

A Prayer for Victory

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Tonight's Psalm is an opportunity for us to really grow and to expand our understanding of the entire book and to gain an appreciation for what the Psalms are doing in a way that perhaps we would miss if we were approaching the Psalms in any other way. You and I have, I'm sure, similar approaches in that we will go to the Psalms for encouragement in times of distress. A Christian with the Spirit of God within them, just knows instinctively to go to the Psalms and find there their struggles and their confessions and different things expressed in the inspired words of the various Psalmists whose works make up the 150 Psalms and it is good for us to do that. That's why the Psalms are there and that's fine as far as it goes but it doesn't set a comprehensive pattern for understanding the Psalms and what I mean by that is this: there is more to the Psalms than simply giving us a sense of comfort in discouragement. There is a broader use of the Psalms and a broader message in the Psalms than simply that which we would find by approaching it from the perspective of our personal difficulties.

Further, we are used to thinking about the Psalms as expressing the prayers of individuals. So for example last week, we looked at Psalm 19 which ended on verse 14. Look at Psalm 19:14 just for an example of what I'm saying. Psalm 19:14 says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer." And many of the Psalms have that personal first-person singular approach and we appreciate that and we identify with it and it's good that we do. Having said that, what we find when we come to Psalm 20 is something that is different than anything that we have ever seen and I want to call your attention to the expectations and the presuppositions that we bring to the Psalms so that we are alert to it and that we can adjust and receive the message of Psalm 20 for what it is rather than trying to fit it through a filter through which we sort of unconsciously read all of the Psalms. We kind of need to circle our hearts and circle around Psalm 20 a time or 2 in order to be able to study it effectively in a one time shot like we have here this evening. And it's very fascinating to me; this has been very enriching to me to be able to spend time in Psalm 20 in preparation for this evening and I think by the time that we're done, you will be refreshed and encouraged also.

First of all, and I love to notice things like this. I love it when Scripture does something different for us. Technically speaking, Psalm 20 is not a prayer to God. Technically

speaking, strictly speaking, it actually addresses a man. If you look at Psalm 20:1, for example, it says, "May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!" Well, that strikes you as a little bit different. This is a little bit odd compared to the presuppositions that we were describing earlier. The Psalmist is referring to the Lord in the third person sense and saying, "May the Lord over there bless you and answer you in the day of your trouble." So it's a Psalm that is somehow being addressed horizontally to another man as opposed to being a God centered prayer or a cry to God or something like that. We'll talk about that more and you'll see it more later but just to point that out to you, it's referring to the Lord in the third person and speaking to another person. That's different.

Secondly, in contrast to what we saw at the end of Psalm 19, for example, Psalm 20 is expressing the thoughts of a plurality of people, not just one person and it's expressing these thoughts in the context of conflict and battle and things like that. Look at Psalm 20:5 for example where it says, "We will sing for joy over your victory, in the name of our God," plural, "we will set up our banners." That's interesting. Verse 7, "Some boast in chariots and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God." In verse 9, "May the King answer us in the day we call." So there is something different that is going on here which gives us a sense and we will say, "Okay, let's step back here. Let's set aside the way that we normally think about the Psalms and be able to approach this and understand it on its own terms." And here's the thing, beloved: with all the Scriptures and with this Psalm in particular, we want to start on the terms in which the text is presented to us rather than starting from the point that says, "What does this Psalm mean to me today in the need that I bring to it and in my frame of mind? I need to make this Psalm speak to my frame of mind." That's an entirely bad way to approach Scripture. It's not our immediate goal. It's not our first goal, I should say, to make the Psalm relevant to us. Our first goal is to submit ourselves to the text and to ask ourselves, "What did the author mean when he first wrote it? What was being said at the time it was written?" We want to go back and understand it on those terms and then and only then ask ourselves the question, "Well, how does it apply to me then today?" That is the way that we let the Bible speak for itself as opposed to trying to run it through a grinder so that we have something that we think we need.

