

## **BE EXALTED, O LORD, IN YOUR STRENGTH!**

Psalm 21: 1-13 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Psalm 21 is about God's king, David, and it is further about David just after a great battle he has won. Yet, there are parts of this psalm that are Messianic, referring, whether David knew it or not, to the Lord Jesus Christ, the one the blind man cried out to, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." The psalms were not placed together randomly, for Psalm 20 is David's prayer for victory before the battle, while psalm 21 is David's praise for victory after the battle. In verses 1-7, we find the people praising the Lord concerning their king, but remember, David wrote these words. Thus, David is speaking words about himself as king after a victorious battle. The battle had been fought and won. As you all know, not all of our battles are fought and won. It is important to remember that some lost battles along the way do not mean utter defeat. Sometimes we lose a battle, but in the end, we win the war, we win the campaign. The wicked often win big battles, but in the end, they will lose the war. Satan knows he has lost the campaign at the last.

In Psalm 20, the people had prayed to God for victory for King David, and for Israel over her enemies. Remember Psalm 20: 5? "May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners! May the Lord fulfil all your petitions." In essence the people of Israel were praying David's prayer as the king as their own prayer. As we ponder this rich psalm, I see four lessons that I hope will stay with us. They are like spiritual meat and potatoes that will stick to our spiritual ribs. These are rich lessons that especially apply to godly leaders, but they are good for us all:

**GODLY LEADERS WIN BECAUSE THEY PRAY!** (I.) The children of Israel would have said, "God's king won because he prayed and because we prayed. Look at verses 1, 2—"O Lord, in your strength the king rejoices, and in your salvation how greatly he exults. You have given him his heart's desire and have not withheld the request of his lips." Selah, Think of that! I love those words, "You have not withheld the request of his lips." God's king wins because he prays and because his people pray in unity with him. Godly leaders win because they pray in unity with their followers or their constituency. ***The battle is the Lord's!*** David knew this principle, this lesson from his earliest days in leading Israel. As a ruddy young lad, a shepherd boy, David went out to face Goliath of Gath, that nine foot tall giant who was 9 feet, six inches tall—six cubits and a span. In I Samuel 17: 45-47, we read, "Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD

will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."

No army wins because it has the best army. They don't win because they have superior wisdom or tactics of war. They don't win because their enemies are weak and stupid. God's king wins because he prays. God's leaders win because they pray, because the battle is the Lord's. Since the battle belongs to the Lord, and Godly leaders win because they pray, that's why God's leaders and God's people need to persevere. The big message from Psalm 21:1, 2 is that, out of God's unfailing love for us, the LORD has not left us to take on the enemies that face us by ourselves. The nature of our enemies is such that we would not have a hope of beating them by ourselves.

But there is a Messianic side to this psalm. This psalm of David winning, and God winning means we win too. Yet, we cannot deal with our sin by ourselves – we need help. We need a Saving King. We cannot deal with sin's condemnation by ourselves – we need a Saving King. And the LORD has provided Messiah Jesus, our Saving King in Jesus. Salvation in verse 1 is ultimately pointing to our salvation in Jesus, the Son of David. Our situation now is much like Israel who sang this song. The king had won the battle, but the war kept raging on. Just because Goliath was dead didn't mean the Philistines were done fighting Israel. Beloved, there are still enemies in our broken and fallen world. The devil still prowls, seeking for someone to devour. We still get sick, we still suffer from depression, confusion, and despair. We still become desperately lonely and injustice prevails often in our sinful world. Our sinful self rears its ugly head much too often. The last enemy, death, has its vicious sting pulled out so it is not fatal or final, but death is still an enemy.

And yet, says Psalm 21 to me, we are not without a Saving king. Jesus has come incarnate, and died for us at Calvary. He rose from the grave and He is coming again. We can shout with David, "In your salvation how greatly we rejoice." Don't give up. Don't despair. In Jesus' saving love as our King, He will ensure that our enemies do not have the last word. History is heading swiftly towards a day when final and ultimate victory will come. It's easy for our enemies to seem impregnable, undefeatable, invincible, unstoppable giants. But David the king, prayed to the King of Kings. We can't defeat our enemies by ourselves, but we have a great Saving Messiah King. And when we win, remember it is not because of our

strength and prowess. It is because we pray. Godly leaders win because they pray!  
Secondly,

