13, it's more storm language, the language of waves and torrents and waters overwhelming the enemies of David.

And then also as this description continues to be presented by the psalmist, we're clear that God's intervention is singularly successful in defeating the enemies of David.

In verse 14, the Lord thundered from heaven. The voice of the Most High resounded. He shot arrows and scattered the enemies, bolts of lightning and routed them. What do we make of this storm stirred up by God?

Not the storm that David faced, but one that God stirs up in order to deliver David. One that David witnesses in awe and in wonder.

[12:28] What do we make of it? There's one little phrase that I read in one commentary that hinted at how David might have felt as a witness and beneficiary of God's storming intervention.

And the little phrase that he suggested that might have been in David's mind as he, in a sense, sat back and observed God in action were these words.

All this cosmic drama, just for me. And I thought that captured it beautifully. David is looking. He's in a storm.

He's in distress. He cries out to God. And the answer of God is of a scale and of a magnitude that defies expectation.

All this drama. Just for me, David might have wondered. Yes, I know God is great. I know He's powerful. But that He would employ all His resources in such a dramatic way on my behalf.

[13:34] Is it possible? Is it possible that God would so deploy these resources just for me? As I was thinking about that, I was reminded of the incredulity of the psalmist on another occasion when he penned the words that we find in Psalm 8, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

Is it possible that this God could be mindful of the likes of us, the likes of me? David might have thought. But the astonishing reality is that God does deploy His unfathomable resources in response to the cry for help of His people.

He did so for David. And you are no less loved than David. God is no less disposed to answer your cry for help than He was to answer David's cry for help.

The resources at God's disposal to secure your deliverance are no less ample and no less effective. And so I would encourage you, in your distress, in your storm, to cry out to God for help and to discover maybe with joyful incredulity the manner in which God responds.

All this drama, all these resources deployed by God just for me. So the storm that David witnessed in response to his cry for help.

[15:12] But then let's just notice briefly how the storm that David faced is stilled by God in deliverance. Of course, the defeat of His enemies is part of that deliverance.

But in verses 17 to 20, we have language that speaks much more immediately to David himself and his circumstances and how he experiences God's deliverance and certain aspects of it.

And let's just think about that for a moment. Some aspects of this deliverance as David's storm is stilled by God. Verse 17, we have language that allows us to speak of this deliverance as a personal deliverance.

He, that is God, reached down from on high and took hold of me. Indeed, as we read through the verses, there's this repeated use of the word me.

God is involved personally in rescuing David, and David is the personal objective of God's delivering activity.

[16:17] This is personal deliverance. God Himself reaches down from His temple and grips David. And as we read these words, we can't help but be drawn to the greatest act of deliverance secured by God on behalf of His people and how that also involved reaching down from on high.

Even when we didn't cry out for help in our distress, God reached down from on high, and He did so in the person of His Son. And God came down from heaven into our sin-sick world to take hold of

us, to take grip of us, and to save us.

Personal deliverance is what David experienced. God Himself takes to do with saving David. That's true in the great need of salvation that we have secured for us by the work of Jesus.

But of course, in the other storms that life brings, we can turn to a God who takes a personal interest and hands-on involvement in securing our deliverance.

It's personal deliverance. But then, as we turn to the next verse, we have what we might call a deliverance that is necessary. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes who were too strong for me.

[17 : 52] I'm thinking especially of David's recognition that his foes were too strong for him. David discovered. He maybe didn't realize this at the beginning of the storm.

Maybe at the beginning he thought that they weren't too strong for him. Maybe when the storm first began to rage, he thought, I can handle this. I can handle it. I'm a man of war.

I have my resources. I have my men. I can handle this. They're not too strong for me, I wonder. But soon, or maybe not so soon, I don't know, he realizes that the storm and the enemies before him were too strong for him.

He could not secure his own deliverance. And so he turns to God. And so this deliverance that God provides is a necessary deliverance in that it's the only hope that he has.

No one else can deliver him. Only God can secure his deliverance. That is true for us. In the matter of our spiritual condition and the chaos that is the product of our sin and rebellion, we can turn to no other.

[19 : 04] Only God can save us. But also in the everyday storms and trials, we need to realize that God is not only one option among many, but ultimately our only option.

We need to turn to him for this necessary deliverance that can only come from him. David continues to describe the experience of deliverance by God.

They confronted me in the day of my disaster, verse 19, but the Lord was my support. And then he goes on to say, He brought me out into a spacious place.

Just pause and think a little bit about this language that David uses in describing his deliverance. And we're calling it a liberating deliverance. I don't know if liberating adds anything to the word deliverance.

They really mean the same thing. But the language that David uses is a very suggestive language. He brought me out into a spacious place. And the picture painted by David of his own personal experience is of how he is brought to this place of liberty and freedom.

[20 : 19] He was hemmed in by his enemies. We think of Saul as he sought to kill David, and David was hemmed in in the caves and in the mountains.

