

Psalm 18 Matt Taylor 17th May 2026

I have to say I am a proud Englishman. You'll see why I say that in a moment. But there is something quite stirring as the English rugby team go north to Scotland and to Murrayfield. 60 plus thousand in the stands. And the lone piper begins and then is accompanied by the drummer. *O Flower of Scotland* resounds around the terraces.

*O flower of Scotland, when will we see your like again, that fought
and died for your wee bit hill and glen, and stood against him, proud
Edward's army, and sent him homeward to think again?*

It's the story of the Scottish hero Robert the Bruce. He had a victory over Edward II, the King of England, 700 years ago. They have to go digging, don't they, the Scots, early in the 14th century. But it is this story of Robert the Bruce that has become the national narrative of Scotland. Resistance, independence, repelling the English. And as the Scots stand in the stands and they sing this song, weary, faint-hearted men on the field in blue wearing the thistle on their chest, they're stirred such that Bruce's story becomes their story. And it kind of works frustratingly. In the last decade, four out of the five Calcutta Cups in Murrayfield have resulted in a Scottish victory. The English have been sent home to think again.

Songs, particularly sung in the corporate kind of voice of a congregation or the crowd at a football or rugby match. They really stir the emotions, don't they? get the blood pumping, the adrenaline going. We feel things deeply. And actually they can have an effect on the players on the pitch.

Now I want to say Psalm 18 is a song like a flower of Scotland. It's a song there to stir our emotions. It's the third longest Psalm in the Psalter, hence why we split in two this morning. And just like the other Psalms in 15 to 24, it is a Psalm of David. We get this quite long superscription before verse 1. It's a Psalm of David, which he sings to the Lord when he had delivered him from the hand of his enemies and from the hand of Saul. David, the Old Testament hero, sings this song of thankfulness to the Lord who delivered him. You'll also find it in your Bibles at 2 Samuel chapter 22. It's placed there by the chronicler to form part of the conclusion of David's life. It is the reflection back on the whole of David's reign.

And the first singers of this song would have sung it about their king, that their king and his salvation and his victory, his conquest belongs to them. But if you have a look right to the end, so flick on to page 552, you'll see that not only does David sing this song, he does so looking forward. The Psalm ends with this line, to David and his descendants forever, or quite literally in the Hebrew, his seed, singular, looking forward. See this song, David looks forward to, trusting in God's promise to him that a greater David would come. And we see and we know in the scriptures that this is the Lord Jesus. For ultimately the themes in this song are all about our King Jesus. And his story can become our story.

And so as we look through Psalm 18, it has been my prayer that our emotions are stirred. That we might have a confident trust that we shall never be shaken, but will have life in the presence of the Lord. As we dive in, I thought it might be helpful to have an overview of the whole Psalm and we'll be working through

Praise the Lord who our King loves (1-3)

Our King's Rescue (4-19)

Our King's Vindication (20-31)

Our King's Conquest (32-46)

Praise the Lord who loves our King

1. Praise the Lord who our King loves.

It's a striking opening, isn't it? I love you, Lord. David is devoted to Yahweh his God. Why? Because he is his defence and his deliverer. It's very personal. My strength, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. My rock, my shield, my salvation, my stronghold. David has eyes only for the Lord. Why? Because it's in him he takes refuge. That idea repeated from Psalm 16, Psalm 17, taking refuge in the Lord. And the logic of verse 3 is quite striking. I call to the Lord and I have been saved for my enemies. And therefore the Lord is the one who is worthy to be praised, honoured, extolled, glorified. David wants us to praise his God.

2. Our king's rescue, verses 4 through to 19.

a) From death

What we get here is a dramatic retelling or a picture of the rescue that David has experienced. And what's striking if we start in verses 4 and 5 is that as David looks back on his life, pursued by Saul, attacked by his own son, Absalom, he frames it as though it is death itself who has been his enemy. So verse 4, the cords of death entangle me. Verse 5, the cords of the grave coiled round me. Verse 5, the snares of death confronted me. Death, destruction, the grave are the enemies that David is facing.

And he's trapped. The cords entangle, the torrents overwhelm, the snares confront him. It's a picture of a man out at sea, as though a line has caught round his leg, pulling him under, or the currents are drifting him out to sea at a rapid rate. But did David experience this? What David is doing is looking back over his life and interpreting it as the cosmic kind of enemies of death, destruction, and the grave. The very things that humanity were

given over to in Genesis chapter 3 as we rejected God and we were kicked out of his presence, we faced death, destruction and the grave. And the plight of David was to experience the coils of death.

b) Cries to the Lord

And as he experiences that, he cries to the Lord. Verse 6, in my distress I call to the Lord for help. And where is God? Well, his earthly place is in his temple. That's where he hears his voice. But he hears and he responds from heaven. And in verses 7 to 15, David describes the Lord's response to his cry. in language that only comes from Exodus.

c) A New Exodus

The idea that the Lord is providing him a new Exodus. So the response from heaven at verse 7, the earth trembling and quaking, the mountain shaking, verse 8, smoke rising and fire. And then verse 12, bolts of lightning and the Lord thundering from heaven. It's all language that comes from Exodus 19. when God appears to his people at the mountain.

