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David's psalm concerning his deliverance. Paul's apostolic mission and prayer to the Father.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

2 Samuel chapter 22. And David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said, The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my guard, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold, and my refuge.

My Saviour, you save me from violence. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. For the waves of death encompassed me, the torrents of destruction assailed me, the cords of Sheol entangled me, the snares of death confronted me.

In my distress I called upon the Lord, to my God I called. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry came to his ears. Then the earth reeled and rocked, the foundations of

the heavens trembled and quaked, because he was angry.

Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth. Glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens and came down.

Thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew. He was seen on the wings of the wind.

He made darkness around him his canopy, thick clouds a gathering of water. Out of the brightness before him, coals of fire flamed forth. The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered his voice.

And he sent out arrows, and scattered them, lightning, and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen. The foundations of the world were laid bare, at the rebuke of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils.

He sent from on high, he took me. He drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me.

For they were too mighty for me. They confronted me to the day of my calamity. But the Lord was my support.

He brought me out into a broad place. He rescued me because he delighted in me. The Lord dealt with me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.

For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his rules were before me, and from his statutes I did not turn aside. I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from guilt.

And the Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight. With the merciful you show yourself merciful. With the blameless man you show yourself blameless.

With the purified you deal purely, and with the crooked you make yourself seem torturous. You say you are humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down. For you are my lamp, O Lord, and my God lightens my darkness.

For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall. This God, his way is perfect. The word of the Lord proves true.

He is a shield for all those who take refuge in him. For who is God but the Lord? And who is a rock except our God? This God is my strong refuge, and has made my way blameless. He made my feet like the feet of a deer, and set me secure on the heights.

He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have given

me the shield of your salvation, and your gentleness made me great. You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip.

I pursued my enemies and destroyed them, and did not turn back until they were consumed. I consumed them, I thrust them through, so that they did not rise. They fell under my feet.

For you equipped me with strength for the battle. You made those who rise against me sink under me. You made my enemies turn their backs to me, those who hated me, and I destroyed them.

They looked, but there was none to save. They cried to the Lord, but he did not answer them. I beat them fine as the dust of the earth.

I crushed them and stamped them down like the mire of the streets. You delivered me from strife with my people. You kept me as the head of the nations.

People whom I had not known served me. Foreigners came cringing to me. As soon as they heard of me, they obeyed me.

Foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses. The Lord lives. And blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation.

The God who gave me vengeance and brought down peoples under me, who brought me out from my enemies. You exalted me above those who rose against me. You delivered me from men of violence.

For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises to your name. Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever. 2 Samuel chapter 22 is essentially the same as Psalm 18.

It particularly focuses upon the deliverance from Saul, but also addresses deliverance from enemies from other quarters. Coming at this point in the book, it serves a larger summary purpose also. Deuteronomy ends with the song of Moses.

1 Samuel has the prayer of Hannah near the beginning of it. While Hannah's prayer looks forward to anticipated deliverance, David's song looks back to realized deliverance. As Peter Lighthouse notes, they have several themes or images in common.

Both of them mention the horn. My heart exalts in the Lord, my horn is exalted in the Lord. 1 Samuel chapter 2 verse 1. And then in verse 10 of that chapter, he will give strength to his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

In 2 Samuel chapter 22 verse 3, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation. The theme of God as rock is also a very prominent image. There is none holy like the Lord, for there is none besides you.

There is no rock like our God. 1 Samuel chapter 2 verse 2. 2 Samuel chapter 22 verses 2 to 3. He said, the Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold, and my refuge, my savior, you save me from violence. In verse 32, for who is God but the Lord, and who is a rock except our God.

And then in verse 47, the Lord lives and blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation. The repeated emphasis upon God as rock, which frames the entire psalm, as the image appears both at its beginning and at its close, should also remind us of the song of Moses at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, where the image of the Lord as rock is very prominent. The rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright as he.

Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 4. In verse 15 of that chapter, but Joshua grew fat and kicked, you grew fat, stout and sleek. Then he forsook God who made him, and scoffed at the rock of his salvation. In verse 18, you were unmindful of the rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth.

In verse 30 to 31, how could one have chased a thousand, and two have put ten thousand to flight, unless their rock had sold them, and the Lord had given them up? For their rock is not as our rock, our enemies are by themselves. In both cases, these songs serve as memorials of the Lord's activity on behalf of his people. They come at the end of their respective books, expressing the fundamental message of the books in the form of a song to be memorized and declared by the people.

