

The Mighty God Who Saves Us

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, you are the God who saves us. You are our rock and our fortress, though! So often we forget. Father, this morning as we look at this psalm, would you remind us! that you are the mighty God who saves, and who has saved, and who will save. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. We are in the fourth of our summer psalms. You'll see at the headline of the psalm. It's another psalm of ascent. That means it was designed, written for the God's people to sing it as they were walking up the hill towards Jerusalem. It was kind of a preparation psalm. Once again, we're unsure of the context in terms of what David was writing about as he wrote this psalm. Lots of commentators think that perhaps David has in mind the events of 2 Samuel 5. Assuming that you don't remember what they are, let me tell you. 2 Samuel chapter 5, Saul has just been killed. First king of Israel has been killed. The army has been utterly routed by the Philistines, and David has been appointed king. But the army is still, or the nation is still very much divided. And so with a divided nation and a defeated king, the Philistines imagined that this is a good time to push home the advantage, to win that battle for good. So 2 Samuel 5.17 says the Philistines went up in full force. They are a massive, motivated army on the back of a great victory, coming up against a king, leading a divided country. The odds are stacked against Israel, aren't they? Until you read verse 19 in that chapter. David prays and asks God if he should go into battle, and God's response is this. Go, for I will surely deliver the Philistines into your hands.

And that's what happens. There is an extraordinary victory brought about by God, fighting for his people. Now there are other possibilities too. God's Old Testament people are used to being against the odds. So think of the escape from Egypt. Battles against those Canaanite kings in Judges 4, against the Midianites with Gideon in Judges 6. Later after David, they will find themselves surrounded and outnumbered numerous times. And in all those times, the odds of Israel surviving were small. And yet, in various ways, God came to their aid and saved his people, either all of them in a great victory, or at least a remnant that might be protected. But whatever the context, I think David has four things from this psalm that he wants to let his people sing about. Here's the first one.

They need to remember that in this battle, the odds were stacked against them. So often we think that we can do anything at all. If only I try hard enough, I can be whoever I want to be. Actually, David wants the people to know that they couldn't do this, that the odds were stacked against them. They were facing a battle they couldn't win against an enemy they could not defeat.

Look at the violent language in the psalm. They're threatened with being swallowed alive, engulfed, swept away. They expected to be torn apart by their teeth. And this is an angry enemy.

They're not coming up against an enemy who just want to give God's people a bloody nose, teach them a lesson to push them back over the border a bit. They are after total annihilation.

[3:40] Israel is utterly helpless. That's clear from the psalm. The enemy is too strong. It's a battle they can't win. The odds are stacked against them. That's the first thing David wants to remind the people.

Secondly, that it was only God's active support that brought them victory. That runs right through the psalm right from the beginning, doesn't it? I think by the way it's set up, it seems to be a song that's maybe started off by a cantor who sings the first line, if the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel say, and then everyone comes in with that next line. If the Lord had not been on our side when people attacked us, they would have swallowed us alive. Only God's active support brought them victory. Maybe you've finished a job sometimes, you've had some help, and you get to the end of that task and you think, you turn to the person who was there with you and you say, really honestly, I could not have done this without you. How times are that? You think, I couldn't have done it without you. I'm not just being polite. It's true. I could not have done this without you. That is

Israel here.

Only God has made this victory possible. Only God's strength has got them through. Without him, they certainly would have been swallowed alive in golf, swept away, and torn apart.

Only God has got them through. But I think David wants to go further than that. He wants to make sure that people know that they contributed nothing to this rescue. That's the implication of that image in verse 7. You see it there? An image of a bird caught in a snare, caught in a cage.

They're stuck, aren't they? I know parrots are quite clever. But once you lock them in a cage, they can't get out. They can't get out. They're stuck. And yet, here, this stuck, helpless, unable to save itself people finds itself rescued. The snare was broken. Israel escaped. How did that happen?