He didn't have freedom. He didn't have liberty. He couldn't go as he pleased. He had to run and hide. He was between a rock and a hard place. He was hemmed in to a corner, and he couldn't escape.

Hemmed in. No spacious places. No freedom. No liberty. No escape. But God delivered him into a spacious place.

He brought me out into a spacious place. For some reason, the picture that came to my mind, it may prove helpful for you or it may not, but I'll share it with you all the same.

The picture that came to my mind as I thought about David being delivered into this spacious place was the closing scene of the sound of music. Now, you must have seen the sound of music.

[21 : 26] Everybody's seen the sound of music, maybe several times. And if you've seen the film, then you know how it is. They're in the convent. They're hemmed in.

They're trapped. They're among the gravestones in the convent. There seems to be no escape. The soldiers are beginning to get so close to them and to arrest them and to do as they would with them.

And then suddenly, in a moment, that in the Alps, there's freedom. In a moment, in a spacious place, hemmed in, surrounded, no escape.

No escape. And then suddenly, all the freedom of that vast mountain range, freedom, liberty, in a spacious place.

And that is what God does for us. We, we who are hemmed in by our own foolishness and sin, hemmed in by trials and troubles, hemmed in by the folly of others that has an impact on us.

[22 : 40] And yet, David speaks of how God, when he cries out for deliverance, he is brought out into a spacious place, place, a place of freedom.

Then one final aspect of this deliverance that I want you to notice in that same verse, in verse 20. David says that all of this, this deliverance, this rescue, there's a reason for it.

He rescued me because he delighted in me. The question really that is, that is answered here by David is the question, why, why is God mindful of David?

What is man that God is mindful of him? What's so special about David? And David acknowledges that it's all about grace.

David is rescued because God delights in him. And God delights in David because God chooses to delight in David. David does not enjoy the deliverance of God.

[23 : 45] God does not rescue David as a reward for good behavior, but because God delights in him. Period. That's the explanation.

He rescued me because he delighted in me. No other explanation can be found. And millennia have passed, but nothing has changed.

God hears your cry. God answers your cry. God deploys his cosmic resources in your favor. God reaches down to hold you in a grip of grace because he delights in you.

Before we close in a moment by noting how David responds to God's deliverance, we need to just recognize, we won't dwell on this, but simply recognize, highlight that David, the one who writes this psalm, the one who speaks of the deliverance that he enjoyed.

David, as God's anointed king, here, and indeed always, serves to point us to his royal descendant.

[24 : 56] Indeed, in this psalm, there is reference to that royal descendants. In the very end of the psalm, David acknowledges he gives his king great victories.

He shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David, and his descendants forever. And in the light of the gospel, in the light of the coming of Christ, we know that among his descendants figures prominently and ultimately the person of Jesus Christ.

David points forward to Jesus. And in Jesus, we have one sent by God to be our deliverer, but we also have the one who himself was delivered from death, from the very grave, by his Father.

He wasn't spared death. He died. He died in our place, but then he was delivered from death, from the grave, by his Father, who rose him from the grave in vindication for his finished work.

The very Father who we're repeatedly reminded, even in the gospels, delighted in his Son. Oh, much more could be said of that.

[26 : 12] We want to close simply by noticing how David responds to the deliverance that he enjoys. And we find that throughout the Psalm, especially at the very beginning, in the opening words of the Psalm.

David here, he writes the Psalm, he's looking back on his experience of deliverance and his response is one of grateful praise. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer.

My God is my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge, and my Savior. From violent men you saved me.

I call to the Lord who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies. As with David, we can't earn or merit our deliverance, but we can praise God for it.

as David does at the beginning of the Psalm, as David also commits himself to do at the end of the Psalm. Notice how the Psalm ends or the penultimate verse of the Psalm.

[27 : 17] David committing himself to continued praise, grateful praise, for the deliverance he has enjoyed. Therefore, in the light of what you have done for me, therefore, I will praise you, O Lord.

But notice what he goes on to say. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations. I will sing praises to your name. This is not private praise, but this is public praise in the hearing of the nations that others would know and hear and discover concerning this God who delivers those who call on him. And that is our calling, too. As we experience God's deliverance, we offer him our grateful praise, but we are to do so not only in the privacy of our homes behind closed doors, but among the nations, among those where God has placed us, that they would hear of this God who has delivered us and who can deliver them.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you are the God who stirs the storm in favor of your people and you are the God who calms the storm also.

We thank you that you are the God who hears and answers the cry, the distressed, anguished cry of your people. You did so for David and you continue to do so for us.

[28 : 44] We pray that as we experience something of your deliverance in our own lives, we would respond in grateful praise and in praise that is voiced and heard by others that they too might be

drawn to consider and to discover in you the God who is ever ready to reach out and to take hold of all who call on you.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.