In these final chapters of 2 Samuel, some of the deep themes of the books of Samuel are being explored, recapitulated and resolved. If we read these chapters carefully, we will have a firmer grasp upon what is going on in the books more generally. They also help the reader to make the transition from reading the history to declaring the praise of the Lord on its basis.

Both Hannah's prayer and David's psalm end on the note of the Lord's consideration of his anointed. In 2 Samuel 22, verse 51, Both speak of the way that the Lord intervenes to deliver his people in distress, and to save them from their enemies and troubles. The Lord turns the tables on the mighty of the earth, and exalts those who depend upon him.

Read together as bookends for the story of 1 and 2 Samuel, we can see Hannah's prayer and David's psalm as related together like promise and fulfillment. One looks forward to the Lord's salvation, and the other looks back upon it. Lighthouse suggests that the psalm can be divided into sections, with a chiasmic or bookended pattern.

It begins with the praise of the Lord in verses 2-3, and then returns to the praise of the Lord at the very end in verses 47-51. The Lord saves David from violence in verse 3, and from men of violence in verse 49. After the praise of the Lord, David speaks of the Lord's

deliverance of him from his enemies, and his enabling of David to overcome his enemies.

This comes in verses 4-20, and is returned to in verses 29-46. While the first of these sections focuses on the Lord's intervention to deliver David from dire straits, on the return stretch of the psalm, the accent shifts to David's triumphing over his enemies himself, by the strength that the Lord has given him. The imagery here might also remind us of the Song of the Sea in Exodus chapter 15, Moses' song of memorial after the deliverance at the Red Sea.

Both contain theophanic imagery. Exodus chapter 15, verses 6-12. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.

You blew with your wind, the sea covered them, they sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them. David describes his deliverance in language and imagery deeply redolent of the Lord's deliverance of his people at the Red Sea.

2 Samuel chapter 22, verses 8-18. In the brightness before him, coals of fire flamed forth. The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice.

And He sent out arrows and scattered them, lightning enrouted them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were laid bare. At the rebuke of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of His nostrils, He sent from on high, He took me, He drew me out of many waters.

He rescued me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me. The imagery that David employs here recalls the deliverance at the Red Sea, but also relates to cosmic imagery that we find elsewhere in scripture. The deep of the waters is related to Sheol, and the grave and its threat, as can be seen in passages such as Jonah chapter 2. It is also related to the Gentile nations.

If Israel is like the land, the Gentile nations and powers are like waters constantly threatening to overwhelm and to drown it. Yet the Lord is going to draw them out of the threatening deep by His might, and establish them on the firmness of the rock. However, while the earlier part of the psalm focuses upon the Lord's intervention to deliver David, later the emphasis shifts.

It is no longer the Lord's action on David's behalf that is seen, but David's action in the Lord's strength. David is, by the Lord's strength, able to wage war effectively against his adversaries. Not only does the Lord act on behalf of the powerless against their adversaries, He will empower His King to act with strength against his enemies, and the enemies of the people of the Lord.

There is an important progression to maturity here, from a situation of dependence in

weakness to a situation of dependence in strength. Being dependent upon the Lord in strength is much more challenging, of course. While in moments of desperation and powerlessness we can turn to the Lord, if only because there is nowhere else to turn, in moments where we feel we have strength, we seldom recognise the empowerment of the Lord and turn to Him in thanksgiving.

David, however, recognises his dependence and expresses his thanksgiving to the Lord in both of these conditions. Sandwiched in the centre of the psalm, in verses 21-28, Lighthouse finds the exploration of David's cleanness and the Lord's corresponding faithfulness. This section might raise some questions for us.

How can David claim righteousness and cleanness of hands? How can he claim that the Lord rewarded him according to his righteousness, as he does in verse 25? This is something that we frequently encounter in the Psalms. The psalmist often approaches the Lord, appealing to his own righteousness and blamelessness, as grounds for divine action on his behalf. To understand this, it is important to consider such statements within a covenant context.

On occasion such appeals are made concerning particular situations. We can appeal to God on the basis of our blamelessness in a particular matter, seeking his vindication against those who would accuse or attack us. However, sometimes we meet with more general statements, such as those that we find here, where David appeals to the Lord on the basis of his blamelessness more generally.