And who is the God who comes down in Exodus 19? Well it's the same God who has rescued his people. people out of Egypt, the place of death, where they were entangled with the cords of slavery to Pharaoh. And so the same God who came down to rescue them then is the God who came to rescue David too. It's a dramatic picture, verse 9. He parted the heavens and came down, verse 10. He mounted the cherubim and flew. and soared on the wings of the wind.

Now I just want to correct an image in your mind at the moment. God isn't flying on a little baby with wings and a little harp in his hands. No, a cherub is a warrior angel. This is a picture of God descending as a warrior to confront his enemy. Did you notice why the earth trembles and the

mountains shake? It's because God is angry. God is angry at who? Well, death itself. The Lord to the rescue.

And verse 15, look how David's rescue is described. It's very Exodus 14 to 15, the Red Sea, which parted and the valleys of the sea exposed, the foundation of the earth laid bare, that the blast of the Lord's nostril, the waves parted. and the people walked from slavery to Pharaoh to new life with the Lord. A new Exodus.

d) A New Moses

But also the Lord makes him a new Moses. Look with me to verse 16. He reached down from on high and took hold of me and drew me out of deep waters. That phrase, drew me out of waters, has one other appearance in the Old Testament. It comes from Exodus. And it comes on the lips of Pharaoh's daughter, who names Moses Moses, because Moses means to be drawn out of the water. David sees himself as he looks back as a new Moses, who having been rescued leads God's people where but to a spacious place, verse 19.

Like A helpless babe in the Nile, Saul and David's other enemies, Goliath, Absalom, the Philistines, death, destruction, the grave, they were all too strong for him. And yet, the Lord, verse 18, was his support. But why did the Lord come to David's rescue? Why did he experience this rescue? Well, the answer comes at the end of verse 19. Because he delighted in me.

3. Our King' Vindication

From our king's rescue, we move to our king's vindication. And this is the central section of this Psalm, verses 20 through to 31. And it answers that question of why is it that did the Lord rescue David? Why did he sweep down from heaven and perform such a dramatic rescue of this man?

a) Our King's Character

Well the answer comes, verse 20 and 24, it's because of David's character, his righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands. And those words, clean and hands, they appear again in Psalm 24 verse 4. Who can enter into God's place? One who has clean hands and a pure heart can enter into the father's house.

Why is it that the Lord answers David's cry? It's because, verse 21, he's kept the ways of the Lord. Verse 23, he's kept himself from sin. Verse 22, it is God's word that produces David's righteousness. For all his lords were before me and I have not turned away from his decrees.

b) The Lord's Character

Our King's vindication because of the character of our King, but also because of the character of the Lord. David's character dovetails with the Lord's character. Verse 25 to 26, we get the attributes of the Lord are just built upon. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure. But to the devious you show yourself shrewd.

That's striking, isn't it? Why has God Why does God show himself to be twisted, cunning, calculated to the devious? Well, it is that God gives them what they want. If they are devious, crooked, haughty, hypocrites, then God shows himself to be what they want him to be. And yet God sweeps down to save the humble verse 27. And bringing low those whose eyes are haughty, he shines the light of his moral word into the life of the humble, turning their darkness into light.

And there is no other god like the Lord, verse 31. Which other god saves like this? our king's vindication is based on his character and the Lord's character.

4. Our King's Conquest

And that leads to his conquest, our king's conquest, verses 32 through to 46. See the story of God's people go from Exodus with Moses to conquest under Joshua. And so in David's life he follows the same pattern from deliverance under Saul to conquest of nations around, bringing peace and rest to the nations as he subdues the nations around. You can read about it in 2 Samuel 8 to 10.

a) A New Joshua

And it is as though in this Psalm we see David presented as a new Joshua in verses 32 to 36 at the top of page 552. He's got nimble feet, being able to stand on the heights. He's got technically skilled hands for battle, strong arms for the fight, bending a bow of bronze, with the Lord himself as his shield. He is trained for this conquest.

b) A New Conquest

And how does it go? he leads a new conquest. Verse 37 to 45. It's a complete victory over the enemies. Verse 38 as an example. I crushed them so they could not rise. They fell beneath my feet.

Now David at the beginning of the Psalm framed his enemies as the cosmic enemies of all humanity. Death, destruction, the grave. Taking us back to a Genesis 3 kind of world. And here too he alludes to Genesis chapter 3 verse 15 which promises one who would crush Satan beneath his feet. And he says, verse 38, I crushed them so they could not rise. They fell beneath my feet.

