

Psalm 21

For our first chapel of the [2024–25] school year, we look at Psalm 21. There is a very close connection between Psalms 20 and 21 that we ought to look at before we read Psalm 21. If you remember, Psalm 20 was the prayer of the people for their king as he was going into battle. If you look back at Psalm 20, you can see that battle threatening. There is the day of trouble (v. 1). There is a need for defense (v. 1). There is a need for help and strength (v. 2). Then you see the battle language of banners being set up (v. 5). We find that some trust in chariots and horses, “but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (v. 7). We read about those who are brought down and fallen, “but we are risen, and stand upright” (v. 8). In the entire psalm you have a battlefield and a battle unfolding, with the king about to march into that battle, leading his army. Psalm 20, therefore, is a prayer for the king as he is about to go into battle.

Psalm 21 comes after the battle. The battle has been fought, and it has been won; and we have in Psalm 21 a victorious king. In fact, the theme of Psalm 21 is the joy of the victorious king.

With that introduction in mind, we’ll read Psalm 21...

What we learn from Psalm 21 is that the king who went forth to battle in the name of the Lord was perfectly and utterly victorious. In this psalm we see that king returning in his victory, exceedingly joyful.

As we have learned, the psalms are not only Jesus’ songs that he sings, but they are also songs *about* him. Our task, as we look at the psalms, is to find by the illumination of the Spirit how the Lord Jesus Christ is taught in them. Just as in Psalm 20 Jesus was the king who went forth into battle, so in Psalm 21 Jesus is the victorious, joyful king who returns from battle.

The fact that Jesus returns victorious from battle is made clear by the type who represents Jesus in the psalm: King David. In the days when these psalms were being inspired, David was the king. You see that the title of this psalm is “To the chief Musician, a Psalm of David.” David went forth to battle. David was constantly at war with his foes around him. And David came back victorious battle after battle, time after time, so that during the reign of David, God expanded the holdings of Israel to the farthest extent that they had ever been: all the way north to the Euphrates River, all the way south into the land of Edom and into the desert, all the way to the east beyond the Jordan River, and all the way west to the Mediterranean Sea. God gave David great victories over all his foes round about, so that constantly King David went out to battle, and constantly he came home from the battle victorious and joyful.

The battles that David fought were types of the battles that Jesus Christ fights. Our Lord is constantly fighting in battle. Always, from the beginning to the end of the world, there is battle for the Lord Jesus Christ. That battle was set by Jehovah God when God put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. The word *enmity* means *warfare, battle*. God is the one who set two seeds, and God is the one who made warfare between them. And Christ is the anointed servant of Jehovah, who serves him as the king of his people and who goes forth constantly to battle. Just as David was victorious time and again and returned in joy, so the Lord Jesus Christ is victorious time and again and returns in joy.

It is striking that the king is victorious because, as far as earthly appearances go, the church of Christ and the cause of God in the world always look like they are about to be overthrown. From the very beginning, when God set enmity between the two seeds—the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent—it was the seed of the serpent who appeared to have the victory. Cain rose up and slew Abel.

Abel did not slay Cain; Cain slew Abel. That pattern would continue through all the history of the Old Testament and continues through the history of the church yet today. From an earthly point of view, it looks as if the seed of the serpent has the victory. But Psalm 21 teaches us to view all these things through the eyes of faith and to see the conquering king, Jesus Christ, who returns from battle with great joy in his perfect victory.

You can see that victory of our Lord Jesus Christ especially on the cross. There it looked like he had gone down to defeat. Pontius Pilate, conspiring with the wicked Jews, had finally crucified the Lord. And what men had been trying to do since Jesus was born into the world, when there was no room for him in the inn, they finally did on the cross: they thrust him from themselves. Always they had been trying to thrust him away, whether it was through having no room in the inn or whether it was taking hold of him on the precipice in Nazareth and seeking to throw him over the cliff to his death or whether it was trying to entrap him in his words so that they could turn him over to the governor (see Luke 20:20). And now, finally, they had nailed him to the cross and thrust him away from themselves—because the cross was a picture of being pushed up from the earth so that there was no room on the earth for one. Always men had sought to thrust Jesus Christ away; and finally, at the cross, it looked as if they had. And what would become of his people, who were helpless and powerless, who had sin and iniquity, who were fallen in Adam?

