Psalm 18
The setting of this psalm is David fleeing from Saul his enemy. Before we begin I'll ask you to bring your enemies to mind. They are most probably not people and if you're thinking of people that's okay, I'm sorry you have enemies, but often our enemies are not people

Think more of your enemy the devil and how that enemy seeks to bring you down – maybe your enemy is discouragement and despair, the feeling of being defeated – maybe it's temptation to sin that you cannot overcome, leading you to a life you don't really want – hopelessness, pride – If the enemy had his way in your life, what would your life look like? I'm not sure, but think of that as we go through this psalm

Verses 1-3 are an intro to the whole psalm
I love you, LORD, my <u>strength</u>.
The LORD is my <u>rock</u>, my <u>fortress</u> and my <u>deliverer</u>;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my <u>shield</u> and the <u>horn</u> of my salvation, my <u>stronghold</u>.
I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
and I have been saved from my enemies.
Note those 7 different <u>words</u> – this is who God is to David and to us, and he wants to paint a picture for us of his situation, his trials, think of yours – just two verses, 4-5

The cords of death entangled me;
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.
The cords of the grave coiled around me;
the snares of death confronted me.
Get the picture of a person being pulled down to death – language is a hunter's snare – another picture I think of is St Malo – a few people have drowned in that lake, getting caught in the seaweed, the "cords of death entangled me"– can you think again of your enemy, can you picture what it looks like for this enemy to drag you down? – next section is what we do when we are being dragged down

In my distress I called to the LORD;
I cried to my God for help.
This struck me particularly – It's not one verse long, it's half a verse, out of 50 verses, that makes it exactly 1% of this psalm – David says I was drowning, my enemy was dragging me down to the grave and I yelled "Help!" – that's it, nothing more than help – next section is how God responds and I love this picture – far longer and more detail

From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came before him, into his ears.
Somehow David's cry for help down on some remote part of planet earth reached the ears of God! We know God is near, but here he's pictured as far away – now God acts, verses 7-19

The earth trembled and quaked,

and the foundations of the mountains shook;
they trembled because he was angry.
God is awake! And angry, not at David, not at you, but at David's enemy and your enemy

Smoke rose from his nostrils;
consuming fire came from his mouth,
burning coals blazed out of it.
Forgive me but this sounds like a fire-breathing dragon – dragon is not a theologically correct image for God, but He is a fire-breathing God and He is furious

He parted the heavens and came down;
dark clouds were under his feet.
The earth rumbles because God is moving and now he comes down from heaven

He mounted the cherubim and flew;
he soared on the wings of the wind.
God comes flying in to the rescue – picture a police car with lights flashing going a 100 miles an hour to save the day – a lifeguard in full sprint across the sand to save a drowning victim

He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—
the dark rain clouds of the sky.
Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced,
with hailstones and bolts of lightning.
He comes in a dark storm cloud, approaching David and his enemy, approaching you and your enemy
The LORD thundered from heaven;
the voice of the Most High resounded.
God's voice sounds to us like thunder! He speaks in what could be described as a mighty roar – it strikes fear into anyone who hears it – you only pray that the source of that voice is for you not against you – think of a momma bear hearing her cubs being attacked – now he attacks the enemy, your enemy

He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy,
with great bolts of lightning he routed them. His arrows are lightning bolts
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.
The earth is shattered at the presence of God upon it – now God finds the one He came to rescue

He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of deep waters. Drowning in seaweed all alone and God swoops in to rescue
He rescued me from my powerful enemy,

from my foes, who were too strong for me.
They confronted me in the day of my disaster,
but the LORD was my support.
David says I readily admit, I was not strong enough for these enemies, they were too strong – if it was just me against despair I would lose, if it was just me against temptation I would lose – those enemies confronted me in the day of disaster, they kicked me while I was down – "but the LORD was my support"

He brought me out into a spacious place;
In The Hobbit movie, the 13 dwarves are up a bunch of trees, chased by goblins and wolves – surrounded by fierce enemies, totally stuck, the orcs set the trees on fire, they are trapped and sure to die – then out of nowhere comes a mighty eagle and 12 more massive eagles come rescue each one and fly them off to safety and put them down in a safe place high on a mountain – "He brought me out into a spacious place" – David is now safe from his enemies

