

PSALM 21

INTRODUCTION

I read this week a story that I want to share with you. It concerns a little three-year-old girl who was visiting someone in their home with her Dad. The girl spotted some bananas on the table and the lady of the house gave her one. The father said to his little girl “what do you say to the nice lady?” The little girl looked at the banana and thrust it forward to the woman and said, “Peel it.”

Now what might be excusable in a very young child would be rude and ungrateful from older children or from adults. Yet how many of us fall into the trap of treating God that way by our failure to thank him. Well the writer of this Psalm was not ungrateful to God for this Psalm is a thanksgiving Psalm praising God for all that he has done for his people. As I said last time Psalm 20 and 21 are linked together by subject matter and by similar words and phrases.

Psalm 20 is a prayer of deliverance for the King in the day of battle and this Psalm is a prayer of thanksgiving for that deliverance. The Psalm teaches us the importance of giving thanks, so before we even begin to study the Psalm in detail let us learn this important point.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING THANKS

Generally speaking we do not find it easy to give thanks. That’s why that Dad had to say to his little girl “what do you say to the nice lady.” By nature we are ungrateful and selfish and think that we deserve everything that we receive from God and others. When we are in trouble whether it is sickness, or danger or financial hardship or some other difficulty we find it relevantly easy to pray to God for his help.

Even people who are unbelievers still find themselves praying to God in moments of crisis. So praying in times of trouble is easy but how often do we forget to return our thanks to God when he intervenes, helps and delivers us from our troubles? How often are we thankful that he is supplying daily grace to help us bear up under the trial difficulty or crisis?

For God does not always remove the difficulty sometimes he simply helps us to cope with it, to bear up under the burden. But it seems doesn’t it much harder to give thanks to God than it does to ask him to help. Well we need to learn the lesson from the Psalmist who realised the importance and necessity of being thankful to God for his many mercies.

Jesus taught this lesson as well on the occasion of his encounter 10 lepers. They asked him to have pity upon them, which he did by healing them. All of the lepers were delighted of course that Jesus removed this awful disease from them. But only one returned to give thanks to Jesus and he was a Samaritan (Luke 17:11-19). Jesus then applied the lesson of the importance of giving thanks to God.

So have we developed a thankful heart? Do we regularly spend time every day thanking God for his grace and mercy to us? Do we especially thank God for those specific times when God comes to our aid and delivers us from some trial and difficulty? We will only return thanks in those specific times if we are thanking him daily for his general blessings. We must learn this lesson and be thankful people and not just asking people.

Next week we have our Thank Offering Sunday. The church will be 13 years old next Sunday and so it is good to have a day when we can publicly thank God for his goodness to us as a church and we are given an opportunity next week to show our thankfulness in a tangible way. But I hope we are not just thankful once a year for God’s grace to us personally and to his church. But I trust every day we are thankful to God for his many blessings. In many ways every Sunday is a Thank

Offering Sunday as our gifts to him should be a reflection of our thankfulness and devotion to our God.

But now let us look at this Psalm in detail and ask what sort of things the Psalmist and the people were thankful for.

2. THANKFUL FOR PHYSICAL, MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

The first section of this Psalm (vs. 1-7) corresponds to the first section of Psalm 20. In the previous Psalm the people were addressing the king but in effect they were asking God to hear their King's prayer and grant him and the people deliverance and victory in the forthcoming battle. Well now in this Psalm this first section is a prayer directed to God to give thanks for his deliverance and his victory granted to the King and the people.

The Psalm could be a prayer of the king or of the people or perhaps even a priest on behalf of the people we simply do not know, although most commentators think it is a prayer from the people. Whoever is praying it does not matter for it is the content that is really important. What specific things do the people and the King thank God for:

a) Give thanks for God's strength and joy (v 1) – Now it is clear that they are giving thanks for God's victory or the word is 'deliverance' or 'salvation.' God has intervened and has delivered his people and his anointed King from the hands of the enemy. But the people do not thank God for giving the people the military know how or tactics to win the battle.

They simply thank God for his strength for to thank God for their achievements could have led the people into being proud of themselves rather than giving thanks to God. Yes the people had to fight the battle but God proved his strength by granting his people the victory. Along with that victory and deliverance came joy, not joy in the fact that they have won and gained the victory but joy in God, it is his joy that the people are thinking about.

