

PSALM 20

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 20 and 21 are different from any of the Psalms that we have studied so far. These two Psalms are designed to be sung by the Jewish people on behalf of their King and nation. Psalm 20 is a prayer for the King's victory in the day of battle. Psalm 21 is a prayer of thanksgiving for that deliverance.

However we must remember in trying to understand these Psalms and in particular the one I am looking at today that Israel as a nation stood in a unique relationship with God and as a consequence the King of Israel stood in a unique relationship as well.

Now we need to remember this for I have read commentaries that simply seek to take the words addressed about Israel's King and apply those words to our national leaders. However there is no nation today that can claim as Israel in the Old Testament could claim to be the people of God. The New Testament equivalent of the nation of Israel is the church of Jesus Christ.

God's people are no longer found in a nation but in the world, and the king of God's people today is not some earthly king but Jesus Christ the God man. So we must be faithful to the text and understand what it meant and how it was applied to the original hearers but we also must seek to understand how it is to be understood and applied today.

1. THE MEANING OF THE PSALM TO THE ORIGINAL HEARERS

a) A Prayer For Israel's King (vs. 1-5) – Strictly speaking this is not a prayer to God so much as words directed to the king himself. These words are assuring the king that the people believe in him and want God to answer his petitions. The key word is 'may,' it occurs six times and it introduces six fervent desires of the people.

Although these desires are addressed to the king they are I still believe a prayer even if indirectly since the people clearly want God to answer the king's prayers (v 1). They want God to protect their king (v 1) to help and support him (v 2), accept his sacrifices (v 3) and grant the King the desires of his heart and grant him success (v 4).

The people knew that only God could do this for the king so the people's words are a blessing to the king to know that the hearts of the people are right with him. But they are also a sincere prayer to God to grant their King and through him the people all these things.

Now it is likely that the context of this prayer has to do with the people and the king gathering for worship just before going into some military campaign. The King is offering sacrifices for forgiveness (v 3) and to seek fellowship with his God and the people are asking God for protection and success in the battle etc.

b) The Assured Answer to the Prayer (vs. 6-8) - In verse 6 the people's desires are given an answer for we move from the plural to the singular. Some suggest that this is the King's response to the people's prayer or perhaps and this is most likely this is a Priest responding. Whatever the case, it is an assurance that God hears and will answer the King's and the people's prayers (v 6).

In passing it is worth noting that the link between the people and the King is very close indeed the people are clearly praying in verses 1-5 and yet it seems so is the King for his prayers will be answered. We can assume that they were all praying for the same thing. The King is God's anointed to lead the people but he is always under the instruction of the Lord.

Verse 7 is at the heart of the second half of the Psalm. This verse compares Israel's trust in God to the confidence of the surrounding nations who put their trust in their own military ability and might. Israel as God's people is not to trust in their weapons or in the military skills or even in the King's tactics but they were to trust wholeheartedly in the Lord their God who granted them the victories.

Of course this means that when they are victorious in battle they are not to praise themselves or their King but they were to return praise to God.

Now there are many examples in the Old Testament of Israel's failure to trust God and their proneness to trust in themselves. There are also many examples of great victories won against the odds because the people trusted in the Lord their God. Let me give you just two examples that immediately came to my mind in preparation. Do you remember the defeat at Ai under Joshua?

In Joshua 7:3 we have a great statement of self-confidence and the people are defeated. Clearly we know that they were defeated because of Achan's sin, which at its heart was a sin of self-confidence. I will take what God says we should not take after all we defeated them sort of attitude. But in Joshua 8:1 God instructs Joshua to take the whole army and Ai is defeated. Self-confidence and disobedience led to defeat for Israel but wholehearted trust led to great victory. Probably the greatest example of victory is the deliverance of the people from Egypt.

The Jews were in slavery and totally helpless and under the control of a foreign power. But they were not just under any foreign power but were under the control of the Egyptians who were the most powerful nation of that time. Yet God stepped in and delivered his people through ten plagues and the destruction of the pursuing armies of Pharaoh.

Moses even composed a song about this event, which starts if you remember with the overthrow of the horse and rider who was thrown into the sea (Exodus 15:1-2). The Egyptians trusted in their military power and weaponry but God shows how foolish that is.

This bold statement in verse 7 clearly is a statement of faith by the priest on behalf of the people. They will be victorious not because of their power and military strength or tactical know-how. They will be victorious in battle because they are trusting in God alone therefore the enemy will be defeated and God's people will stand firm (v 8). The final words are a prayer Lord save us, Lord answer us and then presumably the people went out to battle (v 9). We have here the biblical balance of prayer and assurance.