Such statements should be considered in the context of the covenant. God has promised to act on behalf of people who are faithful in the covenant. The faithfulness that is looked for isn't sinless perfection, but keeping of the covenant.

The covenant provides for atonement, for sacrifice, for forgiveness, and for the covering of sin. It allows for sinners to be blameless as covenant members. When they sin, they turn to the Lord, they seek his forgiveness and his restoration, and stand before him as those whose sins are covered.

Even David's terrible sins concerning Bathsheba and Uriah were covered by the Lord's gracious forgiveness and faithfulness. While there were dreadful consequences for what David did, consequences that David still suffered, even though he was forgiven, he could approach the Lord on the basis of the Lord's covenant and promise. As someone continues in such a manner, they can approach the Lord and claim that their hands are clean, that they are righteous and blameless, and call to God to act on their behalf according to his promises.

The Lord's promises and the provision that he makes for dealing with sin in his covenant gives David, and can give us, great confidence as we approach him. We can appeal to him, assured that he will hear and act on the basis of these things. David's song ends

with foreigners coming to him to pay honour and tribute.

David wins victories over enemies on various sides. He and the nation of Israel are exalted over surrounding peoples and nations. The result of all of this is that the name of the Lord is praised and exalted among the nations.

As David is delivered and lifted up, he praises the Lord among the nations. All around about see David's success, his exaltation, and David sings to the Lord for his deliverance and his steadfast love. The Lord is the God who keeps covenant with his people, and with David and his offspring forever, as he promised in the covenant given to David in chapter 7. A question to consider, how can we see David's song as an initial fulfilment of the Lord's purpose in delivering a people for his name? Ephesians chapter 3 In this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness, and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. In Ephesians chapter 1 Paul described the long purpose plan that God accomplished in Christ and its cosmic scale and implications.

In chapter 2 he spoke of the way that it brought both Jews and Gentiles from death into life and overcame their separation from God and from each other as one new people is

formed in Christ. Now in chapter 3 he turns to his part in the purpose of God. For a man who exalts his message over everything else, Paul can speak a surprising amount about his role as a minister in his epistles.

This is because for Paul, his role is not merely that of a commentator from the sidelines or a messenger whose role is entirely incidental to the message that he bears. Rather, in Paul's understanding, his apostolic mission is a participation in the apocalyptic work of the gospel itself. Paul has a key role to play in the fullness of time, akin to the way that John the Baptist had a key role to play in the transition from the Old Testament prophets to the ministry of Christ and the new covenant.

In a like manner, Paul is one through whom the transition of the gospel to the wider Gentile world truly occurs. As in chapter 1, much of this chapter, from verses 2 to 13, is a long single sentence. It's a parenthesis.

Paul begins a thought in verse 1, develops his parenthetical discussion of his ministry in the next 12 verses, and then picks up and completes the thought in verses 14 and following. Paul describes himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He conceives of his imprisonment as part of his service of Christ Jesus.

Indeed, he speaks as if Christ himself were the jailer. He is not just imprisoned for Christ Jesus, but is also a prisoner of Christ Jesus. And he is a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles.

It is his service of the Gentiles that has occasioned his imprisonment. As Daryl Bach notes, there is a particular irony when we consider the false charge on which Paul was arrested in Acts chapter 21 verse 28. The claim was that he had brought a Gentile, Trophimus the Ephesian, into the temple.

While Paul had not in fact done this, the charge had an ironic truth to it, as Paul was bringing Gentiles into the house of God, in the new temple concerning which he teaches here and elsewhere. He now begins his digression explaining the nature of his ministry. He had been granted a stewardship of God's grace for the sake of the Gentiles.

His stewardship was a gift graciously given in order that he might be an active participant in God's giving of his grace to the Gentiles. In Galatians chapter 1 verses 15-17, Paul declares that his message was received directly from God, not through the mediation of any other apostle. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

The mystery that was made known to Paul, and has been revealed through the apostles and the early church prophets, is one that hadn't previously been known, but only

became apparent in the fullness of time. At the heart of this message is the fact that God's purpose involves Gentiles as full participants and beneficiaries, not merely as those enjoying the offcuts of the blessings of Israel. A new body is being formed in Christ, and Jews and Gentiles alike are members.

