

**Victory with Vulnerability [Psalm 18]**  
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## INTRODUCTION

1. A few times a year, I do something abnormal: I watched hockey.
  - a. There are few things in sports as compelling as NHL playoff hockey.
  - b. I'm a sucker for drama, and sports provide it better than much else.
  - c. Also, I love when stories of success collide with the opportunity for upset
2. Sports metaphors/illustrations seem perfectly tailored for sermons.
  - a. But many testosterone driven preachers fail to acknowledge an important fact:
  - b. NOT EVERYONE LIKE SPORTS. How many of you just don't like sports.
  - c. In our church, when I bring up a sports illustration, some of you feel disconnected.
3. This kind of disconnect can happen when we open the Scriptures as well.
  - a. Even though the Bible is apt and speaks across generations, it was written in a context
  - b. We continue our study of the Bible with **Psalm 18**; one with which we might not jibe
4. There is a strong militaristic context; it's a Psalm that discusses victory in battle.
  - a. There was a time and an era where this context didn't bother people.
  - b. The hymn Onward, Christian Soldiers was written in 1865 by Sabine Baring-Gould
    - 1) He had no intention of ever being published, writing for overnight for a kids march
    - 2) It took off in America after the Civil War, in a country of faith and combat.
5. For us today, this just seems overtly violent and anti-Christian.
  - a. So when it's in the Bible, how do we react to this?
    - 1) DO WE IGNORE IT, and not deal with the conflict.
    - 2) DO WE REJECT IT as an antiquated, historic relic?
    - 3) OR can we find a way to mine relevancy in it?

## VERSE 1-6

<sup>1</sup>I love you, LORD, my strength. <sup>2</sup>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, my stronghold.

<sup>3</sup>I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I have been saved from my enemies.

<sup>4</sup>The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

<sup>5</sup>The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me.

<sup>6</sup>In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.

1. The psalm begins with verbiage we'd expect from a Bible song.
  - a. Concepts of rocks, refuge, shield, stronghold, protection from enemies.
    - 1) As a Psalm of King David, this brings reference to 1 Samuel 24 when he fled
    - 2) The current King Saul attempted to kill him so he hid in a place called **En Gedi**
    - 3) The higher position and caves provided deliverance from enemies.
2. "The cords of death/grave," are a powerful metaphor for being drawn into death.
  - a. The claustrophobic among us understand how that metaphor pulls us in.
  - b. And this is how God delivers us from our enemies: he overcomes all.

SO FAR, SO GOOD . . .

## VERSES 7-15

<sup>7</sup>The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because he was angry. <sup>8</sup>Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. <sup>9</sup>He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. <sup>10</sup>He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. <sup>11</sup>He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—the dark rain clouds of the sky. <sup>12</sup>Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. <sup>13</sup>The

LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. <sup>14</sup>He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy, with great bolts of lightning he routed them. <sup>15</sup>The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, LORD, at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

1. Now we get a hint into the genre of this psalm: it's a **victory hymn**.
  - a. These kinds of songs aren't limited to the Bible but are prevalent throughout ANE
  - b. The point of these songs was to acknowledge the victory granted by a deity.
    - 1) THE HYMN ACKNOWLEDGED THE GOD, but focused on the kings.
  - c. **Here's a hymn to the Egyptian god Amun.**

*"Who takes to battle trusting his strength— mountains tremble beneath him when he rages earth quakes when he utters the war-cry all creation is in fear and terror of him."*
  - d. **A Sumerian hymn from Babylon**, celebrating the power of a storm god  
*"When the great warrior goes out from his house indeed he is a fierce lion,  
When father Iskur walks upon the earth indeed the earth rumbles,  
When my lord walks in the marshes indeed he is a roaring storm."*
  - e. THE POINT: To show that victory was enabled by your god (giving credit)  
\*Speaking of natural events in a militaristic tone was generally accepted
2. David too wanted to give credit to his God, and he was able to invoke history
  - a. **Verse 7** here is a reference to the Sinai experience of the Israelites.
    - 1) **Exodus 19:16** "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast."

