

David's Greatness From God's Gentleness

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[0 : 00] In Psalm number 18, you have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great.

Three elements there, as you see, but I'm going to focus on the third one, your gentleness made me great. Now this is David's great song of praise to God, as you can see from the title of the psalm.

It's a title, it says, a psalm of David the servant of the Lord, who addressed the words of this song to the Lord, on the day when the Lord rescued him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.

In other words, it's a celebration of having overcome all those who were his enemies, and they are now behind him. And he is in a position of both victory and peace, as he looks back upon God's help in gaining those victories.

You could say that Psalm 18 is David's great hallelujah. It's David's great hallelujah of praise to God, in respect to all that God has done for him to that point.

[1 : 14] The book of Psalms, as one of the writers on the book of Psalms, or the theology of the book of Psalms, Walter Brueggemann, one of the things he says about the book of Psalms is interesting and useful, I think, to follow what he says.

He says that the Psalms, the book of Psalms, are really Psalms of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation.

And by that he means that when you look at the book of Psalms as a whole, you find Psalms of orientation, where the Psalmist is at peace, where he knows comfort, where he knows the Lord's direction, where everything at that moment in his life is stable, and he rejoices in God.

But then there are Psalms of disorientation, and you can see elements of that in the Psalm itself.

Verse 4, for example, the cords of death encompassed me, the torrents of destruction assailed me, the snares of death confronted me, in my distress I called upon the Lord.

He is disorientated, so he does what we should do in times of disorientation, he called upon the Lord. And then he calls, he says that when he called upon the Lord, the Lord heard him and answered him.

[2 : 31] And that's reorientation, that's the Lord bringing him back to focus properly upon things, and that's something we ourselves can take from the book of Psalms.

We often go to the book of Psalms, understandably, mostly when perhaps we're feeling rather despondent, or things seem to be working against us.

The book of Psalms is one of the best things we can do, is go to the book of Psalms. Perhaps you'll find yourself there in these circumstances. But then they're there for our reorientation, so that we can come back to a spiritual and moral stability, and refocus on our relationship with God, and with all that he has done, and all that he is, and all that he means to his people.

So here is the hallelujah of David. You could say it's really, in a sense, also almost the memoirs of this soldier king. And as we focus here on verse 35, especially the third part of it there, your gentleness made me great.

It's somewhat surprising to find this word, gentleness, to find that mentioned there in the light of, for example, verses 7 to 15 of the Psalm, where David's talking about the great power of God, the exercise of his power, or how even the creation itself reeled and rocked under the manifestation, or the exercise of God's power, in response to David's prayer.

[4 : 03] But now he says, your gentleness made me great. It's the combination of the great almightiness of God, and the gentleness of God that makes this such a remarkable statement.

My own father, a late father, had very large, craggy hands. Believe me, if you've got a scalp, you knew about it.

Really big fists. And yet, what was amazing at times, and I remember thinking about this very often as I watched him, these great craggy hands as he would tie a fish hook, or something like that that required great delicacy, and you could just almost think, well, these great hands, surely he's not going to manage to actually do such a delicate thing, but he would.

And these great hands, you would see them just delicately dealing with this thing that needed to be dealt with, whether it was tying the threads of a tweed, or tying a fish hook, or whatever.

So the combination of the craggy greatness and the delicate nature of the work really came together, and really something memorable. And really, David is saying, that is my God.

[5 : 17] He has these gigantic hands. He is the great giant, the creator. And yet, he uses them in such a delicate way.

He is so gentle. And his gentleness is what's made me great. Now, we need to look at that somewhat further. First of all, let's look at God's gentleness, because that's the word that's used there.

You'll find different translations of that, but the best is really there. Your gentleness is really the essence of the word, and its meaning, the gentleness of God.

So what does it mean that God is gentle? How does the gentleness of God come across to us in the Bible? Well, first of all, it's actually very closely linked to the word that's frequently used in the Bible for the poor.

Just bear with me as we go through the various stages of looking as to how the gentleness of God can be understood. The word is used in the Bible for the poor, the needy.

[6 : 16] They're very closely related to this word for gentleness. Now, these people in the Bible, of course, you find them here in verse 27, you save a humble people.

They're looked down on. They're despised. For those who really have power and influence, these people are losers. They're the have-nots. They don't have access to such things as defense mechanisms or access to means by which they can vindicate themselves when they're oppressed. They just remain oppressed. They are the poor. But God is on their side, as very often you find that mentioned. And it leads, therefore, to the idea of the word being associated with being humble, being lowly.

And you can follow that into the idea of God being gentle and being lowly. Because the Bible speaks about that as well. He doesn't just identify with the poor and with the needy.

The Bible tells us he comes down to them. Remember the words of Exodus, where in chapter 3 of Exodus, God came to speak to Moses.