So, it's not technically a prayer to God. There are a plurality of people that are speaking here. What is going on in this most interesting Psalm? Well, I think the answer is this and almost every commentator you read would agree with what I'm about to say: Psalm 20 is often identified as a royal Psalm. A royal Psalm, because it is about the king of Israel and his military activities. This is a Psalm that is particularly suited for the king of Israel and what we're going to see is that in Psalm 20, you see the congregation of godly people praying for the king as he is about to go out to battle. As he is about to engage in military conflict, Psalm 20 reflects the prayers of the people as he is about to go into conflict. So what we have in Psalm 20 is a prayer for victory and interestingly, it's kind of paired together with Psalm 21 which we will see next week, Psalm 21 being a thanksgiving for victory that God has given. And so in Psalm 20, the king is about to go out and engage in battle and in Psalm 21, he has returned with victory in hand and the people respond with thanksgiving for the victory that God gave.

Well, that's a general background to the Psalm but we need even a little bit more background to really make this Psalm meaningful to us. In the progress of God's revelation of his word, he gave as we have seen in the past, he gave the first 5 books to Moses about 1,400 years before the time of Christ. The first 5 books which go from creation until the deliverance there on the edge of the Promise Land, throughout that time, the totality of those 5 books came through the pen of Moses and, at that time, there was no king, there wasn't even really a nation per se, not in the sense that there was later on. They weren't yet in the land. They weren't yet established with territorial boundaries. They were a large people but they weren't yet a nation with boundaries and a land that they had taken possession of yet. And yet in the wisdom of God and in the perfection of his revelation, God made provision in that initial revelation that he gave to Moses. He made provision for the time when they would have a king and this is very relevant for us to understand Psalm 20. God made provision and told them how they would act and what their conduct should be in the time when they did have a king.

Go back to the book of Deuteronomy. We'll just spend just a moment here, just enough to set the context for the Psalm that we want to study here this evening. Deuteronomy 17. Deuteronomy 17 is where we are going to go, in verses 14 through 16. Deuteronomy, you will remember, was Moses's final message to Israel before he died and before they entered into the Promise Land under the leadership of Joshua. In Deuteronomy 17:14, Moses exhorted the people of Israel like this, he said, "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman." Notice this, this will be very relevant in what we're about to see in Psalm 20. Verse 16, "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.'" What's behind this is the idea of having a large stable of horses for battle and so God is telling them in advance, "You're not to trust in the power of horses in order to win your battles when you have a king over you."

You see this a little bit more in chapter 20. Turn over a couple of pages to Deuteronomy 20. All of this background, I believe, will serve us well when we get into the text of Psalm 20. Deuteronomy 20:1, here God is giving them laws of warfare and he tells them in chapter 20, verse 1, "When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you." What God is saying here is and what he is commanding them is that they need to understand, Israel was to understand that they were a nation under the hand of a powerful God and they were to trust in him rather than in military preparations for conflict. And God reminds them, he says, "This may sound counterintuitive to you that I'm telling you not to multiply horses and chariots for your battle preparations and when that seems counterintuitive, remember who I am. Who I am is the God who delivered you out of Egypt. I lead you out from slavery, out from under the power of the most powerful nation on earth. I drowned their

horses and their chariots in the sea," to the extent that you can drown a chariot in the sea, you know what I'm saying. But he says, "I brought you out of Egypt. I have established my credibility as a warrior God who is able to fight on behalf of his people." And the whole point was that they would glorify God by trusting in him rather than in their military preparations.

He says, "When you go out and you see more horses and more soldiers, don't be afraid." And if you think about it, in the course of their history between Moses and the time of the Psalm that we're about to study, constantly God was delivering them in miraculous ways by the hands of just a few people. Gideon went out with about 300 men and conquered an army that was greater than his. God delivered them in the book of Judges by making the sun stand still and gave them a victory through supernatural means like that. And you can multiply the examples, the deliverance from Egypt being chief among them. They were just a scraggly bunch of slaves without any ability to defend themselves and they walked toward water and the water divided and that was the means of their deliverance. So throughout, God had established his ability to win victory in ways that seemed humanly impossible, indeed irresponsible and so God here is telling them, "Here is how I want you to function as a nation. This is to mark your national character." Verse 2, he says, "When you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people. He shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.'"