### **GODLY LEADERS WHO PRAY, PRAY WITH GODLY DESIRES! (II.)** I

read in verse 2, “You, O Lord, have given him his heart’s desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips.” Selah. Think of that. Our desires are the mainspring of our lives. You can tell the character of a man by his heart’s desires. Our heart’s desire is the test of our character. It is not just what we say and do alone, that measures our character; it is what we would like to say and do. Proverbs 23: 7 is clear: “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” From our momentary wishes to our deepest steadfast desires that rule our lives, our desires mark us for what and who we are, and our desires mold us into what we shall become. Find what it is that you deeply and habitually desire, and you have the key to your character. Proverbs 19: 22 tells us, “What is desired in a man is steadfast love.” God desires that from us, and so do others. Do we desire that in ourselves? David himself declared in Psalm 40 : 8, “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within my heart.” This brings me to the Messianic part of this psalm. King David’s desires were met by God because his desires were in agreement with the law and love and light of God. What was the desire of the Son of David, our Saving King Jesus, Messiah? Just before Jesus went to the cross, He prayed in His high priestly prayer to the Father in John 17: 4, “I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work you You gave me to do.” Beloved, when we stand before the Lord, can we say, and will we be able to say, “Father, I have glorified you and I have accomplished what You gave me to do.” God, help it be so. Thirdly,

### **GODLY LEADERS, WHO PRAYERFULLY WIN, REJOICE AND SING!**

(III.) I read in verses 3-6—“For You meet him with rich blessings; You set a crown of fine gold upon his head. He asked life of You; You gave it to him, length of days forever and ever. His glory is great through Your salvation; splendor and majesty You bestow on him. For You make him most blessed forever; You make him glad with the joy of Your presence.” Psalm 21 is far more than a theology lesson, it is a song to be sung to the Lord in worship. The title of the psalm was addressed to the choirmaster. Did you notice that in the psalm’s title—“To the choirmaster”? This psalm was written for God’s people to sing. Truly there is more to worshipping the Lord than just singing, but singing and rejoicing should be in the very heart of all our worship. There are 66 books in the Bible, but the longest book of all the 66 books with 150 chapters of the 1189 chapters, is the book of Psalms, songs to be sung. Over one eighth of the 1189 chapters are the Book of the Psalms. The longest book of the Bible is, lest we forget it, a book of songs. The role of singing for the Christian believer is that we are to sing in the strength of our

salvation. Beloved, may we sing of King Jesus and his victory so that our hearts are moved to love and trust him. May our hearts be fortified and our vision focused on him as we sing. It might be easy for us to focus on the rich blessings that come to us when we prayerfully win our battles, (1) the rich blessings, or (2) the crown of fine gold that God sets on our head—call it our trophy case. Yesterday, I stopped in Laramie and picked up a pair of boots I got half-soled there. The man who manages the huge Boardwalk Shoe Repair Store on 1951 Snowy Range Road there had my boots ready. He is a paraplegic man named Rob I have spoken to a number of times. This time he took me into his huge trophy room where he has two full mounted wolves, and about every other trophy from elk to bison to deer to beaver to antelope to moose, along with tons of saddles for sale. This time, after looking at all his trophies that Rob's wife wanted me to see, I spoke with him and his wife about the Lord. Rob told me when he came to the Lord, and his face lit up; it was after his accident on a motorcycle in 1986. He told me some Mennonite young people came to his hospital room and they led him to Jesus. Rob can't take his full animal mounts to lay at Jesus feet, but God gave him something better. God gave Rob eternal life, a gift more precious than a crown of gold.

I read that David asked life of God and God gave it to him, length of days forever and ever, (make that eternal life.) But now Psalm 21:4-6 takes me beyond King David to our Saving King, Jesus, the Son of God, the greater Son of David. I read here, "He asked life of You; You gave it to him, length of days forever and ever. His glory is great through Your salvation; splendor and majesty You bestow on Him. For You make Him most blessed forever; You make Him glad with the joy of Your presence." I don't know if Nathan or David totally knew what God meant when Nathan was sent to David to speak to him. I read in II Samuel 7: 8-17, that God spoke through Nathan the prophet to David saying, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son... but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away

from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” Glory. Fourthly, and lastly,