[7 : 25] And what he said to Moses was, I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt. And I have heard their cry. And I know their suffering.

And I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the king of Egypt and to bring them into the land that I will give them. Notice what he said. He didn't just say to Moses, I've seen them. I've pitied them from a distance. He said, I have come down. My view of them, my pity for them, is to the extent that I have come and descended to where they are.

I have come down to rescue them. There's God's descent. God making himself low, if you like, in order to come and redeem his people there in Egypt. And in Psalm 113, Now we didn't sing it today. There's so many psalms that tie up with this. Psalm 113 has something very similar to this. And it's interesting as well, if you turn to it briefly.

[8 : 24] You notice he begins there in verse 4. For the Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like our God, who is seated on high?

Now there he is beginning with the greatness of God, with the height of God, with the bigness of God. What does he then say? Who is like him? Who looks far down on the heavens and the earth. Now I don't like that translation. Really there, it's not the best. It's better like in the AV, I think, where it says, who condescends, who comes down. Who humbles himself, are the words used.

Who is like the Lord? Yes, he's seated on high. That's his place. That's his majesty. That's his greatness. But then, he humbles himself to look on the heavens and the earth.

He comes down, not only to have a look at things there, but his purpose is to lift those who are poor. You see, he used the same word there.

[9 : 28] He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. There you see the picture that he's giving us there again, of God in his greatness, looking down upon people who are poor, and needy, and lowly.

And what does he do? He comes to make himself low. He comes down to their level. He comes alongside them, not just to look at them, but to help them, to raise them up. Now, that's so very different to the gods of the pagan nations in the time of David, and in the Old Testament, and since then.

And remember that much of the Bible, even the early chapters of Genesis, are actually written so as to counter the idolatry that you find in paganism, and to actually counsel the people of Israel against that, and to stand firm against it.

Not to be sucked into the life of the Canaanites, who have all of these gods. And this is the remarkable thing. Human beings have never created a god of gentleness.

They have never created a gentle god. There is always, in the gods of the pagans, they're not real beings, of course, but they're characterized as very angry, capricious, distant.

[10 : 56] Gods which are not really very dependable. They can turn against you just like that. And David is saying, that's not my god.

Your gentleness, Lord, has made me great. And then you can take that, there is God, he's coming down, he's coming alongside those who are needy, he's showing his gentleness, but then that's also into the way that God deals with us in our own personal experience.

How do you know God today in your own personal experience? Is he distant from you? Do you still think of him as somebody, someone's in the distance of heaven, and he's out of your reach, and he's just looking down on you with all his knowledge and his omniscience, and that's about it?

Well, if that's the case, then you don't know God. And please listen to what God is saying in this verse, where he speaks about his own gentleness, where David has this testimony.

Because when God deals with us, what we come to know about him is his patience, his forbearance, his gentleness.

[12 : 07] Think of the likes of Psalm 103, another psalm where you find a very similar emphasis, and it's there, as you remember, in contrast to what we ourselves deserve, where he says, he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always chide. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

For he knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust. Where is that shown above all else, above all other places or people?

Well, you know that that's in the person of Jesus, isn't it? The gentleness of God, as many other aspects of the character or the attributes of God, have come to clarity for us, and have come to be set forth most clearly for us, in Jesus himself, the Son of God, who came to reveal God to us, to reveal the heart of God to us, the very characteristics of God.

Let me just point out one of them, and you can relate it to the passage in Isaiah, that it's based on. It's in Matthew chapter 12, and from verse 15.

[13 : 38] Matthew chapter 12, and at verse 15, where you find Jesus there set out as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah in Isaiah 42.

And Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from many, followed him, and he healed them all, and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah. Behold, my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased.

I will put my spirit upon him. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, he will not break.

You've seen a candle burning for some time. You blow it out. You're left with the burnt wick. You try and pick that without breaking it.

Extremely difficult. What that passage is telling us about the servant of God, that's Jesus, in Isaiah 42, and then picked up by Matthew in Matthew 12, is that when Jesus comes alongside broken lives, lives that are really reaching the end of their tether in some cases, lives that have come to the point of saying, how am I going to cope with this anymore?

[15 : 00] How can I put up with this anymore? How can I actually go on from this point? When Jesus comes alongside to help, and to heal, and to build up, he's able to do it without breaking that smoldering wick.

That very delicate, breakable life. And only he can do that. But he does it so well. The gentleness of God.

God's great hands, all mightiness, but handling this smoldering wick of our broken lives in a way that is able to heal us without breaking us.

To put right what's gone wrong. to reorient what's become disoriented. Your gentleness has made me great.

Do we know this gentleness today? Are we prepared to confess this gentleness of God? God? It's so important, isn't it?