Now here is a lesson for us. The Christian life is never easy our enemy the devil is powerful and he is out to destroy us. Every day we face temptation and trials that we have to overcome and life is one long hard battle for the Christian. But what happens when we do not give into that powerful temptation. Perhaps we have succumbed in the past but this past week we have managed to resist it and gained the victory over it.

What temptation do we then face? It's the temptation to be pleased with ourselves; we did it, we did not give in. With that comes a sense of pride and achievement and with that comes defeat. The proper Christian response is to thank God for his strength; our God is a strong God strong enough to help us overcome temptation.

But on a deeper level the only reason why we can overcome our daily temptations is because our God is strong and has already delivered his people or granted victory to his people through the cross of Jesus Christ. He died to overcome our enemies, the devil has already been defeated and it is only because of this that we are able to overcome his temptations and attacks.

Our God is strong and that strength is seen at the cross where it took incredible strength to die for sins not your own. It's only when we have this proper perspective will we constantly return thanks to God for his daily deliverances and with this perspective we will know the greatness of God's joy in our hearts. We will truly be able to rejoice in God's great deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord.

b) Give thanks for God's answers to our prayers (v 2) – The people ask that God might give the king the desire of his heart (20:4) now they are returning thanks to God for answering their king's

and the people's prayer (v 2). Now the emphasis is again on God. "You have granted" God has not withheld his answer but has heard and answered the prayers of the king and his people.

Now how often do we actually thank God that he answers prayer? Sometimes we can thank God for doing something specific in our lives or the lives of others, but how often do we simply thank God for the fact that he has heard us and has answered our prayers. You see it is so easy to become man centred even in an unintentional way. We say "Thank you Lord for answering my prayers" with the emphasis in our hearts on "my prayers".

Imagine Lord you heard me and immediately the temptation is to think well God must be pleased with me, I must be able to pray well, perhaps if I was to pray for that thing that my brother or sister is praying for then perhaps the Lord will answer my prayer. Implying of course that the Lord does not seem to be answering the prayers of my brothers and sisters but my prayers well they are different look how he has answered me.

Now I have exaggerated that thinking deliberately to hammer home the difference of man centred thinking from what the Psalmist is doing here which is clearly God centred. All praise and thanks to you O God for you have granted answers to our feeble prayers.

We need to thank God that he hears and answer the prayers of his weak and feeble people and the reason he is able to do so is because he is strong and has delivered his people from their enemies of sin and Satan. So spend some time not necessarily thanking God for a specific answer to prayer but for the fact that He does not withhold from his people answers to our prayers.

Once we begin to think like this it will encourage us to pray but it will also encourage us to see God's response to prayer in a slightly different way.

So that when God does not do what we expect him to do in the way that we expected him to do it we will still be able to praise and thank him that he hears and answers prayer because he has granted his people deliverance through the strength of his Son's death on the cross.

c) Give thanks for the blessings granted to us by God (vs. 3-6) - The idea of the word 'welcome' (v 3) is the idea of meeting someone. So here God meets with the King and grants to him many blessings. The blessings are then listed. It is God that appointed the King, his position as King of Israel is indeed a blessing granted to him by God and granted to the people.

The King asked for life probably meaning he asked that his life might be spared and God blessed him with eternal life (v 4). God granted the King glory on earth as a result of his victory and granted his presence, which brought joy to his heart and life (v 6). So you see the Psalmist is thankful for God's many blessings that he enjoys in life. These blessings are not just material but also spiritual as life everlasting clearly indicates.

So as we think about giving thanks then we must also daily give thanks to God for his many blessings that we enjoy. These blessings are physical and material as well as spiritual.

Whatever position in life we hold we must understand that God has granted it to us. The job that you have and, perhaps, that position which you hold is a blessing from God.

If we see it like that then it will completely change our view about our place of work and in particular the position that we hold. Whether that is at the top of the ladder or at the bottom or somewhere in between, it is God who has granted us that position in life and we ought to praise God for it and give thanks to him.

Will such a view of life not stop us complaining about our jobs or lot in life and start making us more thankful to God? If we are placed in positions of honour in our places of work or in our community or in our church then we ought to give thanks to God for he has placed us there and allowed us to receive such honour and given us such responsibility and privilege.