**GODLY LEADERS, WITH GOD’S PEOPLE, TRUST IN GOD’S KING**

**UNSHAKABLY. THEY PRAY TO HIM, AND REJOICE IN HIM.** (IV.) This is what I find in verses 7-13. This takes me beyond a tribute to King David who won his battle. This sends me to Messianic pictures. I read in verse 7, “For the king, that’s David, trusts in the Lord, and through the steadfast love of the Most High, he shall not be moved.” Godly leaders and God’s people are those who sing, “I shall, I shall, I shall not be moved.” And as we sang this morning, “I will not be shaken, I will not be moved, I will not be shaken.” This unshakable trust in the Lord knows that God will judge the enemy for us. I read in verses 8-12, “Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you. You will make them as a blazing oven when You appear. The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath, and fire will consume them. You will destroy their descendants from the earth, and their offspring from among the children of man. Though they plan evil against You, though they devise mischief, they will not succeed. For you will put them to flight; You will aim at their faces with your bows.” This is clearly second coming related to our Saving King, King Jesus returning in the second coming. I believe it was Peter Dray who related a scene from the Gladiator that moves me. Maximus, played by Russell Crowe, is the aging Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius’ general, waging war against the barbaric Germans. In similar words to what we’ve seen today in Psalm 21, Maximus is a bit like the king—King David. The lines were forming for battle. And Maximus rode up into the forest where the Roman cavalry were waiting, his wolf running closely at his side. General Maximus stopped and addressed his men, saying: “Fratres [brothers], three weeks from now I will be harvesting my crops. Imagine where you will be and it will be so. Only hold the lines, stay with me.” “Hold the lines, stay with me.” That is what the Lord Jesus Christ would say to us today. Because of the LORD’s unfailing love, He was sent incarnate and He has won the battle already. The ultimate end to the war with Satan will be His too. All those who hold the line, who persevere, and stay with Him, we will ultimately see Messiah Jesus vanquish all our enemies. He will welcome us into eternal life with Him in Glory forever. May that be our song! I love to hear the Crabb Family Singers sing, “Just Hold On!” The words are, “So many times I’ve questioned the certain circumstances and things I could not understand. Many times in trials my weakness blurs my vision and that’s when my frustration gets so out of hand. It’s then I am reminded, I’ve never been forsaken. I’ve never had to stand one test alone. As I look at all the victories, the Spirit rises up in me. And It’s through the fire my weakness is made strong. (Chorus) He never promised that the cross would not get

heavy and the hill would not be hard to climb. He never offered a victory without fighting. He said help would always come in time. Just remember when you're standing in the valley of decision and the adversary says give in, Just hold on, Our Lord will show up and He will take you through the fire again. I know within myself that I would surely perish. But If I trust the hand of God, He'll shield the flame again. Just hold on, Our Lord will show up, and He'll take you through the fire again.” Our Saving King, Our Warrior, The King of Kings and Lord of Lords, will take us through and bring a final end to our enemies. Verse 9—God will swallow up death and all His enemies in victory. Because we know the king wins, we don't worry about the future. The enemy can never ultimately succeed.

The whole psalm builds to a joyful crescendo in verse 13. Perhaps if we were following Pastor Kevin in singing this song, he would lead us in a key change at verse 13. We would go higher. Look at verse 13: “Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength! We will sing and praise Your power.” This psalm the Holy Spirit inspired to help us trust in godly leaders who are following Jesus, and ultimately to trust in the King of Kings for final triumph. God the Holy Spirit led the people first to look to their trusting king, and then to let the model and pale imitation of Messiah Jesus point the direction to where ultimate victory comes from—from Messiah Jesus, our Saving King. This psalm is not true of any earthly king including David. None of them, for example, has length of days forever and ever. None of Israel's kings ever had shoulders broad enough to wear the robes of this psalm's lofty description. This psalm's giant robes hung loosely on all the kings including David, until, in the fullness of time, The Saving King Jesus, Messiah, came. Here, at last, was the descendent of David who perfectly matches the words of the Psalms. Here is the One alone, has shoulders broad enough to wear these magnificent robes.

Jesus' battle was the cross. There Jesus trusted the LORD and took on our enemies: sin, death and the devil. And yet as He was raised by the Father on the third day, and later ascended to heaven, He was been given length of days for ever and ever. Because of His victory and vindication, Jesus' glory is beyond description. The Father has bestowed on him splendor and majesty above every other name. At the cross, Jesus ensured that the works of the enemy were undone, and one day soon, the devil's ugly influence and shrewd lies will be no more. History is heading towards a day when all of the enemies that rage against God will be swallowed up once and for all. We look forward to the day when our King will finally do away with the devil himself, with all sin, death, disease, brokenness pain, weeping, and war. Jesus is God's saving King. He has won the battle. He won the battle at the cross, and He will win the war, because of God's unfailing love for us His people. We are champions, because he is the Champion. Verse 13!