[5:41] By God's intervention. He broke the snare. He undid the trap. He set them free. The victory belonged to God alone. They did nothing. Now, if you read back in 2 Samuel 5, the army do some fighting. Okay? That's clear in a couple of passages in that chapter. But it's also clear that God is the one directing everything. In fact, in verse 24, we're told that God goes ahead of David's army and routes the Philistines before David's army even arrives on the scene. And of course, if you think about the escape from Egypt, God does do everything, doesn't he? He sends the plagues. He defends them from behind. He goes ahead and pushes the Red Sea apart so they can go through, just as he wins that decisive battle for Gideon's 300 men in Judges 6. Here, in the psalm, David is saying we can't claim anything in this victory. All the glory goes to God. If the Lord had not been on our side when people attacked us, they would have swallowed us alive. And then lastly, that final line of the psalm, it's a reason why not only God saved them in the past, but why God's people could have real confidence for the future. You see that? There is no one greater than God, because who is he? He is the maker of heaven and earth. We're outnumbered 100 to 1. No matter.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Our enemies have the most advanced weapons. We're outgunned. No matter. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Our enemies have us surrounded. Doesn't matter. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Our king has only been in post a couple of weeks. Doesn't really know what he's doing yet. No matter. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

This is where the psalm reaches its glorious conclusion. And that the victory rests on the distinction between mere creatures and the almighty eternal creator. And in a battle between the two, I tell you, there is no contest. No contest. The odds were stacked against them. They contributed nothing to their salvation. Only by God's active support did they find victory, because no one is greater than God's. And he was on their side. Now, if that isn't a reason to sing and rejoice, I don't know what is. It was a wonderful reminder to the people as they gathered to worship and celebrate God's goodness, that it was all down to him. See, I think we often have a tendency to claim at least partial credit for the good things that happen in our lives. But this psalm focuses the eyes and thoughts of God's people on the Lord. It says it's all down to him. That's what David wanted them to remember. Now, you say, that's really good, Dave. That's really encouraging. Fantastic. Thank you. I can see why they wanted to sing this song. But what about us? There aren't many of us who will find ourselves in similar situations, our nations surrounded, overwhelmed on the brink of national disaster.

Although those of you that are old enough to remember the events of the last war will recall days of prayer being called around the evacuation from Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain, and perhaps on D-Day as well, when it seemed that the Lord was on the side of the Allies.

[9:20] And without him, we would have been utterly crushed and swept away. But I think if we look at our own lives, we see the rescuing hand of God lots of times.

Many, many times. Let me give you some examples. Just after my 18th birthday, I was on a head-on collision with another car. I was on my way to work. It was an early January morning. And a young lad, even younger than me, who was just 17, was driving his mum's car quite fast on my side of the road.

My dad, who was a former fireman, came out to pick me up. He'd attended many road traffic accidents. And he was amazed that I got out alive, let alone with no broken bones. Not a scratch anywhere.

Now, I could put it down to the design of the crumple zones, maybe the functioning of the airbag. But I tell you, if the Lord had not been on my side on that moment, I would have been swept away.

Some of you know George, our youngest son. He was born three months premature, at two pounds of weight. He was very poorly. He was placed in an incubator and put on a respirator, but he was working against the machine.

[10:36] And Judy was told that his chances of survival were slim. He's now in his mid-40s, strapping lad, runs marathons and climbs mountains.

Now, we can assign his survival to the care of the staff, and I'm told they were brilliant. But the truth is that if the Lord had not been on his side, he would have been swept away.

We could talk about Judy or Coral's cancer treatment in the same vein. Two of our church family, Karen and Ian, have had serious car accidents in the last few months.

We've had friends who have been caught up in terrorist bomb attacks. Others who have indeed fought for our armed forces in conflicts. Others who have faced a variety of dangers and diseases and addictions, which might have taken away their lives.

What's more, every one of us, even if you haven't had anything that dramatic, if you think closely, you will remember times when you think, oh, that was a click, that was a near call there, a close call there.

[11:38] That car seemed to stop just in time. You're drilling through that wall and you get a little shock rather than electrocuted because you've hit the one wire and not the whole lot.