### **VERSES 20-24**

<sup>20</sup>The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. <sup>21</sup>For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I am not guilty of turning from my God.  
<sup>22</sup>All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. <sup>23</sup>I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. <sup>24</sup>The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

1. I want to pause here because this seems just like standard biblical remarks.
  - a. Throughout the Bible (and the Psalms) there's a reciprocal nature to our relationship
  - b. If I can remain faithful before the Lord, he will deliver me.
  - c. But this isn't just something limited to the Scriptures.
2. **A victory hymn** of Ramesses II states, "O Amun, I have not transgressed your command."

### **VERSES 37-45**

<sup>37</sup>I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed.  
<sup>38</sup>I crushed them so that they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet.  
<sup>39</sup>You armed me with strength for battle; you humbled my adversaries before me.  
<sup>40</sup>You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes.  
<sup>41</sup>They cried for help, but there was no one to save them—to the LORD, but he did not answer.  
<sup>42</sup>I beat them as fine as windblown dust; I trampled them like mud in the streets.  
<sup>43</sup>You have delivered me from the attacks of the people; you have made me the head of nations. People I did not know now serve me, <sup>44</sup>foreigners cower before me; as soon as they hear of me, they obey me. <sup>45</sup>They all lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds.

1. This here, is what many of us find problematic: is the Bible just a violent book?
  - a. Is the point just that our God promotes violence against those who don't agree.
2. I ask that you pause and look at the contexts of other victory songs from the ANE.
  - a. Here is an example from one of the Assyrian **King Tiglath-Pileser I**  
*"I laid low their men-at-arms in the mountains like sheep. Like lambs I cut off their heads and made their blood flow into the hollows and plains of the mountains."*
  - b. The Hittite king Halparuntiya II claimed

"When I captured the city Iluwasi, of the men I cut off the feet but the children I made eunuchs to us."

3. What I would offer to you is this take away that might help us. TWO THINGS

**\*Nowhere do the Psalms approach this graphic imagery.**

- a. You might like this explanation, but I think you need to really grapple with it.
- b. There's a Scriptural trajectory away from what the world was doing.
  - 1) And this trajectory starts in an amazing place but results in brilliance.
  - 2) **Matthew 5:38,39** "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."

**\*\*Whenever we see it, it highlights the judgment of God, not glory for the king.**

READ ON

**VERSES 46-50**

<sup>46</sup>The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior! <sup>47</sup>He is the God who avenges me, who subdues nations under me, <sup>48</sup>who saves me from my enemies. You exalted me above my foes; from a violent man you rescued me. <sup>49</sup>Therefore I will praise you, LORD, among the nations; I will sing the praises of your name.<sup>50</sup>He gives his king great victories; he shows unflinching love to his anointed, to David and to his descendants forever.

1. The song isn't to the glory of David, but to the glory of the Lord.
2. And that is the difference in this victory song: it contains **vulnerability**.
3. That's the opposite of what we tend to see in the world.
  - a. It's obviously not what we see in the sports world, as we highlight our greatness
    - 1) Aaron Rogers, a "humble" player does the Triple H belt celebration.
4. But the highlight of the Psalm is vulnerability. **VERSE ONE:** "I love you, LORD, my strength."

**CONCLUSION**

**\*WE CRITIQUE VIOLENCE, BUT NOT OUR CURRENT SOCIETY'S LACK OF VULNERABILITY**

1. I have a friend in the ministry who is a good man of God, much better than I.
  - a. He had some familial issues lately, especially with his kids being sick.
  - b. His religious tradition is peculiar & some people joked that he should pray more.
    - 1) Unfortunately, that "joke" become more and more serious for some.
    - 2) Some of his congregants really thought his kid's sickness was because of his faith.
    - 3) Unfortunately, some people left his church as a result of his child's illness.
  - c. Even though you and I can look at that in disbelief, some people still believe this.
  - d. My biggest lament: my friend opened himself up to his church . . .
  - e. Because he was a pastor, his vulnerability was punished.
2. When I recently visited some ministers in Boston, I asked about the city and its people
  - a. One of the things they told me was interesting: they love to give but hate to receive
  - b. This was exemplified after the Marathon bombing, where people offered everything
  - c. But they refuse to accept any help, and this makes the gospel difficult
  - d. As followers of Jesus, we are called to allow ourselves to be human.
3. We follow the example of Jesus, who was himself vulnerable.
  - a. In the garden, hours before his death, he prayed in Matthew 26:39
  - b. "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."
  - c. If Jesus can let his struggles show, why can't we?
  - d. Our faith demands vulnerability so we can experience the victory.