[16 : 10] When our God is presented in so many of the attacks made upon him and upon his cause as one who is capricious, one who is stern, one who is tyrannical, one who is just not dependable, one who is distant, a God who just frowns upon us, who is displeased with us, who doesn't allow us to do certain things that we want to do ourselves, there's all that negative side, isn't there?

Sometimes perhaps we're ourselves guilty of thinking in some ways of God in that way without taking account of his gentleness. Today, think of the gentleness of God.

Think of what the gentleness of God means to us. As broken sinners, as needy creatures, think of the gentleness of God through Christ and how much you need that gentleness to actually come and take hold of your life and build you together again and build you up and be your companion and be your friend.

Well, this is what David is saying. Of course, he knew that God was a mighty warrior. He knew that David had, he knew that God had immensity of strength, almightiness, incalculably strong.

That's why he says that he enabled him by his strength, that he was a rock to him and a deliverer, a refuge, the shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. He knows God himself as a mighty warrior who defends his people, but he knows also this side to him.

[17 : 42] Your gentleness made me great. Your compassion, your pity, your understanding, your delicate handling of my life has made me great.

So what is the greatness of which David speaks? The gentleness of God and human greatness.

Well, human greatness is something that we had as human beings but lost.

We were created with greatness. Greatness in the sense of God placing us over the whole of his creation as we were created as as the first two chapters of Genesis describe the position, the status given to human beings as God created them, male and female.

The faculties that he gave to us as human beings, faculties that are greater in terms of mind, of understanding, of emotions, of conscience, far above any other form of life except himself.

He created us in his image. He created us with greatness in relation to the rest of the creation. Only God was greater than us human beings when he created us.

[19 : 06] But then Genesis 3 comes like a huge thunderclap and smashes everything that God had made. Our sin, our rebellion, our turning away from God, our choosing our own way.

And now we come to think of greatness as very different to the way we were created as great.

There is greatness now to fallen human beings, to all of us as fallen human beings as we think in our own sinful way and distorted view of greatness.

We think of greatness in terms of wealth, in terms of power, in terms of influence, in terms of pride, in terms of fame, in terms of social standing and social status. We think of greatness in terms of celebrity cult.

And those people who are made famous by such publicity. Greatness in human terms. And it's not in God's eyes great at all. It's the greatness that human beings have come to regard as greatness.

But it's not really greatness, is it? Not the greatness of which David here is speaking, your gentleness made me great. Because it's not in terms of wealth or power or social standing or celebrity or fame.

[20 : 23] It's moral greatness. It's spiritual greatness. It's the greatness that grace restores, which reverses the effects of sin.

The grace of God in Jesus Christ. The grace of God when his spirit comes and turns your life from inside out to be different to what you were as a sinner. Lost and looking at greatness in a very different way to the way we should.

You see, God's social ladder, if you like, the social ladder that he has when he defines greatness and the different categories in which his people are placed.

And by that I mean the different roles that he gives to them, God's social ladder is in the opposite direction to ours as fallen human beings. That's why you have the likes of 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 26 where Paul is describing there God's way of choosing.

Not many of you, he says, were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. You see, there's greatness in terms of worldly greatness. Not many of you, he says, were that.

[21 : 40] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in his presence.

And he is the source of your life in Christ Jesus. greatness. You think of all the beatitudes in Matthew 5. Those people that Jesus termed as blessed.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. What are they all about? Are they greatness? Is it greatness in human terms? In worldly terms? No. It's very often in all of these beatitudes things which the world despises.

It doesn't like humility. It doesn't like meekness. It doesn't like Christ likeness. But these are the ones God terms as blessed because by his gentleness that's the greatness he brings about.

[22 : 57] The greatness of humility. The greatness that stamps upon your pride. The greatness that wants to be like Jesus. The greatness that is moral greatness that hates sin, that loves holiness, that seeks to live in a way that uses our faculties to the highest extent possible in this world.

Not in the service of sin but as servants of Jesus. The moral greatness that meets the purpose why we were created. We were not created for pride.

We were not created to be proud of ourselves. we were not created so we can think of greatness in those terms. We were created to be great as God would have it to be so.

To be great morally and spiritually. To fulfill our chief end to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

That's what grace brings about. And in fact we have to insist on this it sounds to begin with perhaps rather not the case fully but it is.

And it's this. God's purpose in salvation is to make us great. God's purpose in salvation is to make us great.

[24 : 17] Great in the sense in which David thinks of it. In which God himself defines us. Because God's salvation is restoring us to why we were created.

the purpose of our creation. The greatness of being human beings in the image of God fulfilling the terms of our creation.

God's purpose in salvation is to make us great. That doesn't make you proud. It has the opposite effect. But it's still something we have to insist upon.