They pray for victory and yet the Priest also assures them that victory will come if they trust in God and not in themselves. We will see how this applies to ourselves but before we leave the meaning of the Psalm for the original hearers we must ask were they victorious? Did God deliver on his promises? Well I said in the introduction that this Psalm and Psalm 21 go together and look how that Psalm starts.

It starts in praise for the victory granted to the King (Psalm 21:1). This Psalm strengthens the faith of the original hearers and encourages them to keep praying in the midst of the battles and to keep trusting God in the midst of the conflicts.

But I said that we couldn't take this Psalm and apply it directly to our nation in battle or to our King (Queen). For we as a nation are not the covenant people of God that Israel were. Our Queen is not in a special relationship with God as Israel's King was. Nor is she in the same relationship with her citizens as the King of Israel was with his citizens. So how do we apply this Psalm to our generation and to ourselves personally?

2. THE MEANING OF THE PSALM TO THE CHURCH TODAY

One of the ways to understand and apply this Psalm to ourselves is to do so Messianically. The King is God's anointed a term clearly related to Jesus and as king He will accomplish what none of the historical kings had ever done. The Messiah king would defeat God's enemies decisively and establish God's direct rule over all his people.

This is clearly how the New Testament understands the royal Psalms, as they are known. If you look at Acts 2:30-35 we see that Psalm 110 and 132 are clearly understood as speaking about Jesus the Messiah and king. So it is valid to see in Jesus the fulfilment of the Old Testament people of God hopes directed towards the Davidic kingship.

What the human kings were unable to accomplish Jesus carried to fruition.

Now if we apply this Psalm in this way then we can easily find helpful applications for ourselves. Jesus as the Messiah King knew the protection and support of his heavenly Father as he entered our world and lived among us. His Father always accepted his worship for he knew no sin and was in constant fellowship with his heavenly Father.

The desires of his heart was perfectly in tune with his Father's this is why he entered our world and died in our place for it was his desire as the Son of God to save a people for himself just as it was the desire of his Father. Right throughout his life Jesus trusted in his Father and the greatest application in this Psalm is that Jesus is victorious over all our enemies. He is victorious over sin, dying so that we can be forgiven.

He is victorious over Satan defeating him by the cross and robbing his kingdom of precious souls. He is victorious over the world, triumphing via the cross so that men and woman can come out of the world and be released from its sinful hold.

Jesus' victory as God's anointed is seen by his resurrection and will ultimately be seen by all at his Second Coming when he comes in power and glory. So Christian here tonight, you can put your trust in the Lord for he is victorious having triumphed over all our enemies. The temptation for us is to trust in our chariots and horses in things that we can see and touch. But doing so only brings defeat into our lives but simple faith in Jesus as God's Messiah King brings us the victory through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So if you are not a Christian tonight you are trusting in other things, things that ultimately will see you defeated. You need to turn to Jesus and place your faith in him for it is only in him that we can know victory in this life but ultimately in life after death, Will you turn to him and apply his victory via the cross to yourself. The church will be victorious just as the people were victorious in this Psalm.

But our victory does not depend upon us and our ability but upon the Lord Jesus Christ the King and head of his church. It might appear that we are defeated tonight. The world might think that we are a spent force but we can be assured from this Psalm that we are victorious because Jesus our King is victorious and that victory was accomplished through the cross.

So let us not be discouraged but let us rejoice in our Saviour and in our King.

Finally we can apply this Psalm individually in the sense that just as the people and the King sensed their need for God's protection and support in their battles so we to need that same help and support in our daily battles with sin the world and the devil. As Christians living for God in this

world is hard and difficult. There will be times of distress; at all times we need that protection and support that comes from the Lord.

There will be times when the temptation that we are facing is particularly difficult. There will be times when circumstances seem to be getting on top of us and when we feel totally defeated. At all of these times and in many more situations we need to do what the people did in this Psalm. We need to call out to God for help. We also need daily to come before him for forgiveness and to seek communion and fellowship with our God just as the King did in this Psalm (v 3).

For it is in the context of worship and fellowship that the people and the king seek God's help. We must daily be walking with God so that turning to God and seeking his help is the most natural thing in the world to do.

But how can we be confident that God will hear us and come to our aid. The answer is that Jesus is victorious. He has died for us and on our behalf, He has defeated all our enemies, therefore there is nothing that can stop or hinder him from coming to our aid. The conditions for his help are very simple. Keep trusting in him and not in ourselves of anything else. Keep daily in touch with him. If we do that then ultimately we will see our enemies fall but we will rise up and stand firm (v 8).

Amen