

Summer in the Psalms:
Psalm 21
ABC 7/10/22

There are many things in life that go together. For example: Hamburgers &...? Adam &...? Steak &...? Salt &...? Broccoli &...? OK, nothing goes with broccoli. Some of the psalms go together or appear in pairs. This summer we've already looked at Ps 3, a morning psalm, & Ps 4, an evening psalm, that go together. Today we're going to look at another psalm, Ps 21, that pairs with Ps 20. While we'll touch on Ps 20 today, I'll leave it to you to read & study it to see how it fits with Ps 21. Basically, Ps 20 is a prayer for God's deliverance of King David in an impending battle. It's a prayer for victory or salvation. Ps 21 is a prayer of thanksgiving for that deliverance. The 2 psalms are linked by repeated words, phrases, & structure.

At the center of Ps 21 stands the faith of the king: **For the king trusts in the LORD (7)**. David is a man of faith who relies on God for everything. This central vs reminds us that our relationship with God is through faith & trust in Him. All the vss of this psalm seem to revolve around the central point of faith in vs 7. At the center is the trusting king. Preceding vs 7 it reflects on the blessings given by God. Following vs 7 it testifies to the future success against his enemies by God. This psalm isn't all sugar & spice & everything nice. It reminds us that those who trust God will enjoy eternal life & those who make war on God will suffer everlasting destruction. It reminds us that God, who is a God of unfailing love to His people, is also a God of absolute justice to His enemies. Both psalm 20 & 21 have the same superscription (*writing above*) saying, **For the choir director. A Psalm of David**. This tells us it was meant to be set to music & was probably played & sang in the context of worshipping God corporately. It also tells us David wrote these psalms. Once again, we don't know what situation in David's life brought these psalms about.

1. Thanksgiving for Past Victories Vss 1–7 correspond to the 1st section of Ps 20. In that psalm the people were addressing themselves to their king but were in effect asking God to hear the king's prayers & grant victory in the battle that was coming. The 1st section in Ps 21 is an explicit prayer, directed to God to give thanks for that victory. Who is speaking in this section? It's not easy to tell.

It could be David speaking in the 3rd person.¹ It could be someone speaking for him, such as a priest.² It could also be the people themselves, the congregation. The majority of commentators lean toward this. Whatever the case, it's not really important to know. What are the specific blessings given that God is thanked for? There are 6 of them, one in each of the 1st 6 vs.

A. Salvation Through God's Strength Ps 20 asked for victory, not through chariots & horses (20:7) but in the name & power of God. This is the blessing God gave. **1**

The king will be glad... he will rejoice (greatly). Why is he joyful? Because of God's **strength** & His **salvation** or **victory**. The 2 concepts, **strength** & **salvation/victory**, are parallel. The **strength** in which David is **glad** is the same thing as the **salvation** or **victory** in which he **rejoices**. **Victory** is what was prayed for (20:4-5) & it's mentioned, not only in vs 1, but also in vs 5. The military victory which David won in battle was in reality the victory which God, in His **strength**, had given.

B. Answered Prayer The king had been praying for victory. But in addition to thanking God for the victory itself, vs 2 thanks God for answering prayer. **2**

What is David's **desire** & **request**? In the context it must include that God would save him from his enemies. What David was seeking & what God gave him was victory over his enemies. This God that David worshiped is our God as well. & He still answers prayer. Like many of the psalms, portions look forward to the Messiah, Jesus. As the Messiah, Jesus knew God's might in deliverance. Protected in His birth & empowered in His baptism, Jesus lived & ministered under the hand of God. He only did what the Father said as He always sought His Father's will. & He encourages us to live in the same way. Thus as we abide in Him we abide in the Father. As we pray in His name, the Father hears & answers. God still grants the desires of His people's hearts, according to His will. & wherever & whenever He's done that for you, rejoice, praise, & thank Him for it.

