

From Victory Unto Victory

Psalm 21

Main point: Believers are to celebrate past victories, anticipate future opposition, and rest in His ultimate triumph.

O LORD, in Your strength the king will be glad,
And in Your salvation how greatly he will rejoice!
²You have given him his heart's desire,
And You have not withheld the request of his lips. *Selah.*
³For You meet him with the blessings of good things;
You set a crown of fine gold on his head.
⁴He asked life of You,
You gave it to him,
Length of days forever and ever.
⁵His glory is great through Your salvation,
Splendor and majesty You place upon him.
⁶For You make him most blessed forever;
You make him joyful with gladness in Your presence.
⁷For the king trusts in the LORD,
And through the lovingkindness of the Most High he will not be shaken.
⁸Your hand will find out all your enemies;
Your right hand will find out those who hate you.
⁹You will make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger;
The LORD will swallow them up in His wrath,
And fire will devour them.
¹⁰Their offspring You will destroy from the earth,
And their descendants from among the sons of men.
¹¹Though they intended evil against You
And devised a plot,
They will not succeed.
¹²For You will make them turn their back;
You will aim with Your bowstrings at their faces.
¹³Be exalted, O LORD, in Your strength;
We will sing and praise Your power.

Introduction:

Considered one of the best Shakespeare film adaptations ever made, the 1989 British historical drama film, *Henry V*, features a moving scene at the end of a bloody battle, where Kenneth Branagh leads the victorious and wearied soldiers in a beautiful short Latin Christian hymn entitled *Non Nobis Domine*. It is a prayer of thanksgiving and an expression of humility, which is taken from Psalm 115:1, "*Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory*" (KJV).

In the film, the king was singing this because he was saying that England's victory came from God's blessing. We fought, but you gave the victory, and the glory goes to You. Here we find the same spirit and theme in Psalm 21. Psalm 20 was a prayer for deliverance *before* the battle; Psalm 21 is thanksgiving for the victory *after* the battle. Psalm 21 is a royal thanksgiving psalm—part *prayer*, part *praise*. The tone that seeps through the cracks is that of *thanksgiving, gratitude, triumph, confidence, jubilation, celebration, gladness, joy, and exultation*, but there is also a note of *humility and trust* for the future.

There are a couple of lessons this psalm teaches us about faith that you will find very useful today and in your life in the days to come.

- Faith always teaches you to say, "Lord what You've done in the past, You can do again in the future."
- Faith always teaches you to say, "Lord, whatever victory comes in my life, to You belongs all the glory."

Psalm 21 teaches us how to look in two directions: *backward* and *forward*. In verses 1-6, we find the congregation being led by the choir director to *look back*. In verses 8-13, we find the psalm looking *forward* and anticipating the complete triumph of God's kingdom in the world. We look back and *give thanks*; we look forward in *complete trust*.

Another *inclusio* is seen. It starts with *Yahweh's strength* in verse 1, and it ends with *Yahweh's strength* in verse 13, and what it signals to us is that *the same strength that brought the victory in the past, is the same strength that the people are to look to in the future.*

It's impossible to understand this psalm without looking through "*Christian eyes*," if you will. By that, I mean, we can only grasp this psalm by looking through the lens of what the New Testament teaches us about the *Lord Jesus Christ*, David's greater Son. David and his kingship in Scripture are meant to point us forward to Jesus and His kingship. Yet as we read this psalm, there are things spoken of the king, which do not really match David.

David wonderfully weaves together what is said about *his victory* to what is true of *the Lord's victory*. Let's come to this psalm and divide it into three parts.

Exposition:

A. Remembering God's Deliverance (vv.1-4)

O LORD, in Your strength the king will be glad,
 And in Your salvation how greatly he will rejoice!
²You have given him his heart's desire,
 And You have not withheld the request of his lips. *Selah.*

Explanation: What are we to be mindful of when we pause and meditate? The answer is that it is *God who deserves the glory*. God's people are remembering a particular deliverance. It is hard to miss who the Subject is in these verses. God is the great *Actor*. God is the mighty Deliverer. God is the true *Victor*. The people, the soldiers, the army, and the congregation are remembering that it is *God who gave the victory*. As the people of God celebrate David's victory on the battlefield, David reminds us of two things:

1. God is the source of our strength in battle. (vv.1-2)

Notice, the emphasis, "O LORD, in Your strength...in Your salvation...You have given...You have not withheld...You meet him...You set a crown...He asked life of You, You gave it..." Do you see the emphasis? Now, why the acknowledgment? Because to refuse to give God praise for the grace that He gives is to boast in some other false source and that dishonors God. They could not say as they did in chapter 20:7, "Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God," and then when victory is given, boast their clever plans or superior training. No, they properly acknowledged that it is God and God alone who deserves the praise.

- **Psalm 73:25-26**—Whom have I in heaven *but You*?
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.
²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

You know this is true in your heart when you can agree with the hymn writer who wrote,

Every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness
Are His alone.¹

The military battle which the king appeared to win was, in reality, the victory which God, in His might, had granted.