My dad, a number of times, has been thrown across a room when he's drilled into electric cables. He is still here today. All those near misses, all of those times, the Lord has saved us.

And the truth is, if the Lord had not been on our side in those moments, you and I would have been swept away. We would not be here today. You ever stop and think about those things?

Go back over your history and think, you know what, if that hadn't happened, if that person hadn't stepped in there, if that sudden gust of wind or whatever it was hadn't come along, I would not be here today.

Stop and think, if the Lord had not been on my side in that situation, I would not be here right now. Now, I don't mean that as something mournful and maudlin to think, but something to bring us down.

[12:47] That's not the point of the psalm. The point is that such a reflection lifts our heads and our voices to praise of God. Because every moment of our lives is a gift.

Every moment. When our grandchildren were small, our son Thomas used to walk into the boys' room first thing in the morning. And he'd walk up to the curtains and he'd go, has he?

Has he done it? Has he done it? Has he done it? And he'd open the curtains and the sun would come in and he would say, yes! It's a new day! God has brought a new day. You and I have a new day today because God has given it to us.

Because God has done it. We should think about that every morning, shouldn't we? After all, who was it who was watching over you last night when you slept?

Utterly helpless. And whilst you might have said, well, it's okay because the door was locked and the windows were shut and I've got a brilliant burglary on. And that may be so, it may be prudent, but the truth is that you and I woke up this morning because God opened our eyes and he gave us a new day because of God's saving, preserving work in the ordinary times of life.

[13:57] If the Lord had not been on our side, let the people say, if the Lord had not been on our side when we were vulnerable and undefended, when we faced dangers of various kinds that might have taken away our lives, they would have swallowed us alive and swept us away.

And if that's true about our physical lives, then what does it say about God's work in our spiritual lives? See, once again, a number of people try to say, try to explain that they are, they have faith that they're a Christian because of them.

Ah, it's because I listened well in Sunday school that I'm a Christian. Because I picked up my Bible that day and I wrote. It's because I listened to my parents and I didn't listen to my friends.

Because I took a left turn one morning and I ended up in church and not in the pub. I wonder if you'd say that about yourself. I'm a Christian because I.

I have hope of eternal life because I. If so, the psalmist would point us in another direction. To say instead, I am a Christian, I am part of God's family, I have that hope of heaven because he.

[15:13] Because he, because Christ, because God has acted. That's not to say that those efforts of our parents and friends who showed us Jesus or the ones who invited us to church, the one who shared the good news with us or welcomed us in the door when we came through.

It's not to say those efforts were without value. Of course they were. They were the means that God used to bring you to Jesus. It is to remind us that without God's work, we would never, ever, ever have come to a saving faith.

No matter how hard we searched or much we prayed, however many times we came to church or whatever good deeds we might have done. We are not saved because we. We're saved because he.

Because he did it all. And he had to. If you know your New Testaments, you'll know the different ways the Bible speaks about us when we were outside of Christ, when we had no faith.

2 Corinthians 4, we were blind. John 1, we were walking in darkness. Romans 5, we were enemies of God. Ephesians 2, hostile to God with no hope in the world.

[16 : 26] Romans 6 tells us that we were slaves to sin. Acts 26 adds that we were under Satan's power. Ephesians 2 tells us that by our fallen nature, we were children of wrath.

Lost. Luke 15 with no way home. Perishing. 1 Corinthians 1 with dead stony hearts. Mark chapter 3. And to cap it all, Ephesians 2 tells us that we were dead in our transgressions and sins.

Now, if you've ever had a graze or broken a bone or picked up a nasty virus, you'll know how wonderful our bodies are about healing. Sometimes that's helped with medical intervention as well, isn't it?

Our bodies get better. They are amazing things. But the dead can't raise themselves. Our bodies can heal while we're alive.

We can get ourselves better. But when we're dead, we're there. And there's nothing you and I can do to change that. But God can. God can. We see that physically in the works and miracles of Jesus and we see it spiritually too.