C. Blessings Associated with the Crown **3**

The theme of God's granting the king his **heart's desire** continues. Here David receives God's **blessings**. Rather than being met by enemy armies or military disaster, he's met by God's **good**

¹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction & Commentary on Books I & II of the Psalms*, p 103

² P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, vol. 19 of the *Word Biblical Commentary*, p 189

things. His kingdom is secure since he's crowned by the Lord Himself: **You set a crown.** The crown God gives is of **fine gold.** This represents the value & permanence of God's kingdom.³

The blessing here could be the welcome David received upon returning victorious from battle. Stated in 2 different ways, the Lord's granting David powerful **salvation** from his enemies is referred to as **blessings of good things** & it's also pictured as setting **a crown of fine gold on his head.** That could be David saying God was highly honoring him & using the picture of being crowned with a gold crown to express the great value he sees in God providing him with this **salvation.** It's possible the situation that brought this psalm about is when he was delivered from the persecution of King Saul & made king himself. If that's the case, then David, after experiencing God's powerful salvation in the form of Saul's death, is literally having a crown of gold placed on his head. There's another possible situation that may fit as well. In 2 Sam 12 & 1 Chron 20 we're told of a situation where David attacked the city of Rabbah in Ammon. God gave David the victory & he retrieved a gold crown from the Ammonite king that the people put on his head. Of course, there could be other situations as well. But if David's speaking literally concerning this **crown of gold,** then maybe one of these situations is what he has in mind. Otherwise, he's simply communicating the precious value of God's powerful deliverance & victory.

God's goodness & grace comes to meet us all the time. The grace of His love loves us before we ever loved Him. The grace of salvation comes out to us, bringing us the goodness of God & making us able to receive the gospel. The grace of ministry prepares us for what God has for us in the future. The grace of service prepares the ground where we work before we ever get there. Are we grateful for these things? Do we thank God for them?

D. Length of days 4

That David should thank God for length of days isn't surprising. This is something anyone might pray for. David lived to be 70 (2 Sam 5:4; 1 Kgs 2:10-11). His life was filled with war & threats to his life, but how did he die? Not in battle. He died a peaceful death. He was a man of bloodshed (2 Chron 28:3), & yet, even though his life seems to have been in constant danger, God gave him **life.**

³ Donald Williams & Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Psalms 1-72*, vol. 13, The Preacher's Commentary Series, pp 175-176

He delivered him from his enemies. There's some hint here that David was looking beyond his own physical life & thinking of eternal life he'd have in the presence of God. It's entirely possible he believed that he'd experience **length of days** with God **for ever & ever**. But it's probably even more than that. How are we to understand the phrase, **forever & ever**? There are 3 possibilities:

1) It might be simple embellishment: **O king, live forever!** (Dan 2:4). The problem with this is that it's more suited to a pagan environment than to the court of a king of Israel. Also, the *vs* isn't a wish that the king might live forever but a statement that God had given him **length of days forever & ever**.

2) It could be a reference to the promise of 2 Sam 7 in which God promised David that his rule would last forever: **Your house & your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever** (16). The **length of days** would be fulfilled not in David's long life but in the duration of his dynasty.

3) It may be a reference to the Messiah. The promise of God to David in 2 Sam 7 would itself bear this out. How? By David's divine descendant, Jesus Himself. Like many of the psalms containing statements about the character or future victories of Israel's king, this one contains statements that can only have their true fulfillment in the Messiah. Consider this: The ancient Jewish Targum, the Chaldean paraphrase of the OT, & the Talmud, Jewish teaching, translate the word **king** in *vs* 1 as *King Messiah*. This means the Jews in an early period understood these words to be spoken of the Messiah. A change came in the Middle Ages as a result of a judgment by Rabbi Solomon Isaac, known as Rashi (born about 1040 AD). He endorsed the early view but suggested it be dropped, saying, *Our old doctors interpreted this psalm of King Messiah, but in order to meet the Schismatics, that is, the Christians, it is better to understand it of David himself.*⁴ To me, this is just another case in which we find ideas in the psalms that go beyond any contemporary context. Though they may not always have been recognized as such, they're prophetic of the One who was

⁴ Cf. J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 2 vols. in 1, 1:232; Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Book of Psalms: A Devotional & Prophetic Commentary*, p 97

to come. The next psalm, Ps 22, is about Jesus entirely. We looked at it last year.⁵ So this too could be pointing forward to the fulfillment in Jesus & His reign forever.