He rescued me because he delighted in me.
The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.
For I have kept the ways of the LORD;
I am not guilty of turning from my God.
All his laws are before me;
I have not turned away from his decrees.
I have been blameless before him
and have kept myself from sin.
The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.
This doesn't sit well with our reformed theology of being saved by grace and not by works, but just let it say what it says – David sees God rescuing as having something to do with David's faithfulness to God – only the faithful would ever cry out in the first place

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.
You save the humble
but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.
You, LORD, keep my lamp burning;
my God turns my darkness into light.
God saves the humble – the proud would never cry out to God, because they can probably handle things on their own – "I can figure my way through this, I'm smart enough, I'm strong enough to swim to shore" – the humble say I cannot do this on my own, I am sunk without you God – this next section pictures David, saved by God living in victory – can you imagine what victory over your enemy might look like? – no longer "entangled in the cords of death"?

With your help I can advance against a troop;
with my God I can leap over a wall.
As for God, his way is perfect:
The LORD's word is flawless;
he shields all who take refuge in him.
For who is God besides the LORD?
And who is the Rock except our God?
It is God who arms me with strength
and keeps my way secure.
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;
he causes me to stand on the heights.
He trains my hands for battle;
my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
You make your saving help my shield,
and your right hand sustains me;
your help has made me great.
You provide a broad path for my feet,
so that my ankles do not give way.
I pursued my enemies and overtook them;
I did not turn back till they were destroyed.
I crushed them so that they could not rise;
they fell beneath my feet.
You armed me with strength for battle;
you humbled my adversaries before me.
You made my enemies turn their backs in flight,
and I destroyed my foes.
They cried for help, but there was no one to save them —
to the LORD, but he did not answer.
I beat them as fine as windblown dust;
I trampled them like mud in the streets.
What would it look like to trample your enemy like mud in the streets? To face temptation and stomp it down and live in holiness? – to face hopelessness and discouragement and to live in joy instead, with a genuine smile on your face? – to conquer bitterness and to live in peace? – this is David's victory march over his enemies

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,
foreigners cower before me;
as soon as they hear of me, they obey me.
They all lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds.
The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior!
He is the God who avenges me, who subdues nations under me,
who saves me from my enemies.

You exalted me above my foes;
from a violent man you rescued me.
Therefore I will praise you, LORD, among the nations;
I will sing the praises of your name.
He gives his king great victories;
he shows unfailing love to his anointed,
to David and to his descendants forever.

So the psalm ends with this great victory of God over David's enemies – all of this great victory is contingent on that one half verse, that 1% of the whole psalm back in verse 6 "**In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help."** I can't tell you how many times I have faced challenges and struggles and enemies to overcome and failed to do just that, to cry to God for help – I've complained to my wife, I've worried, I've sat and stewed about it for hours and days on end, tried to figure it out on my own, but I have sometimes failed to simply cry to God for help – why don't I do it? Why don't you do it? I don't know, but this psalm invites us to consider a God who comes to the rescue when humble people call upon him

It is often not immediate as this psalm portrays, wasn't even immediate for David – though God can certainly bring something to you in the immediate moment that pulls you toward safety – often it's a long journey to safety and to victory to our rock, stronghold, our fortress – where we maybe cry out for help daily for days on end, months, even years, saying over and over again "God I cannot save myself from this enemy. If you don't save me I am sunk, so come save me" –

The morning I read Psalm 18, I also read 2 Cor 12, about Paul and an enemy he was facing **Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me [his enemy]. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. " Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

The power of God only shows up in weak people – "*His* power is made perfect in *our* weakness" – so as we face enemies in our lives we can say with all boldness, "I am not strong enough for this. I am weak and this enemy is far more powerful than I am. So I cry out to God saying 'I am weak! I need your strength! I need you to save me!'" – or simply "Help!" – and I believe the God we see in Ps 18 who shook the earth, breathed fire from his mouth, who raced in to save the day and hurled lightning bolts at David's enemies and delivered him IS THE SAME God who hears our prayers when we cry to him to save us when we cannot save ourselves.