That the greatness the Bible speaks of as the greatness of Christ likeness is really what God is intent upon in his salvation.

Now let me just come to a conclusion. Let's just take that a step further and ask well who then is the greatest Christian? How should we think of greatness in terms of being Christians or believers?

[25 : 20] Well remember in Matthew again chapter 18 that Jesus was asked a question. and he was asked a question here by the disciples. They came to him and said who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And Jesus being Jesus he replied with an illustration before them of a live illustration of you like. He took a child, a very young child and he took this child and put him in the midst of them and said truly I say to you unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Now he didn't mean they're children in the sense of innocence, children in the way that we sometimes think of them.

What he meant there was a child in the way you see a child as dependent on the guidance of parents. A very young child that is willing to accept what's relayed to them by those who are looking after them.

They're dependent on their parent therefore they're humble in that respect. And that's he says the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It's the person who is most dependent on God who is most humble in that respect.

[26 : 43] That's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And then you shoot forward to the time when the Lord's Supper was being instituted or just before then.

Luke chapter 22. Again it's the disciples and there's a dispute amongst them. What are they disputing? What's the argument about?

What are they quarreling about? They are disputing as to which of them should be the greatest. Luke chapter 22 verses 24 to 27.

You'd have thought by now that they would have learned not to engage in such things. But there you are at this time just approaching this very crucial time in Christ's own life.

They're disputing as to who is the greatest. So Jesus said, let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as the one who serves. Who is the greater?

[27 : 40] One who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? but I am among you as the one who serves. The servant, the greatest servant, the most humble.

The incarnation where the son of God became a servant is the greatest humbling that ever took place. It's the lowliest place ever taken by a human being.

what's it for? I'm among you as one who serves. I'm among you. I've put myself here in my gentleness alongside you. I've come down to you so that you would be taken up, so that you would be saved.

And that's why he answered them in the way he did. God made himself little. Asperger puts it this way. God made himself little so that we would be made great.

God made himself little. You know what he means by that. What we've been seeing in the gentleness of God. So that we might be made great. Now the Lord's Supper which we anticipate next Lord's Day.

[29 : 01] The Lord's Supper is all about that. It's for the great. It's for the great ones. As I know it's for those who are humble, those who depend upon God.

But then that is greatness as defined by Christ and by the Bible. Greatness in God's terms of greatness. And Psalm 16 remember there the psalmist is saying he's rejecting those who want to draw him aside after other gods.

He says their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out. I will not take their name on my lips. The Lord is my chosen portion. But in verse 3 he says as for the saints in the land they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight.

The excellent ones could very easily be translated the great ones. The ones God has made great and my delight is in them. The Lord's Supper is the way we remember.

The words of 2nd Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 9. What he says you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet he made himself poor that you through his poverty might be made rich.

[30 : 23] What a great text that is. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Where is it seen? It's seen in that though he was rich with the richness of God and the status of God yet he made himself poor he became a servant.

The servant. Why? So that we through his poverty see what I say? Through his lowliness through his gentleness as a servant that we might be made great that we might be made rich.

That's what we remember in the Lord's Supper. We remember the gentleness of God. the great almighty God coming to show his gentleness in the grace that is in Christ Jesus making himself poor that we might through his poverty be made rich.

Let's then come and take communion. Yes we're unworthy but as far as Jesus is concerned that's one of our great qualifications because it's for the unworthy that he has come to lower himself in order to make us great.

So come let the gentleness of God caress you through the Lord's Supper so that that will lead to God making you great.

[31 : 59] great in his presence. Let's pray. Lord our God we give thanks today for your greatness and for your gentleness for the combination of these in the way in which you deal with us as sinners not marking our iniquity against us but providing us with such wonderful salvation.

We thank you for your gentleness in your touch upon our lives and for the way that you give us to appreciate that all the more as life goes on. We pray Lord that you would bless to us this great emphasis today of your word and help us to deposit ourselves believingly into your great and gentle hands.

We pray it in Jesus name. Amen. Well let's conclude our service this morning singing in Psalm 17 Psalm 17 that's on page 18 sing to a tune Dennis and we're singing from the middle of verse 4 through to verse 8 from every evil path by your word I am preserved my feet have held to all your ways from them I have not swerved I call on you O God for you will answer me O turn your ear towards my prayer and hear my earnest plea and so on through these four verses from the middle of verse 4 from every evil path occurred through cesarely

I have My feet have held to all new ways, from them I have not sweared.

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me.

[34 : 24] O turn you dear, towards my faith, and hear my earnest plea.

Display your steadfast love, and save with your right hand.

All those who flee for help to you, when foes against them stand.

In shadow of cured wings, hide me in times of strife.

And as the other Lord cured I, preserve and guard my life.

[35 : 50] If you allow me to get to the main door, please, after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.