So with that little bit of background, turn back to Psalm 20 here. God had given them a pattern in principle by which they were to think about military battles and military conflict. They were not to trust in horses and chariots. They were not to trust in an abundance of numbers but they were to be ever mindful of who their God was and be ever mindful of trusting him and seeking him and depending upon him as they went into battle like that. Now, how does that relate to Psalm 20? Psalm 20 is a pattern that I believe that David gave to Israel to follow so that this instruction from Moses would be fleshed out in their spiritual and in their national and in their military lives. It's very instructive for us today. What's going on in Psalm 20 is that Israel and their king is in the process of seeking God in the way that Moses's writing commanded them to do so that they would go into battle courageous and unafraid, trusting in the Lord as their banner rather than trusting in men.

Now, go to Psalm 20 here and verse 3 and we'll come back and structure the Psalm for you in just a moment. But what you see in Psalm 20:3 is the people here are supporting the king and the king in verse 3 has already offered his sacrifices to God in preparation for the battle. Look at what it says there in verse 3. The people are speaking to the king and they say, "May God," may the Lord, may Yahweh, in other words, "remember all your meal offerings And find your burnt offering acceptable!" so there is a picture here of the people having witnessed the king make his sacrifices as he prepared his own heart for battle, as he expressed his own dependence upon the Lord and he has offered his sacrifices in submission to the will of God. The congregation has been watching this.

Now as they are speaking in the first part of the Psalm, they are affirming him and lending their public congregational support to him as he prepares to go into battle.

So what we have here in Psalm 20, is a setting of public worship with the king present in the midst and the people are supporting him with the words of Psalm 20. This is a magnificent setting. It's hard for me to think right now of a setting like it in Scripture, so much so that as you read this Psalm and you reflect on it, you realize that there is a pulsating energy that's going on. Battle is about to be engaged with a powerful enemy and the people are mindful of this and the king is going to lead his troops into battle. The king is going to go under the promises of God and representing the people of God into battle and the people know this and they are lending their support to him. You could almost hear the beat of the war drums echoing in the distance and yet the people have stepped back to take time to seek God and to worship him and to put their trust in him before he goes. And the king is gathering up his strength and courage and there is a whole congregation of godly people gathered around him saying, "We support you. Our prayers are with you. Go into battle. We are confident of your victory."

So there's this great national sense of the people, watch this, of the people helping the king elevate and rise to the occasion of the battle that God has called him to. So there is this great national event going on, the national integrity, the national perspective, the national needs are at stake and responding to revelation that God gave through Moses 400 years ago earlier, supporting their king, united together around their king and their representative, everybody is on the same page going into this seating. And the people, watch this, the people in godly response to the word of God and in love and deference to their king, the people are identifying with the king as their representative and as their leader and lending him their support as he goes into battle.

Now, you don't need to have much of an imagination to realize how significant that would be to the king. Aren't you strengthened in the midst of your trials when you have friends that come alongside you, put their hand on you and love you? That say, "I'm praying for you. I'm with you. I believe in you"? You draw strength just from your personal friendships, don't you? You know what that's like to reach out for encouragement and a friend is there to give it and you go to a level of strength that is beyond what you would have done on your own. Well, imagine a godly, tender king like David preparing for battle and having the whole nation come together and say, "We believe in you. Go forward. Our prayers are with you. God be with you." You go out of a setting like that and you're ready to take on the world. You're ready to conquer. So this is a way, this is the means in which an expression of that trust that God wants his people to have when they go to battle when they were a nation under the leadership of a king.

First point here tonight, the first section that we're going to look at is we're going to see the first prayer of the people. The first prayer of the people beginning in verse 1. Again, it says it's a Psalm of David. It seems to me as though David prepared this as a model, as a pattern, for the nation to follow whenever their kings went out into battle and what you have is you have the people speaking here in verses 1 through 4. Verses 1 through 4, actually, let me show you something else before we begin. Psalm 20 begins and ends

with the need for an answer. I got ahead of myself here. This is the first prayer of the people but I want you to see the structure of the Psalm.

Look at verse 1, "May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!" So the king has given his sacrifices. The king has expressed his own petitions and now the people are saying, "O king, may the LORD answer you. May the LORD grant what you have just requested and answer and in the day of trouble." Now, look at verse 9 at the end where they are praying directly to God now and they say, "Save, O LORD; May the King answer us in the day we call." So beginning and ending is this expression, this urgent need for an answer which means that there have been requests that have been made and the people are saying, "We have made our request. King, you have made your request. We are praying and, God, we ask you to answer the request that we've made." There's an element of urgency suggested by the fact that, "It's in this day of trouble. In the day that we call. God, we need an answer and we need it now."

