



Psalm 21 - Thanksgiving for Victory

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

Introduction

Psalms 20-21. These two Psalms form a pair of royal Psalms. Psalm 20 is a prayer that God will give success to the Davidic king, particularly in battle. Psalm 21 gives thanks to God for answering the request of Psalm 20.

Psalm 21:1-7 - Thanksgiving

These verses are addressed to the Lord (you) about the king (he), celebrating the military success prayed for in Psalm 20. It is clear from such terms as salvation (v.1 and v.5), your presence (v.6), and trusts (v.7) that the psalm assumes a pious and faithful king and is not intended to offer endorsement to sinful plans.

- ¹ In your strength the king rejoices, O Lord,
and in your help how greatly he exults!
- ² You have given him his heart's desire,
and have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah

Psalm 21:1-2

In your strength the king rejoices, O Lord. King David had many reasons to take joy in the strength of God, which are especially revealed in David's song of praise: <<*He is a tower of salvation for his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his descendants for ever*>> (2 Samuel 22:51). Perhaps this joy came from preservation and success in battle or some other deliverance.

You have given him his heart's desire. The strength and the help or salvation of God came to David in response to both the desire of his heart and his spoken prayers, i.e. the request of his lips. This speaks to the special place answered prayer has in the life of the believer. Every Christian should know the thrill of

frequent, wonderful answers to prayer just as David had desired: <<**May he grant you your heart's desire, and fulfil all your plans**>> (Psalm 20:4). When a Christian does not enjoy the blessing of answered prayer it is because they are prayerless, praying wrongly, or because of some hindrance in prayer.

There are many things that can hinder prayer in the life of the believer; things which should prevent one from saying with David, 'You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips.' Unanswered prayer should be regarded as a warning signal that there may be a problem in one or more of the following reasons for unanswered prayer:

- Not abiding in Jesus (John 15:7).
- Unbelief (Matthew 17:20-21).
- Failure to fast (Matthew 17:21).
- A bad marriage relationship (1 Peter 3:7).
- Not asking (James 4:2).
- Selfish praying (James 4:3).
- Disobedience (1 John 3:22).
- Not praying in God's will (1 John 5:14-15).
- Unconfessed sin (James 5:16).
- Cold, passionless prayer (2 Kings 20:5 and James 5:16-18).
- Prayerlessness and lack of persistence in prayer (Psalm 55:17 and Luke 18:1-7).
- Sin against others (Matthew 5:23-24).
- Lack of unity (Matthew 18:19).
- Not praying in the name of Jesus (John 14:13-14).
- Pride (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5).
- Lying and deceitfulness (Psalm 17:1).
- Lack of Bible study and Bible teaching (Proverbs 28:9).
- Trusting in the length or form of prayer (Matthew 6:7).

Selah. The idea in the Hebrew for this word, which occurs 74 times in the OT, is for a pause. Most people think it speaks of a reflective pause, a pause to meditate on the words just spoken. It may also be a musical instruction, for a musical interlude of some kind. Worshipers take this Selah as an opportunity to thank God for the strength and salvation he has shown in their lives, and for the glorious way he answers prayer. They, like King David of old, take joy in such a great and loving God.

- ³ For you meet him with rich blessings;
you set a crown of fine gold on his head.
- ⁴ He asked you for life; you gave it to him —
length of days for ever and ever.

- 5 His glory is great through your help;
splendour and majesty you bestow on him.
- 6 You bestow on him blessings for ever;
you make him glad with the joy of your presence.
- 7 For the king trusts in the Lord,
and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be
moved.

Psalm 21:3-7

For you meet him with rich blessings. King David could see that the goodness of God had come to meet him. God brought it to him, more than David chasing down these blessings of goodness. It was certainly true that God went before David with blessings and that David recognised and praised him for it. Yet often it did not seem like that in the many long years between his anointing for the throne as a young man and when he finally took the throne of Israel.

God's goodness and grace comes to meet people all the time:

- The grace of his love loves them before they ever loved him.
- The grace of restraint keeps them back from committing sins that would put them even more out of reach of the Gospel.
- The grace of salvation comes out to meet them, bringing them the goodness of God and making them able to receive the Gospel.
- The grace of ministry prepares them in a thousand ways for what God has for them in the future.
- The grace of service prepares the ground where they work before they ever get there.

You set a crown of fine gold on his head. David wore the crown both of the throne of Israel, God's special nation, and the crown of victory. Its nature of pure gold shows how special the nation and the victory were: <<**Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak**>> (Zechariah 6:11). Of King David it was undeniably true that he let God put the crown on his head. Although in some sense he had the right and the reasons to forcibly take the crown from Saul, he waited for God to place it upon his head.

He asked you for life; you gave it to him. David went into battle praying that God would preserve his life, and now he celebrated the answer to that prayer. In the life-and-death danger of battle, David was given life and length of days.