E. Glory, Splendor, & Majesty The 5th blessing for which David thanks God for is that **glory, splendor, & majesty** have come to him as a result of his victories. **5**

God gives him **splendor & majesty** which God Himself has. Ps 104:1–2 puts it, **O Lord my God, You are very great; You are clothed with splendor & majesty, Covering Yourself with light as with a cloak...**

In these qualities the king shares the very glory of God. They're the fruit of God's salvation of him. David knew the exaltation that came to kings victorious in battle; but here he declares this **glory, honor, & majesty** he enjoyed came from God & not from himself. In light of the previous vs, it's hard not to think of this in terms of the **glory** given to Jesus because of His victories over sin on the cross & over death by His resurrection.

F. The Joy of God's Presence The last of these blessings is a partial present enjoyment of the blessings of the future age, described as the joy of God's **presence**.⁶ **6**

It was the **presence** of God Himself that was his greatest blessing & gladness. David was more thrilled with the **presence** of God than with the crown of royalty or victory. In Ps 16, as we saw last week, David claims that in God's presence is **fullness of joy** (11). That was his firm belief. David knew that because of God's physical salvation from his enemies, he could look forward to everlasting gladness in God's **presence**.

Vs 7, as we saw, is the central vs & a transition vs; a bridge from the past victories celebrated in vss 1–6 to the future victories anticipated in vss 8–12. It bridges these sections by referring to the relationship that had been established by God with His people. **7**

The opening word of vs 7 is best taken as introducing an emphatic statement, *Yes, indeed*, rather than the **for** of most translations. *Yes, indeed* points to the relationship which on the human side is characterized by **trust**. Such **trust**, however, is no more than a response to the **lovingkindness** of **the Most High**. It's this steadfast love which guarantees that the king's status & safety are secure.⁷

⁵ 6/20/21, www.ashlandbiblechurch.com/june-20-2021-psalm-22.html

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expositional Commentary*, pp 186–188

⁷ Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Theological Commentary, p 77

Vs 7 is rich with covenant language, particularly the 2 words *hesed*, translated **lovingkindness** or **unfailing, loyal love** or & the word **trusts**. The 1st describes God's part in the covenant which is eternal & unchangeable. The 2nd describes David's & the people's parts. It's something that needs to be renewed constantly. It's not a *one-&done* thing. It's an ongoing & ever present trust or faith in God. David would be glad forever in God's presence, not because he was sinless or because he earned that blessing, but because he **trusts in the Lord**. There's a interchange here. David **trusted** & God poured out His **lovingkindness**. Having a God who's steadfast in His love allows us, as it did David here, to **not be shaken**. If you are His child, God cannot love you more than He does right now. When you have a God whose love for you cannot be changed or moved, what an encouragement that is for us to not be **shaken** in the difficult situations of our lives. But we can't read these words without again thinking of Jesus. He alone can be said to have completely & fully trusted God & was never shaken.

God's **salvation** through Christ, in the defeat of sin, Satan, & death has brought glory, honor, & majesty to Him as the triumphant King. Also, it's the presence of the Father that gives joy to the Son, & His trust in the Father & in His **lovingkindness** that makes Him unshakeable.

Victorious Jesus was met with the **blessings of goodness** when He ascended to heaven. Jesus wears the **crown**, both as King of kings & glorious Conqueror. Jesus **asked life of** God the Father, & 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 & death. Jesus rejoiced in the **presence** of His Father, even though there was a sense in which God turned away from Him on the cross. Jesus continues to trust in His Father, & will **not be shaken**. Alexander Maclaren summarizes this well:

These daring anticipations are too exuberant to be realized in any but One, whose victory was achieved in the hour of apparent defeat; whose conquest was both His salvation & God's; who prays knowing that He is always heard; who is King of men because He endured the cross—and wears the crown of pure gold because He did not refuse the crown of thorns; who liveth for evermore, having been given by the Father to have life in Himself; who is the outshining of the Father's glory, & has all power granted unto Him; who is the source of all blessing to all, who dwells in the joy to which He will welcome His servants; & who Himself lived & conquered by the life of faith, & so became the 1st leader of the long line of those who have trusted & have therefore stood fast.⁸