So there are war drums beating in the distance and the people, as it were, are hearing these, I'm speaking metaphorically. They are hearing these things in their ears. They are mindful of what's about to happen and in the urgency of the moment, they are saying, "O God, answer. Answer in this day. In this day of trouble." So the desire for an answer frames this Psalm like an envelope and everything that comes in between verses 1 and 9 is all designed to speak to and to build upon this desire for an answer that takes place. So now they are expressing their desires for the king.

Now we'll get into the first section of the Psalm. They express their desires for the king with the word "May." Look at the first 4 verses here of Psalm 20 with me.

1 May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high! 2 May He send you help from the sanctuary And support you from Zion! 3 May He remember all your meal offerings And find your burnt offering acceptable! Selah. 4 May He grant you your heart's desire And fulfill all your counsel!

So 5 times there in those first 4 verses, "May the LORD do this. May the name of the God of Jacob do this. May He send you help. May He remember you. May He grant your heart's desire." There is this repetitive and fervent prayer being lifted up for the king at this time of need.

Now, something that I want to point out to you as well in this section: you see the multiple times that they refer to the person that they are speaking to with the word "you." "May the LORD answer you. May the name of the God of Jacob set you on high. May He send you help and support you from Zion, remember your meal offering, find your burnt offering acceptable." In English, we don't have the capacity naturally, the word "you" could be referring to either just one person or it could be referring to many. I could speak to Dane and say, "God bless you, Dane." Or I could speak to all of you collectively, "God bless you," and use it in a collective sense and the word "you" by itself

doesn't distinguish in English between singular or plural. Now, I understand that many of us will use the phrase "y'all" to try to overcome that in this particular region in which we are speaking but that's not relevant to what I'm saying now. That's something different. In the original language, there is a very clear way to distinguish between "you" singular and "you" plural and here in Psalm 20, these "you's" that you are seeing are all singular and so they are directed to one individual that this is being said to. This isn't being said to a congregation of people, "May the LORD help all of you with all of your troubles," it's addressed to one individual at the time and we know that it's the king because of what is said in verse 6 where it refers to "the LORD saves His anointed." It's a reference to the king there and the fact that the king is about to lead them into battle as seen in verse 7, "Some boast in chariots and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God." So they are speaking "you" singular, speaking to the king, speaking as he is about to go out into battle. That's how we see these things and put them together from Psalm 20.

So as you read this section, they are technically speaking to their leader. "The LORD bless you. God answer your prayers," as opposed to saying, "Lord, you do this on behalf of the king." That's kind of the form of the expression. And yet at the same time, they are really praying for the king, aren't they? Although they are speaking to him but they are praying for him and in that form. Think about it this way: some of you might use the phrase, I like to use it, the phrase as you're speaking to someone, "God bless you." Well, what are you doing when you say that, when you are saying it sincerely? There is a sense in which that you are giving someone a horizontal word of encouragement and you're saying, "God bless you," and you're wanting to extend a sense that, "Your well-being is in my heart." But really when you are saying that sincerely and not just, you know, echoing it after someone sneezes, when you're sincerely stating that, it's really a prayer to God, isn't it? You're really asking for God's favor upon the one that you're speaking to. So when I say, "God bless you, Nathan," I'm saying, there is a sense in which I'm speaking horizontally but there is a vertical dimension that I'm bringing to bear upon the conversation where I am conscious of God and conscious of his ability to bless you and in my spoken words I am asking God to bring that to pass in your life.

That's what's going on here in this Psalm when they say, "May the LORD answer you in the day of your trouble. May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!" There is a congregation of representative people of the nation saying to the king, saying to David, "David, God bless you as you go. We realize that you are entering into a realm of danger. You're entering into battle and there will be constant decisions that you are having to make in the heat of the moment. There will be times when you are ducking weapons designed to decapitate you, that your life will be threatened and you will have a plan that you are trying to carry out. In the midst of all of the chaos of battle, David, it's our prayer that the Lord would answer you in your immediate need and guide your every step so that your battle meets with success." That's what they are praying here.