But there on the cross Jesus won the victory by his death, shedding his blood to cover the sins of his people, so that all the desires of his heart, which he gave expression to with his lips, as Psalm 21 says, were fulfilled. God gave him his full desire, and God heard his prayer. And what, according to John 17, was the prayer that he made right before he went to the cross? “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me” (John 17:24). Jesus’ will—the whole desire of his heart—was the covenant of Jehovah God with his people and that his people might be with him in his presence. And the only way for them to be with him was through his cross and through his blood, that all their sins might be covered in him. The cross of Christ, which looked to the earthly eye as if it were a defeat for the Lord, was his great victory. And the Lord Jesus Christ, then, went with joy into God’s presence, rising again the third day and ascending into heaven forty days later and pouring out his Spirit upon his church.

The psalm continues with the fullness of this joy of our Lord, who is the great king. “Thou hast given him his heart’s desire” (v. 2). “Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness: thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head” (v. 3). The idea of being *prevented* by the goodness of God is that God goes before. God has gone before in his eternal good pleasure and eternal counsel, so that all the victory that Jesus Christ won is the good pleasure and the counsel of Jehovah God.

“He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever” (v. 4). What a request of the king! “Give me life.” That is such a remarkable request because that king is the head of his people, so that when he asks life for himself, he is asking that life for his people too. The life of the Lord Jesus Christ is your life. And what life is that? It is life with Jehovah God forever and ever—not the death of living apart from God but the life of being with him in his covenant and in his fellowship. That is the life that God gives his people in the church, so that in the worship of the church we live together that life of the Lord. That is the life that we enjoy in this school, as in the covenant of God we are reared together or rear our children together in the fear of the Lord. All of that is our life *because* it is the life that the Lord asked for and that God gave him through his cross.

“Thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance. For the king trusteth in the LORD, and through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved” (vv. 6–7). The note of victory that sounds and resounds throughout Psalm 21 is a comfort to the church of Jesus Christ and to the people of God because it is a victory that cannot be taken away. “Thou hast made him most blessed *for ever*.” Forever the Lord Jesus Christ is blessed, and forever the word of God’s peace and comfort is spoken to him and in him to all of us. Therefore, the church of Christ is secure and safe in our salvation, in the victory over our sin and death, and in our life forevermore.

The implication of that victory for the church is that the enemy can never overthrow the cause of Christ. We see in Psalm 21 the union of the cause of Christ and the cause of God. In fact, Jesus Christ *is* God’s cause because Jesus Christ shows forth the glory of God. The cause of the church and the cause of Christ can never be defeated, which means that in all of the opposition that the church faces from the world today, she already lives in the victory and the joy that God has given her through Christ.

That is the way the psalm concludes in verses 8–12. Here we see what God does to his enemies. He finds them out (v. 8). He makes them as a fiery oven in the time of his anger, swallows them up in his wrath, and devours them with fire (v. 9). He destroys their fruit and their seed for all their evil intentions against Jehovah (vv. 10–11). God makes ready his arrows against them (v. 12). All of that violent language teaches the church of Jesus Christ her utter security in the midst of this world. According to the eye of the flesh, it always looks like the church is almost ready to go down to defeat. The church in this world never becomes a powerful, mighty thing. And when an institution that calls itself church becomes a powerful, mighty thing, corruption is inevitably very soon to follow because of what man is. The true church of the Lord Jesus Christ always looks like she is about to go down to defeat. She is beset by her foes. But the church, seeing by faith, beholds all her foes as already defeated according to this joyful victory of the king. Already now the church lives in victory, and there can be no overthrow of the church.

The goal of the king’s victory and the destruction of the enemy, as verse 13 teaches, is the exaltation of Jehovah through the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the church, singing praise to God for his power, shows forth the glory that was God’s purpose in anointing his king and sending him forth to battle and bringing him home victorious.

This is the glad life of the church of Jesus Christ in the world: a life under the victorious king, a life of sharing in his joy, exulting and singing praise to Jehovah God.

- Reverend Andy Lanning