And what's striking, it's not just that the Lord rescues David from his enemies. No, but it's that God gives him victory and triumph over those enemies as well. Death, destruction and the grave.

Verse 41 is arresting. They cried for help, just as David did in verse 6. They cried to the Lord for help. But he did not answer. But that does make sense, doesn't it? If the Lord is faithful to the one who is faithful, he's blameless to the one who is blameless and pure to the one who shows himself pure. But he's devious, he's crooked to the one who shows himself to be shrewd.

See God, there is no salvation without righteousness. God saves David based on his righteousness. So when his enemies cry for salvation and they're not righteous, well they get no salvation. There's no one to save them.

c) Enthroned as head of the nations

So what happens at the end of this conquest? Well verse 43, he is enthroned as the head of the nations. Our King is given a worldwide dominion. In fulfilment of Psalm 2, those who conspired against David now serve him. End of verse 43, people I did not know now serve me, foreigners cower before me, as soon as they hear me they obey me.

We have this image of a cosmic reign. All the enemies of this world are subdued underneath him. And the end of rescue, verse 46, is life. The Lord lives. Life beats death. Imagine that. Our experience is that death beats life, isn't it? But here in this story, life beats death.

5. Praise the Lord who loves our King

And so David says we should praise the Lord who loves our King. Praise be to my rock, exalted be God my Saviour. Or verse 49, I will praise you, Lord, among the nations. I will sing the praises of your name. For the Lord has shown his steadfast love to his king. Verse 50, given him great victories. This God is worthy of praise.

Psalm 18 as Jesus' song

And David sang this song, yes, looking back over his life, but also anticipating Jesus who was to come. Rescue based on vindication, conquest, reign is the pattern of Christ. Psalm 18 is sung by David trusting the covenant promises and is fulfilled in Jesus.

Because David only really tasted a little bit of the chords of death, destruction and the grave. Yet Jesus experienced them in full, did he not? Pulled down, dragged under, drowned by all the cords and torrents of sin and death in this world. As he was nailed to the cross, dead and buried, he literally descended to the place of the dead, to hell itself.

And yet it was impossible for the cords of death to hold on to him. On the third day he burst out again. The Lord raised him up and rescued him, bringing him to the spacious place of new life. Why? Well, because of his righteousness. The Lord dealt with Jesus according to his righteousness, the cleanness of his hands. Jesus never turned away from his father. He walked in his ways, he kept his self from sin.

And Jesus too is the all-conquering king. Yes, defeating death on the cross and being raised to new life, but also conquering the world as he rescues sinners from the grass of hell itself and bringing dead people to life

spiritually. And he is the one who has been raised to the highest place and all things have been placed under his feet, the head over everything.

You see, as we read verse 43, it was a bit of an overreach. for David to say that he has been made the head of nations. Because if you know anything about David's empire, it was like a postage stamp in the Middle East. That's a bit of an overreach to say you're the head of nations, David. And yet it is wonderfully true in the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who crushed sin, Satan and death on the cross.

And Jesus, the one who is the source and mercy of hope for the nations. And even today, isn't it amazing? We, on this little island off the coast of Europe, praising his name together.

Psalm 18 as our song

In Jesus, this song can become our song too. Death is the peril we all face. Six years ago, as we were in COVID lockdown, lots of people commented that our own mortality came before us. And people were starting to talk about the reality of death more. But the statistical likelihood of us each facing death hasn't changed in the last six years, has it? We're still all going to die. And yet again, we've distanced ourselves from it.

Death is the peril we're going to face. But who do we cry to? money, reputation, technology to give us some form of life beyond the grave. In the face of the peril of death, in Christ we too can cry to the Lord to take refuge in him. And using the dramatic picture of verse 9 and 10, it's as though if we cry to the Lord for faith even today, he descends on cherubim to rescue us from the pit, to lift us up to new life.

His story is our story. And so we can receive vindication from the Lord, not based on our own goodness, but our king's. And we too can follow the conquering king, taking his name to the nations that as they hear of him, they will obey him. But more than that, our conquering king can conquer every little part of our own lives as he puts to death the misdeeds of our body, as sin is driven out.

And we too can cry, the Lord lives. And the outcome of our lives need not be death beating life, but will be life beating death. And that is something to praise the Lord about.

In 2 years' time, the English again will go north. And a 1960s, did you know it was written in the 1960s, pop song, O Flower of Scotland, will stir the hearts of the Scots again. Hopefully, the English will win.

But brothers and sisters, let Psalm 18 stir your heart, your soul, this morning. as Jesus' story is your own story, that we will sing out in joyful, thankful praise, declaring the Lord's praise among the nations. For he is the one who gives his son Jesus great victories, who shows unfailing love to his anointed, to Jesus, and all who are found in him