Now, it's probably difficult for us to identify fully with this prayer coming from America and our two-party democratic system of government. Israel's king was more than a political leader to a faithful Jew. The king embodied God's promises to the nation. God

promised David that he would never lack for a son to sit on the throne and so the king was emblematic of the fact, tracing back to that place in 2 Samuel 7 where God had promised David that he would have a descendent sitting on the throne and so the king was an embodiment of the very promise that God had made. A godly king and they were identified with the king in a way that we don't really identify with our political leaders. For them, a godly king led them to blessing and the historical books of the Bible emphasized that repeatedly and the people were conscious of it. An evil king brought judgment upon them. So, in this setting that we see here in Psalm 20, the well-being of the king and the well-being of the people were bound together in a way that is different than the way that we think in American culture. We can be opposed to our president or our governmental leaders or we can support them, whatever the case may be. There is not that solidarity in the same way that is present with biblical times.

So here in Psalm 20, we see the people in a corporate solidarity with their wishes and aspirations being bound up with the success of the king that is going on, that is going out, I should say, on their behalf. So they are urgently praying for him and their well-being is bound up with the way that God chooses to respond to their prayer. It's a wonderful setting. And what do they do? Having expressed these desires? Verse 4, "May He grant you your heart's desire And fulfill all your counsel!" The king made plans, developed his counsel for how the war battle was going to go. Look at what they say in verse 5 and with that sense of solidarity in mind, put yourself in David's shoes. Put yourself in David's sandals, if you want to put it that way, as the people echo this and echo their expectation for God's response to their prayer. They say in verse 5,

5 We will sing for joy over your victory, And in the name of our God we will set up our banners. May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.

What they're saying is that, "We are confident that you are going to win and you will come back victorious. Not only are we with you, not only are we confident in our God and have we placed our petitions before him, we're confident that God will work through you and deliver a great victory to our nation." What does that do to the man who is responsible to go out and lead? Well, you enter into the thoughts of the king, enter into the thoughts of the leader, and he's got this whole group of people that he loves and represents and wants to defend and they have just articulated to him, "We believe in you. We know you are going to win." He goes out with courage, with confidence, with a sense of power, carried up on the wings of their petition and their confidence that he has expressed in them and he goes out with a sense of confident morale and expectation and he's ready to conquer.

In the passage that we looked at from Deuteronomy 20, God had declared that he would go out with them into battle. That he would fight for them. That he would save them in battle. And the whole point of that was for them to understand that their dependence upon God was the key to their victory. Psalm 20 is the God-inspired means for them to express that confidence and it wasn't just an individual trusting in the isolated corner of his house, there was a corporate dimension to the trust. There was a national dimension to the trust that was the source and the explanation for their expectation of victory. It's wonderful to

think about all of the people of God gathered together in common purpose, in common dependence, in common trust and in common affirmation of their king and leader.

Let me say this: God calls upon his people in various dispensations and in different ways, calls upon his people to display vigorous support for the leaders that he has put over them whether it was a king then or spiritual leaders today. Beloved, God's men, God's leaders embrace the battle. They welcome the opportunity to exercise what God has called them to do on behalf of his people. Any leader that God installs, that God truly installs, is going to embrace the battle that is necessary to win victories for God and for his people and to be an instrument in God's hands to be used for that purpose. Every leader embraces that. Every godly leader embraces that. But if you were to talk to people in different settings of leadership, if they were honest and transparent they would tell you the position can be lonely. The sense of responsibility can have an isolating impact on the leader. Well, the courage of a military leader, think about it just in an athletic realm, the courage of an athlete rises to the occasion when the home crowd is cheering him on and pleading with him to succeed and the noise and the cheering causes him and gets the adrenaline pumping in a way that he rises and goes beyond his natural ability in order to meet the challenge that the opponent brings.

Well, what we see here in the purpose of this kind of praying for David as he went out to battle was because the courage of leaders can better rise to the occasion when the people that they are leading openly pray and openly express their support to them. Leaders draw strength from the courage and affirmation that their people give to them. This is a pattern that you can find throughout Scripture. God spoke to Joshua in Joshua 1, remember? "Be strong and courageous. I am with you." "Well, you know, if the Lord is with me, then I'm good, let's get to it! Let's get to the battle because I want the taste of victory on my tongue!" And all of this in these first 5 verses are designed to reinforce that, that position of trust, dependence on the Lord, encouragement and affirmation of the leader as he goes into battle.