His glory is great through your help or salvation. David proclaimed that he was most blessed forever: <<**therefore may it please you to bless the house of your**>>

servant, that it may continue for ever before you. For you, O Lord, have blessed and are blessed for ever’>> (1 Chronicles 17:27), but it was the presence of God himself that was his greatest blessing and gladness. David was more thrilled with the presence of God than with the crown of royalty or victory.

For the king trusts in the Lord, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved. David declared his trust in the mercy of God, and that it would continue to preserve and bless him in the future: <<*They think in their heart, ‘We shall not be moved; throughout all generations we shall not meet adversity’>>* (Psalm 10:6), and: <<*Those who do these things shall never be moved>>* (Psalm 15:5b).

Each of these things was certainly true of King David, but they are also, or perhaps even more so, true of David’s greater Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Son of David. Each line in vv.3-7 can be applied to Jesus, victorious after his great work on the Cross:

- Victorious Jesus was met with the blessings of goodness when he ascended to heaven.
- Jesus wears the crown, both as King of kings and glorious conqueror, and his crown is of pure gold.
- Jesus asked life from God the Father, and as God’s Holy One was delivered from death.
- Jesus gloried in the salvation extended to him from the Father; not a salvation from sin, but a victory over sin and death.
- Jesus rejoiced in the presence of his Father, even though there was a sense in which it was turned away from him on the Cross.
- Jesus continues to trust in his Father, and will not be moved.

Psalm 21:8-12 - Confidence for the Future

The person addressed (you) may still be God, as above, but it seems better to take it as the king, who will continue his military exploits on behalf of the people. As above, it is necessary to see that these enemies are those who hate the king and plan evil against him (v.11). When the king lives by the Davidic ideal, God takes hostility against the king as hostility against his own purposes and thus as against himself; thus the godly king is the tool of God’s wrath (v.9).

⁸ Your hand will find out all your enemies;
your right hand will find out those who hate you.

⁹ You will make them like a fiery furnace
when you appear.

The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath,

and fire will consume them.

- ¹⁰ You will destroy their offspring from the earth,
and their children from among humankind.

Psalm 21:8-10

Your hand will find out all your enemies. David recognised that even though he was victorious in battle, God was done finding and judging his enemies wherever they may be: <<*As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols whose images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols what I have done to Samaria and her images?*>> (Isaiah 10:10-11).

The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath. David confidently expressed his confidence that God would judge his enemies, and he expressed that confidence in the strongest terms, even that God would also judge the posterity of those who fight against him. This probably assumes that the children and offspring of these hostile Gentiles carry on the hostility of their parents.

Fire will consume them. God has always used the symbolism of fire to judge those who oppose him: <<*For a fire is kindled by my anger, and burns to the depths of Sheol; it devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains*>> (Deuteronomy 32:22), <<*Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all around him*>> (Psalm 50:3), <<*I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn for ever*>> (Jeremiah 15:14), and this is the final judgement that awaits those who reject Jesus as their Lord and Saviour: <<*Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire*>> (Revelation 20:14-15).

- ¹¹ If they plan evil against you,
if they devise mischief, they will not succeed.
- ¹² For you will put them to flight;
you will aim at their faces with your bows.

Psalm 21:11-12

If they plan evil against you, if they devise mischief. The strong statements of judgement in vv.8-10 seem to demand an explanation. Why such a severe judgement? Because they intentionally rebelled against God and his people, even though their plans were bigger than their ability to perform, i.e. they will not succeed. It is not necessarily actions that are judged but the heart: <<*But the*

Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart'>> (1 Samuel 16:7).

For you will put them to flight. David sees, and perhaps literally saw, the enemies of God running away on the field of battle, with their back turned against the advancing armies of God. God had promised his people this would happen when they took possession of the Promised Land: <<*I will send my terror in front of you, and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you*>> (Exodus 23:27).

You will aim at their faces with your bows. David saw the enemies of God as helpless before the ready arrows and taught bow string of the war-like, judging God. His arrows are aimed right at their faces. This is a stark reminder of just how near the judgement of God actually is against those who reject him, and how it is only his great mercy that prevents the release of his arrow of judgement against them. It is a great but rarely regarded or understood sin that man ignores and presumes upon this great mercy.

Psalm 21:13 - Be Exalted!

As in Psalm 18:46, the Lord is exalted when he shows his power in making the faithful king successful.

¹³ Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength!

We will sing and praise your power.

Psalm 21:13

Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength! David worshipped God directly here. He exalted the Lord who had this great strength within himself, and never needs to rely on another for strength: <<*I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold*>> (Psalm 18:1-2).

We will sing and praise your power. After the direct statement of praise, David expressed the determination that he and the people of God would continue to praise God, and to do so in song. The psalm's end is consistent with the tone throughout. It is full of praise to God for the blessings of victory, deliverance, and answered prayer. This attitude should always be among the people of God.