⁸ Alexander Maclaren, *The Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1–38*, p 205

What is true for Christ is also true for us who are in Him. We share in His victory. In His name, we too can defeat our spiritual enemies. The **blessings, presence, & lovingkindness** of God are all ours & they give us security.⁹

2. Thanksgiving for Future Victories The 2nd stanza of Ps 21 also corresponds to the 2nd half of Ps 20, though there are some differences. In Ps 20 the speaker is apparently an individual, & while this could be the case in Ps 21, it isn't obvious. In Ps 20 the speaker uses the present tense, anticipating the victory that has been prayed for & is expected to be given. In Ps 21 the tense is future, anticipating the victories yet to come. Yet in spite of these differences, the tone of the 2 psalms is very much alike. Both express confidence that God will protect the king & people in the coming days as He has done in the past. Here in Ps 21 this confidence follows naturally on the reference to the covenant in vs 7. Again, the identity of the person being addressed, **you & your**, isn't clear but isn't important. The person could be David, in which case it would mean God would give him power over his enemies so they might be completely overthrown. Future victories would complete the work already begun. Or the person could be God Himself, in which case it means that God will achieve this final victory. In the final analysis, the debate involves a distinction without a difference, because whatever the case, it's God who works through the king. Notice that the victory the king has is because of his enemies' defeat & destruction. **8**

The verb **find** may also be translated *reach*. No **enemy** is beyond God's reach. & **enemy** is defined as **those who hate You**. **9**

Our God, who is merciful & patient & kind to us, is also a God who doesn't leave the guilty unpunished. Those who remain God's enemies & refuse His mercy make themselves the objects of His burning wrath. David here is likely focused on the destruction that was to come to God's enemies in this life. & yet with the 2 references to **fire** here, it's not hard to think of what the Scriptures reveal about the **eternal** fate of God's enemies. The fate for all who reject God's salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ is eternal fire (Mt 25:41). It continues... **10**

⁹ Donald Williams & Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Psalms 1–72*, vol. 13, The Preacher's Commentary Series, p 177

Offspring is literally *fruit* & **descendants** is *seed*. When judgment comes the future dies. Death destroys fruitfulness for the next generation. There could be nothing more terrible to the Hebrew mind. This should also remind us that what we do affects our family. The actions we take & the words we say & the heart we have toward God will impact our kids. Our kids, & those who look up to us, need a parent like David in this psalm who trusts in God & who isn't moved because of God's loyal, unshakeable love. **11**

Notice the godly thinking here. David's concerned that his enemies were intending evil, not against himself, but against God. But they were unable to perform the evil they planned. As God's people are saved & delivered, those who attack them are destroyed. We can't have one truth without the other. God's judgment is seen in the **fiery oven & fire** that **will devour them** (9). Here God was going to execute judgment on these enemies of His according to vs **12**.

It's as if God was drawing back the arrows against these enemies even as He used the literal bows & arrows of David & his army against these wicked men. Whatever the identity of the person addressed in these vss may be, there's no doubt about the One addressed in the final vs, which is where the psalm ends. He alone is God. **13**

David ends this psalm with a resolve to praise the Lord. Notice the emphasis on God's **strength & power**. This is the **power** we've seen in this psalm that was demonstrated in salvation or deliverance from enemies. Notice as well David's **singing & praise & exalting** the Lord. In other words, **rejoicing** because of God's **salvation** (1). The call, **be exalted, O Lord**, may also be translated *raise Yourself*. It would be a call for God to go into battle. It may, however, be a call for God to lift Himself up as the object of worship. Whatever the case, Israel promises to **sing & praise** God's **power** which overcomes Israel's enemies & brings deliverance. The psalm ends where it began, with the words, **O Lord, in your strength** (1, 13). But now it's no longer the king who rejoices, but the community which reaffirms its joyful & strong faith in God. The king may be good in battle but ultimately it's God alone in whom the nation finds security. It's God who must be lifted high, **exalted**, in the thought & praise of His people.¹⁰

¹⁰ Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Theological Commentary, p 78

I encourage us all to take some time to rejoice in the deliverance that God has provided each one of us. It's maybe less dramatic than in David's time, but God hasn't changed & is still delivering us giving us salvation & victory. As those who've trusted Christ, we can rejoice in the powerful salvation spoken of by Paul in Rom 1:16 where he says, **For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.** Seeing that sin is our greatest enemy, we who've drawn near to God through Christ can rejoice in the greatest & most powerful salvation that God has to offer. Let's rejoice today & always in God's powerful salvation.