Let's move on in the Psalm. Point number 2 here: in the verses that follow, verses 6 through 8, you see the confidence of the king. The confidence of the king. We saw the prayer of the people, here in point number 2 we see the confidence of the king. And this next section expresses a response to the corporate prayer. Look at verse 6 and notice the first person singular where he says,

6 Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him
from His holy heaven.

Do you notice the first person singular there, "I"? The speaker has changed. It's not "we" now. There is a dialogue going on that is reflected and identified by the difference in the pronouns of who is speaking. Now, some people think that maybe this is a person, a Levite in the temple that is responding to the people's prayers, probably the majority of commentators would take that position. I see it a little bit differently. They are clearly not speaking to the Levite in the first 5 verses. They are not speaking to a temple worship leader. In verse 5, they are talking to the king. They are talking, you know, "Answer you

in the day of your trouble." The Levite is not in trouble, not in the way the king is. So I think what we see here, it seems to me that the king is the one responding in verse 6 because he was the one being addressed in the first 5 verses.

So what you have here is the response of the king to this climax of the people's support and prayer for him. What does he say? Look at verse 6 with me again. He says, "Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven," and he starts to refer to himself in the third person. But he says, "And to the response to the way that you all have prayed for me, in response to the promises of God, in response to this outpouring of the support of godly people, I am confident of victory as I go forth. I know that the Lord saves his anointed and therefore I am confident that he will answer the king from on high with the saving strength of his right hand," it says there in verse 6. "The savings strength of His right hand," is a statement of the omnipotence of God. It is a metaphor for his illimitable power and so what he is saying is that, "I go into battle now confident that the power of God will deliver me in accordance with the way that you have just prayed for me. That God will answer me in the day of my trouble."

He says, "I know the LORD saves. He will answer. He will display his power." This is a statement of utter certainty that transcends what the outward human situation would seem to call for. Humanly speaking when you go into battle, the outcome is uncertain, particularly if you are going up against a more numerous foe with greater military resources at its disposal than you have. You would go into that humanly speaking with a sense of, "I don't know what's going to happen here but I'm in a lot of trouble." And the fear would undermine the courage that is necessary to win the battle. David says in response to this corporate outpouring of support and prayer for him says, "Your support is an example, is a symptom. It illustrates the fact that God is with me and if he is omnipotent and he is with me as I go into battle, then I cannot do anything but come back victorious." So he is focused and his faith is triumphant and powerful.

Look at verse 7, he says,

7 Some boast in chariots and some in horses,

There were nations that boasted in the strength of their military might. In fact, let me just show you an illustration of this from Isaiah 31, I believe it is. Yes. Isaiah 31:1, just so that you get a sense of the fact that this is seen elsewhere in Scripture. Isaiah 31:1, turn there with me. Isaiah 31:1 says, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help And rely on horses, And trust in chariots because they are many And in horsemen because they are very strong." He says, "Their confidence is in their military equipment and the animals." And Isaiah contrasts that with what it means to trust in the Lord. He says, "But they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the LORD!" Nor seek Yahweh. So you see there in Isaiah 31 the same language being used here in Psalm 20 and confidence in military preparations is set in distinction to confidence and trust in the Lord.

Go back now to Psalm 20:7 with that in mind and see the triumphant boast that the king is making as he responds as this service is about to come to a conclusion, the service

there in Psalm 20, not necessarily the surface here in Cincinnati. He says and he is consciously articulating the trust and affirming it verbally in a way that consciously separates him from trust in human means. He says in verse 7,

7 Some boast in chariots and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God.

Why are we confident of victory? We're confident of victory because of our trust is in the omnipotent God of Israel. We are trusting in Yahweh, our covenant keeping God who has promised to be with us in battle and deliver us from our enemies. So it's really, really impossible, almost, for us to imagine anything like this in our day and age, in our secular day and age where the word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ is so openly despised and mocked by those in power in our country and in our area. But here in Israel, in a great day, in a day that all righteous people would rejoice to have witnessed and been a part of, the leader, the king is consciously affirming his trust in God and saying, "I go forth in dependence on the Lord our God." Can you imagine that today? Can you imagine a military leader saying anything like that today? Not only would they not say it, they would be court-martialed if they did. So far different is our situation than what is being described here in Psalm 20. You see, we are looking at something that is really distinct and outside our normal experience when we look at this. And sometimes, beloved, what you need in your own spiritual life, sometimes what you need is to be lifted out of the mire of your own circumstances and difficulties and temptations and you just need to be lifted out and see something that is completely different and something that gives you a whole different perspective on Scripture and on the biblical text. Sometimes we don't need something that just speaks directly to our need, we need to be lifted out of ourselves and see something grander and more glorious than what we are in ourselves. Psalm 20 does that for us.