But then there are the spiritual blessings that we as his people enjoy. The King wanted long life, which in his time and context was rightly seen as a blessing from God. But God promised him and gave him a much greater blessing of eternal life with eternal blessings (vs. 4 and 6). One of these blessings is the presence of God with the king and his people and such a presence brings joy to the heart and soul.

Now we need to reflect and ponder again the many spiritual blessings that we enjoy in Christ Jesus. We too know the gift of eternal life, a gift that cannot be earned or deserved in any way whatsoever. Yet it is granted to us as a gift. How often do we return thanks to God for his gift of eternal life? Now whether God grants us long life in this world or not, the important thing is that we have been granted eternal life.

So that if we live until a ripe old age then God has blessed us with old age but if he should call us home while relevantly young then we will know an even greater blessing the blessing of eternal life with Christ our Lord.

Then there is the blessing of having God's presence with us every day of our lives. In times of joy and in times of sorrow he is with us and his presence brings joy to our heart even when facing the most difficult of times. Let me try to illustrate this. Imagine you have suffered a loss of a loved one. The family gather around you to comfort you in your loss. Well isn't there a certain joy in having your family around you at such times of loss.

Well in a far greater way Christians have our elder brother with us all the time and that brings joy to us in every circumstance and situation of life. I could go on and list a whole host of blessings that come from the hand of God, physical, material and spiritual. But the main point is that we need to open our eyes and see the many blessings that he bestows upon us especially the blessing of eternal life and the blessing of his presence.

Once we do open our eyes then we must return our thanks to God for his many blessings. In doing so it will also enable us to have a more positive attitude to life, knowing that all that comes to us comes from God's gracious hand and no matter how hard and difficult life might seem, if we are truly his people then we have eternal life through Christ and God's presence with us every step of every day.

These are great blessings that we must not take for granted so make sure that we return our thanks to our great and gracious God.

d) Give thanks for God's covenant commitment to us (v 7) – The word that is translated 'unfailing love' is the word for covenant commitment (hesed). God is eternally committed to his people; his covenant commitment to us is unchanging. Now this is something that we ought to continually give thanks to God for. He is wholeheartedly committed to us with an unchanging commitment.

It does not depend on our response to him or on our faithfulness to Him or our love. No God continually loves his people and is gracious to his people and is merciful to his people, in spite of our lack of commitment to him and our indifference towards him and our great carelessness in spiritual things. God is no less and no more committed to us than he always has been.

So when we are spiritually cold towards him and spiritually weak he is as committed to us as when we are spiritually strong and on fire for him. That is a reason to thank God and such a commitment

from God ought to move our hearts in love and devotion and commitment to Him. That is the response that we are supposed to make to his covenant love and commitment to him.

For the word translated 'trust' is also a covenantal word, which describes our part in this covenant agreement that God has made with us. We are to trust him in everything and this trust is based on the fact that our God loves us and is committed to us and is eternally committed to us. If you want to know how much God loved us and how committed he is to us his people then look at the cross.

There you see God's love and God's commitment to his people. He has promised to save us and he will save us; he has sent Jesus to do so therefore trust him be committed to him as he is to us. Love him for he loves us. This God can be trusted, he has made a covenant with us even though he knew what we were like, sinners rebellious selfish ungracious.

Yet his commitment took his Son to the cross in order that we might know and experience his many blessings in Christ. So will you trust him in the good and bad times of life? Will you be wholehearted in your commitment to him? Do you love Him?

If you are a Christian you have every reason to do so, therefore, don't forget to return your thanks to God. But if you are not a Christian then look again at the greatness of God's goodness. He is strong enough to deliver his people from all their enemies. He can deliver you from sin, and the power of the devil and the world. He is a God who is able to answer prayer and will not withhold any good thing from his people.

He grants you many blessings in this life and he can grant you many spiritual blessings in Christ if you will come to him and plead for mercy.

Finally he is committed unreservedly to his people. You can become one of his people by turning to this God and pleading for his grace and his mercy to rescue you from your terrible sinful condition. Look at the cross in your mind's eye my friend. Can you not see Jesus bleeding and dying there for his people?

O what love, what grace, what mercy what commitment. Will you come to this God; I pray and trust you will. You will not be disappointed.

Amen