In the NT, Jesus comes as the Warrior-King, taking David's throne, doing battle with Satan & his demons. He came to cast out the **ruler of this world** (Jn 12:31). Because of this, this psalm can be seen on at least 2 levels. The 1st relates to Israel & her king holding military campaigns against their enemies. The 2nd relates to the Messiah-King's conquering God's enemies. From this we may even develop a 3rd level in that we share in the Messiah's triumph in our own spiritual battles.¹¹ Our Lord assaulted sin on the cross. He defeated death by giving Himself to it & then triumphing over it. In destroying death, He also destroyed Satan's weapon to keep us in lifelong fear & bondage. Moreover, the risen Christ is the reigning Christ who pours out His Spirit upon us. Our salvation, our deliverance, our victory is in Jesus. In rescuing us, however, He also brings judgment upon His foes. As we stand before the awesome conquering power of God, we cry with the king: **Be exalted, O Lord, in Your own strength; We will sing & praise Your power** (13).

A couple points of application: 1. Generally, we don't find it particularly hard to pray when we're in trouble. Even unbelievers pray in times of sickness, danger, or other hardship. *O God, help me!* they'll say. We do the same, & there's nothing wrong with that. What's wrong is that we find it often much harder to remember to pray after God intervenes to help, rescue, or save us, as He often does. The fact that Ps 20 & 21 were written together & are carefully linked shows that the Jews of that day were reminded of the importance & necessity of being thankful always. We must be as well. Jesus knew how easily we neglect thanking God after He intervenes for us. Remember the time when Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem & was met by 10 lepers? They asked him to have

¹¹ Donald Williams & Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Psalms 1–72*, vol. 13, The Preacher's Commentary Series, pp 173–174

pity on them, which He did. He told them to show themselves to the priests, which they would be required to do in order to receive formal proof that they'd been cleansed of this disease, & as they went on their way they were healed. All were delighted, of course, but only one was thankful. He was a Samaritan. He returned to Jesus, fell at His feet, & thanked Him profusely. Jesus then asked those who were standing by, **Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?** (Lk 17:17–18). How thankful are we for the victories God gives us by His strength & power? Could we be more thankful? I'm sure the answer is, *Yes!*

2. In our world, many want to affirm the love of God & deny His justice. They maintain that God can't be both loving & just. But those who think this way haven't understood the very heart & center of Christianity. It's only in the person & work of Jesus that the love & justice of God are brought together. On the cross, Jesus becomes, in a sense, the enemy of God that He might satisfy the full justice of God for all who belong to Him. Because justice is satisfied in Jesus, the ultimate King of Ps 21, love abounds to all who trust in Him. Jesus on the cross suffers the curse of Ps 21:10 just as Isaiah prophesied He would: **By oppression & judgment He was taken away; & as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?** (Is 53:8). It's also true that Jesus is the victorious King. Of whom else could it be so truly said that God gave Him **length of days forever & ever?** This is the triumph & resurrection of Jesus. Isaiah saw that too: **If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, & the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand** (Is 53:10). Some may wonder how relevant a psalm that speaks of kings & wars is to Christians who live in a mostly peaceful, yet divided, country. But the psalm helps us remember that Jesus isn't a president whose authority rests on public opinion. He's the King under whom we are all His subjects. Jesus calls us to have clear priorities for our lives. He said, **seek first His kingdom & His righteousness...** (Mt 6:33). This psalm helps us celebrate our King & reminds us that we're part of His royal family, part of His work, & we must thank Him.

The 2nd half of Ps 21 possibly stands behind Paul's words of encouragement to those who were being persecuted in the church in Thessalonica, & I close with this:

It is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, & *to give* relief to you who are afflicted & to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God & to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord & from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, & to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed (2 Thes 1:6–10).¹²

¹² Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction & Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 15–16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, pp 127–128