So, he is focused. He is actually mocking the folly of his foe's trust. "They are trusting in chariots and horses. Can you believe how foolish that is? They are doomed because we as we go into our battle, we are trusting in the sovereign God of Israel who is a covenant keeping God and who has promised to bless us. There is only one way this battle can come out, it can only come out in victory." And what's really cool as you continue on in the Psalm, is not only does he say that the outcome is assured, it is so certain that the future result of the battle he describes in the past tense in verse 8. Look at it with me. He says,

8 They have bowed down and fallen, But we have risen and stood upright.

It's a picture of him standing over his conquered enemies and, "We have stood and we are upright and they have fallen down at our feet." Well, battle hasn't taken place yet so why is he talking about it in the past tense? Why doesn't he say, "They will bow down. They will fall before us"? He's saying it in this way, he's expressing it in this way because he is saying, "It is so certain, the outcome is so certain that we can speak of it as though it were a past event. It can't be changed, this outcome, because God is in this and therefore we are certain of the outcome and I can describe it as finished even before it occurs because

of who God is." We speak that way sometimes, you and I. Somebody comes to you and says, "You know, could you do this for me?" And you say, "It's done." Well, you haven't really done it yet but what you are saying to them is, "Don't worry about it. I will follow through on my word. I will perform what I have said. You just think about it as though it were done and in time it will be finished." David here in verse 8 is describing the battle and saying, "This battle, it's done. I still have to go out and do my thing. I still have to exercise the human component of this but the outcome is assured." Wow. Don't you love that kind of confidence in God? Don't you love that sense of assurance of things unseen that can act on the promises of God in such an assured way that there is no doubt about the outcome? Before the first sword is drawn, David says, "This battle is over. God is omnipotent and he is on our side. Nothing but victory can come between now and then." That's the confidence of the king.

Well, Psalm 20 ends, point number 3 here: with a final prayer of the people. We saw the prayer of the people in verses 1 through 5 and then we saw the confidence of the king in verses 6 through 8. Now in verse 9, we are seeing the final prayer of the people and this is a magnificent verse of Scripture. Psalm 20 here ends with a climactic prayer. It's the final word before the battle. It is a compact statement with a flourish of trust. Look at verse 9 with me where it says,

9 Save, O LORD; May the King answer us in the day we call.

Now, I need to say a word about the texts that you're looking at. Some of you may be holding an English Standard Version in your hands and it reads differently. It says, "O LORD, save the king! May he answer us when we call." Perhaps your version says something like that. That's a different verse than what you see here in verse 9 where it says, "Save, O LORD; May the King answer us in the day we call," with a capital "K" at that. Well, there's a reason for the difference that you see there and here the New American Standard is rightly following the Hebrew accents that are in the text which clearly separates one clause from another and the way that this particular accent works, it separates the verse so that you understand the first clause before the accent is a complete unit of thought and then you take the next unit of thought after that and it kind of divides the verse in half according to its logical, what the writer intended to communicate. Why does that matter here? Why would I go into that? This crystallizes the climax of the Psalm. It crystallizes everything down into one word where it says, "Yahweh, save! Yahweh, deliver!" It's the final cry, "Yahweh, save!" The brevity contains a forcefulness to it that expresses the urgency and summarizes the whole Psalm into one single word, "save."

And this also clarifies the focal point of trust. Watch this. This is so cool. This is so cool. Who is the king in verse 9? Throughout the first 8 verses, it has been an interaction between the people and their human king and, yes, as we described, there is an element of prayer that is going on here but there is this human interaction that is taking place and the human king is about to go out into battle. Well, there is this magnificent play on expectations. There is this magnificent turn where they say, "May the King answer us in the day we call." They are calling upon Yahweh. They are calling upon God. They are

not asking the king to turn around before he goes into battle and answer their request. No, they are referring to God, Yahweh, as the King and they want this King, the one true King, THE King, to answer them in the day that they call. They turn attention from their human king to recognize the ultimate King.

