

Psalm 20

Psalm 20 is a battle psalm. This is the song that the children of Israel would sing to the king of Israel before he went forth to war. You can imagine King David, dressed in his battle array, dressed in his armor, stopping by the tabernacle before he went to battle, with all of the soldiers ready to go; and the priests and Levites would come out and sing this psalm to David, a psalm of Israel to the king.

An interesting thing about this psalm is that the speaker changes throughout the psalm. The whole psalm is the song of Christ—he gives it; he sings it—but the speaker changes throughout the psalm. In verses 1–5 the people are singing to the king. The Levites and priests would have been singing this to King David as he was about to go forth to battle. Then, in verse 6, the voice changes. Now the king is singing. “Now I know that the LORD saveth his anointed.” The king is singing that about himself. Then, in verses 7–8, the people are singing again. We see that it changes from “I” in verse 6 to “we” in verse 7. Verses 7–8 are a kind of confession of faith before battle, in which the people sing about what they trust in, as opposed to what many others trust in. And then in verse 9 the people are still singing, but now they are singing a prayer to God. “Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call.”

It becomes obvious throughout this psalm that it is a battle song and a song that anticipates a great clash between the king, who rides forth at the head of his army, and the foe, who is fierce and strong. There is going to be a tremendous conflict between them, so that this psalm can open by calling it “the day of trouble” and by calling on the name of Jehovah for defense.

There needs to be battle because the enemy is always attacking the church and the king. From the very beginning, when Satan fell and tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, there has been this spiritual battle and warfare. God himself announced that he would put this enmity between the two seeds, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And that history-long warfare of the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman continues through all the ages of the church, so that always the church of Jesus Christ is engaged in battle.

Psalm 20 gives us this perspective on that battle: we have a king, a champion, a leader who rides forth in that battle at the head of the army; and we have a king who is undoubtedly going to be victorious in that battle. As you read through Psalm 20, you find that it is impossible for that king to fail. The king is strong. The king is mighty. And what makes it impossible for the king to fail is that he has the defense and help and safety and salvation of Jehovah. David wrote this psalm under inspiration, and the king in his day was David as a picture; but the reality of that king is Jesus Christ. In the church’s battle against her enemies—the devil, the world, our own sinful flesh, the false church—we have a king who rides before us and who cannot fail.

As the psalm develops, the psalmist says a very striking thing about the power and strength of this king. “The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the *name* of the God of Jacob defend thee.” Again and again the psalm returns to the *name* of God. We don’t usually think of a name as being a defense against the foe. A name for us is usually just a handle. It is just something you attach to someone so that you can address them, refer to them, get their attention. But here in Psalm 20 the name of Jehovah is the defense of the king. “The name of the God of Jacob defend thee.” The people come back to that as they sing in verse 5, “We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners.” And verse 7 again: “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.” This name of God is a defense.

That means that we need to know what God's name is. In scripture the name of God is not merely a handle for God. The name does not even merely mean the proper names that God calls himself and that we call him—names like God, Jehovah, Almighty, the Rock, the Lion of Judah's tribe, and on and on. But in scripture the name of God means his revelation of himself, his showing of himself. That is what the names of God do: they reveal him. Our names don't really reveal us. Our names might reveal a little bit: our names can reveal whether we are a boy or a girl; our names might reveal what part of the world we come from, whether from the West because we have a Western name or from the East because we have a Chinese or an Indian name. Our names might reveal a little bit, but the names of God open him up to us. God intended his names that way, so that when he calls himself Jehovah, he is revealing who he is: the I AM THAT I AM. And when he calls himself God, which name means *mighty*, he is revealing who he is. He is the almighty one. Or when he calls himself the Rock, he is revealing who he is as the firm, immovable Jehovah, who changes not. The name of God is the revelation of God. And that means that the name of God is more than those proper names—Jehovah, God, Rock, Lord. The name of God includes all his revelation of himself. The name of God is really the Bible because in the Bible God tells us who he is, what he does, what his purpose is. Wherever God reveals himself, there you find his name. That is why God said in another psalm, "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1)—because in the works of God's hands he has revealed who he is; he has revealed his might.

A word we could use, then, that captures exactly what the word *name* means is the word *Truth* with a capital T, so that you could read through Psalm 20, and wherever you find the word *name*, you could replace it with the word *Truth*. "The LORD hear in the day of trouble; the Truth of the God of Jacob defend thee." That revelation of God, that truth, that sound doctrine that God has revealed regarding himself, is the defense of the king and therefore the defense of the people. That is why when we looked at Nehemiah in church, we could understand the walls that Nehemiah and the others were building as God's truth, as sound doctrine—because it is the name that defends. It is the truth of God that is our protection and our stay. And so we have here in Psalm 20 one of the great keys to all of the scriptures, where we see that the truth of God, the sound doctrine of the scripture, the gospel of Jesus Christ, is the defense of the church.

That is the truth that defends the church because that truth reveals the purpose of God with his king, Jesus Christ, and therefore with his church. God's purpose with his church is not that it be destroyed. God's purpose with his church is not that the seed of the serpent overwhelm and overcome the seed of the woman. God's purpose is that the seed of the woman bruise the head of the serpent; that the Lord Jesus Christ be victorious; and that, in that victory of Christ, Jehovah God receive all the glory. God's purpose with his church is her salvation from her sin and death and from all her foes. That is why the name of God is a defense to the king, why the truth of God is the walls that are built around the church. In that truth we see the purpose of God and the glory of God.

And so the psalm continues by exalting that king. "[The LORD] send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion" (v. 2). What was in the sanctuary? What was in Zion? The truth of God. That was where the priests and the Levites were, who taught the people. That was where the law of God was kept in the ark of the covenant. The truth of God was there, and with that truth is help. "Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice" (v. 3). "Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel" (v. 4). "The LORD fulfil all thy petitions" (v. 5). The people are singing to the king, "The Lord give you everything that is in your heart. The Lord hear all the prayers that you have made. The Lord remember all the offerings that you have brought to Jehovah." The people are singing to the king regarding his glory and his honor and his strength that he has from God.

That is the strength and honor of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has made the offering. He has made the petitions. In his heart is the will of God, so that the church, with Christ, sings to Christ, “The Lord fulfill all thy petitions and accept all thy burnt offerings.”

And what does the king say about all of this? “Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed” (v. 6). There the king is speaking about his knowledge of himself. He is the anointed, and he knows that the Lord saveth his anointed. “He will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand” (v. 6). That was the confession of Jesus Christ all throughout his life. “I know the Lord saveth his anointed and will hear him from heaven.”

And so the church’s response, in verses 7–8, is the confession that there simply is no help anywhere else. There are many who trust in chariots and horses—all the strength and the might of man that man can muster and assemble—but there is no true strength or help there. “But we will remember the name of the LORD our God”—the truth of our Lord, his gospel. There is our help. There is our strength. And all those who trust in chariots and horses are brought down and fallen. That is always the end of man and of trust in man. “But we are risen, and stand upright.” That is always the end of the church: risen and standing upright, even in the midst of the fiercest battle.

And so the church prays in verse 9, “Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call.” This verse ties together the Lord and the king, so that we see regarding the king that this king *is* the Lord. He is our savior. He is God come in our flesh, the second person of the Trinity, who was made flesh and dwelt among us, so that in this king we have all the power and the might of Jehovah and his truth to save us.

What a glorious battle song for the church of Jesus Christ, and what comfort in the midst of all of the attacks of the foes. We have a king, a victorious king, whose defense is the truth of God.

- Reverend Andy Lanning