[17 : 37] Unless God intervenes, we will still be in that state of spiritual darkness, of lostness, rebellion, slavery, hatred towards God, death, leading to a lost spiritual eternity.

And yet, if you're a Christian this morning, you can say with a psalmist, if the Lord had not been on my side, if he had not come to my aid, and if he hadn't brought me to light and salvation through Jesus' death on the cross, my sin and wickedness would have swept me away to hell.

But praise be to the Lord who has not let me be torn away by sin's power. Through Jesus, I have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare and the curse of sin and death.

Through Christ, that snare has been broken and I have been set free. My help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Can you say that this morning, friends?

Can you rejoice in that this morning? If so, we've got a wonderful way of celebrating that later on, haven't we? To gather at God's table and take bread and wine together, reminding ourselves what it costs God to bring us that salvation.

[18 : 44] Because that's where God did his work. By Jesus' death on the cross in our place, for our sins, as our substitute, the curse and power of sin and death was broken.

Salvation was made possible. And then it was by the amazing love and undeserved grace of God that by God's Holy Spirit, your eyes and hearts were opened, that you were drawn into God's family, given that gift of faith that turned you from death to life, from darkness to light, from condemnation to adoption and everlasting life.

Without God's intervention, that would not have happened, however hard we tried. But our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

You may not be a Christian yet here this morning, but wherever you are on your journey of faith, you and I are here this morning with breath in our lungs because of God's saving and preserving power over our physical lives.

And if you don't yet know that God as your Lord and your Saviour, it may be that God has drawn you here this morning so you can get to know him. We'd love to chat with you afterwards. Do come and talk to me and I'll point you to the one who saves all who come, who draws us to himself.

[20 : 08] But if you're a Christian, then not only is God giving you physical life here this morning, but he has given you that spiritual life. And he has kept you over those days of wandering and doubts.

You are still in his care today because of God's saving and preserving power. Either way, both ways, we've got so much to be grateful for, so much to be thankful for, so many reasons to rejoice. A God who saves and keeps, who brings to life the spiritually dead. So maybe over this next week, you can just spend a few minutes over a cup of tea, looking back over your life, thinking the number

of ways that God has saved you and preserved you and kept you.

But this teaching here should also help us look forward with great hope and confidence. Can you see the logic behind that? Doesn't mean that since God has preserved us in the past, then we will literally be able to walk through raging floods and not be swept away or walk through fiery, furious fires and not be burned, as Isaiah 43 poetically puts it.

Please don't try either of those and think, I'm a Christian, it'll be okay. What? No. We are not indestructible because we follow Jesus, you'll know that.

[21 : 27] And we should not live carelessly with our lives, thinking that because we're in Christ, it's like we've got this mighty guardian angel who will rescue us from whatever stupid place and folly that we put ourselves in.

No. It is saying that we are utterly and completely safe and secure in God's hands no matter what happens because ultimately God is the one numbering our days and guiding our steps.

And if he has hold of us, he will never let us go. So friends, as those who are now wrapped up in Christ through faith, we do not need to fear the battle or the night, as we just sang.

Neither do we need to fear anything in life. We need so much about fear today. People are frightened of all kinds of things. Whether it's the future of the world or the power of the Chinese Empire or whatever it might be.

We're worried about so much. We do not need to fear if we're in Christ. And neither do we need to fear the day of our death either.

[22 : 39] The God who has kept us and preserved us, who has brought us to know him as our Lord and Saviour, who has worked in us in this life now, will not leave us when this life eventually comes to an end.

For the God you and I follow is a God who has conquered death. A God who has given his solemn promise to take all who trust in him through death into eternal life.

We've got a God who saves. A mighty God who saves. Let me finish with a verse from a hymn that you'll know in Christ alone. The last verse goes like this.

No guilt in life. No fear in death. This is the power of Christ in me. From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.

No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand till he returns or calls me home here in the power of Christ.

[23 : 44] I'll stand. Look back and see how God has preserved you and kept you. Look back and see how he has saved you. And be confident that God who has done all those things will keep you to the end and into eternity.

The God, the mighty God who saves. Amen.