Look over at Psalm 5:2. I want you to see that I'm not just making this up, in fact, I'm not making it up. It's not that I'm not just making it up. I'm not making this up at all. Earlier in the Psalms, we have seen indications where God himself is referred to as King. Psalm 5:2 says, "Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, For to You I pray." Look over at Psalm 10:16, just one page over in my Bible. Psalm 10:16, "The LORD," Yahweh, "is King forever and ever; Nations have perished from His land." What are they saying here? For all of their support of their human king, they are ending on a climax where they say, "Save, O Yahweh. May You, the one true King, answer us in the day we call." They are not asking for a human king to respond to them. Their whole trust has been put in Yahweh and so here at the end with having talked about the human king throughout the whole thing, they bring it to a climax and show where the ultimate trust is and say, "May the King, the one true King answer us when we call." So it goes out on this supernatural note of trust in an omnipotent, supernatural God asking him in one climactic word, "Save. Deliver. May the one true King in whom we have placed our trust answer all of these petitions that we have made before Him." And very much metaphorically speaking, this Psalm ends in loud cymbals and bursts and their echo fills the air. Boom! Boom! Boom! As a triumphant trust has been expressed and the human king walks into the horizon to face the foe with victory assured at his hands.

What can you and I take away from this Psalm today? We're not sending a king out into battle. Let me just very quickly give you 4 points of application. First of all, Scripture calls us even in New Testament times to pray for our leaders. The New Testament tells us to pray for kings and all who are in authority, including whoever our current president may be or may become. Beloved, let's think about that for a second. If it was urgent for Israel to pray for the anointed king of Yahweh who carried covenant promises into battle, how much more should we be desperately asking for mercy on those who lead us who do not know God and lead a pagan nation into deeper sin? I know the tendency of people of our persuasion is to get critical, to be concerned as we see the news play out and decisions made that we think are unwise and contrary to our interests and all of that. Beloved, we really do need to transcend that. I'm speaking to my own heart as much as I am to yours. If a king under covenant protection needed prayer, how much more desperately should we be praying for the mercy of God on those who do not know him and who have no interest in him and no promises of his protection. Do you realize how vulnerable the situation is?

Secondly, Scripture calls us to corporate involvement. Scripture calls us to corporate involvement. The people in Psalm 20 prayed for the king because, watch this, they saw beyond their individual lives. They were thinking beyond their own immediate circumstances and what their family needed or what their own interests were. There was an identity with the broader people of God. Well, so also in the church, we are to love, serve and pray for one another and not merely seek our own welfare. Psalm 20 points us

in that direction. To join together for the welfare of someone else is a picture, is a start, it's a seed of what we see played out in what the New Testament describes that the church should be like.

Thirdly, Scripture calls us to trust. Scripture calls us to trust. Beloved, Scripture does not exempt you and me from the call to battle. We are soldiers in a spiritual warfare, not tourists at rest. We're not meant to be on vacation. Our rest is still ahead of us in our eternal home. Here in this life there will be battle and we need to respond to that with a godly sense of trust and remembering the promises of God and rather than living in fear and anxiety, we should ask God to protect and deliver us with confidence that he will.

Finally, I always like to try to end on a note that brings our focus onto Christ. Our greater King has already won the battle for us. Israel identified with David before his battle and his victory became their victory. In Christ, in his death on the cross, in his resurrection, in his ascension, in his session, in his promise to return, we are identified with his victory over sin, death, the world, Satan and hell. Our King has already won the battle. That's why he is reigning in heaven and we are identified with his victory. He is our King. He has won the decisive battle and soon enough, he will share the spoils of victory with us. Israel identified with their human king and shared in the afterglow when he won his victory. In a greater way, in an eternal way, in a more profound and a spiritually victorious way, God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ has graciously brought us into union with Christ and identified us with him and him with us in a way that his victory is ours. And just like Israel rejoiced in the victory of David, in a greater way, you and I as believers in Christ rejoice in the great victory that Christ has done spiritually and now we just wait for him to bring it to full completion.

Psalm 20. Praise God. Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you for this wonderful Psalm, for all that it teaches us and all that it points us to. May we walk out confident of ultimate victory in our own lives because we are identified with Christ. May we think through the way this applies and appropriate it in a way that will be spiritually profitable for us and those that we know. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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