They are fellow heirs, both in line to receive the realisation of God's promise, and needing to recognise their kinship together in the new family that this entails. They are both participants in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. In God's powerful working, he took one of the greatest enemies of his church, and overcame him by his grace, making him who was once an enemy into his greatest servant.

In Paul, God manifested the extent of his grace, so that Paul might be a fitting instrument, and a worked example of the wonder of the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul is a minister, or a servant. He is one commissioned by his master, who now represents his master, and acts in his master's name towards others.

Paul is keenly aware of how exceptionally unworthy he was of being set apart for such great mission. He is the very least of all of the saints. He makes a similar point in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 9-10.

For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

His calling is to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles, unveiling to the whole world the mystery of the creator God's purpose from before time began. Now, in the formation of the church, this mystery is being unveiled to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. What is revealed through this is the manifold wisdom of God, the mind of God that surpasses understanding.

The revelation is made to the great forces and powers of the cosmos, so that in the steady unveiling of God's purpose in the church, all of the angelic and demonic powers of the cosmos might be amazed at the greatness and majesty of God. It is all too easy to forget the presence and the importance of other forces and parties in the narrative of salvation. Yet Paul is often keenly aware of the way that God's work is addressed not just to humankind, but to the natural world and to the angelic powers.

The church is at the heart of this revelation of the wisdom of God. All of this is according to the purpose that God has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord. The church is being formed before the watching angelic forces.

And as we saw back in Ephesians chapter 1, this is occurring as God's purpose before the foundation of the world. It is a plan that centres on Christ. In Christ we now enjoy a new

access to God's presence, something that we can enjoy with confidence on account of either our faith in him or his faith.

The expression is ambiguous in meaning, although a robust theological case could be made for either. When we have a firm sense of God's purpose in Christ and its effectiveness, we will be much less troubled by seemingly threatening or contrary circumstances. Paul wants the recipients of his letter to have a confidence in God's purpose when they consider his imprisoned condition.

Paul, whatever his enemies and captors might plan for him, is exactly where the Lord intends for him to be. The Lord's purpose for him has not failed. And while he is suffering, he is suffering in the performance of his calling as the apostle to the Gentiles.

And the outcome of it all, as he follows the pattern of Christ himself, will be the glory of the churches to whom he is ministering. They will be benefited by him. Now Paul finally returns to the dangling half-started thought of verse 1, which preceded his long digression concerning his ministry.

In what follows, he shares his prayer for the readers and the hearers of his epistle. The, for this reason with which it begins, returns to verse 1 of the chapter, but verse 1 looks back to chapter 2, verses 19 to 22. They are members of a new building, and more importantly for Paul's prayer here, a new family, the household of God.

Paul addresses the prayer to the Father, bowing before him in reverence, dependence, homage and fealty. He describes the Father as the one from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. Although it may be theologically attractive to translate this prayer into the Hebrew, as the ESV does, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, and a linguistic case can be made for it, it seems most likely to me that it refers to the naming of the whole family in the heavens and on the earth, not every family.

We all bear the name of the Father, are all members of a single household, and must acknowledge each other accordingly. His prayer is that he might by his spirit empower them within, returning to the themes of riches and might that he mentioned in his earlier prayer, in chapter 1, verses 15 to 23. God will enable them in a supernatural way, so that Christ will reside in their hearts by an enduring faith that is brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit within them.

Once again, we should observe just how fundamental the Trinity is to Paul's understanding of the pattern of salvation. The Father grants the spirit, who is the means by which Christ abides within us. As we are rooted and grounded in love, as we grow out of the security of God's enduring love for us, a love from which our own love for God and our brothers can develop, one of the results will be understanding.

God will give us the strength and the capacity to perceive things that we would not otherwise. As a collective act of the people of God, Paul wants his readers to come to a grasp of the true scale of the love of Christ, that, as he goes on to acknowledge, surpasses any capacity of our understanding. The result will be that we are overwhelmed by a growing sense of God's unfathomable goodness, and as this occurs, be filled with all of the fullness of God.

Once again, Paul has in view a collective growth in knowledge and filling here. This isn't just for solitary Christians, but is something that we grow in together, in fellowship with each other, and as we minister to each other. He concludes this section with a doxology.

A question to consider. When we talk about salvation, we tend to focus upon things from a very human perspective, thinking about what God's deliverance does for us. How might Paul's profoundly God-focused and God-centered portrayal of salvation in the book of Ephesians change the way that we think about things?