2. God is the source of our blessings in life. (vv.3-4)

³ For You meet him with the blessings of good things;
You set a crown of fine gold on his head.
⁴ He asked life of You,
You gave it to him,
Length of days forever and ever.

Explanation: The picture is painted here of David, who went out with a warrior’s helmet on, but he came back and God had already prepared to meet him figuratively, welcoming him back with the victor’s crown. Now this crown set upon David’s head symbolized God’s approval—for ultimately, only God was king—and here we see *deity crowning a human representative*.

The words “**You meet him**” can be better translated, “*You go before him with blessings of good things*” or with “*blessings in disguise*.” In other words, blessing that would promote David’s good.

As we face the battles of the day, we cannot see the good that will come by engaging in the struggle. But our Sovereign Lord has already *anticipated the blessing we need* that will promote our good and His glory. Now that blessing may be the patience we need or the mindset we need, but whatever it is, God knows it and designs the blessing before it was asked! (*Matt.6:9*). God is our source of blessing on the *frontend* before we go to battle.

But he is also our source of blessing on the *backend* when we’ve fought the good fight. “**You set a crown of fine gold on his head.**” Now the crown being placed on David’s head was not the coronation crown when he became king. He was already a king at the time of battle. This is a reference to the victor’s crown—where he is shown to be a conqueror. Now, I don’t know if that sounds familiar to you, but I remember reading in Romans 8:35-37 these words:

- Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written,
“FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;
WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.”
³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

¹ Harriet Auber, *Our Blest Redeemer*

Now, victory does not just come to us automatically without a fight. As we learned in the last psalm, we must always do our part. We *start with prayer*, we *add in praise*, we *continue in preparation*, and we *go forward in faith*, but God is the One who must give the victory.

Notice in chapter 20:4, the people prayed, “*May He grant you your heart’s desire.*” Now draw a line from this prayer request in chapter 20 to chapter 21 verse 2, where the answer is seen, “*You have given him his heart’s desire, and You have not withheld the request of his lips.*” Now draw another line to verse 4, “**He asked life of You [that is that You would spare his life in battle] You gave it to him, length of days forever and ever.**” There is a specific answer to the request they made.

Exhortation: It is here that we find *two encouragements to pray*. In times of danger, distress, sickness, or affliction, let us pray to God for His mercy and help. God hears our prayer as we pray in harmony with His will.

But secondly, we also discover that *particular deliverances* should be matched with *particular thanks*. Are some among us like the unthankful lepers?

- **Luke 17:11-19**—While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; ¹³ and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? ¹⁸ Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”

Let us not be as the nine lepers who asked for mercy but refused to give thanks after they were healed. Give thanks to God for every deliverance, for God is the source of our strength in battle and every blessing in life. One hymnwriter wrote,

When upon life’s billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.²

B. Enjoying God’s Security (vv.5-7)

Here we find the people rejoicing not only in *the preservation of the king’s life*, but also *commendation of the honor, splendor, and majesty* given as a consequence of the God-given victory.

⁵ His glory is great through Your salvation,
Splendor and majesty You place upon him.

⁶ For You make him most blessed forever;
You make him joyful with gladness in Your presence.

⁷ For the king trusts in the LORD,
And through the lovingkindness of the Most High he will not be shaken.

² Johnson Oatman, *Count Your Blessings*

Explanation: What blessings do the people celebrate as specific gifts from God?

- His glory—“*His glory is great.*”
- Salvation—“*...through Your salvation.*”
- Splendor and majesty—“*...You place upon him.*” These are attributes of God constituting His reflective glory. They are not self-generated, but God-given.
- Blessing—“*For You make him most blessed forever.*” Blessed is the Old Testament term for happiness. But here, the blessing would be imparted or scattered to others eternally. This must speak of the Messiah.
- Joy and gladness—“*You will make him joyful with the gladness of Your presence.*”
- Security—“*through the lovingkindness of the Most High he will not be shaken.*” This enables the king to say, “You can’t move me until you move God...”

What marvelous blessings these are! But what we are intended to see is that *the offering of prayer* is not only the means of securing the blessings which we asked, but they also secure greater blessings which we did not ask or ever dreamed we would obtain.

They were praying for *victory*; God displayed His *glory*. They were praying for *safety*; God demonstrated His *salvation*. They were praying to *get through the battle and the pain*, but God *carried them through on wings of joy and grace!*

You know what this is like..

- If you have ever struggled with some *menacing weakness*, but you prayed and felt God’s power in the midst of it, blessing you with His overcoming strength.
- If you have *survived a near accident or pulled through a crushing blow* and felt God’s peace in the midst of it, and the unexpected blessing of a grateful heart flooded your chest.
- If you have *lost a loved one*, and *experienced the deep grief and pain of loneliness*, and felt God’s loving arms around you, then you began to see the magnitude of Christ’s sacrifice and the unexpected blessing of His compassion and your salvation.

C.S. Lewis wisely said, “When we lose one blessing, another is often most unexpectedly given in its place.” All these blessings are *great*, but what makes the people and David the *happiest*, is *the joy that comes from God’s very own presence.*

What David and the people are celebrating is *the Giver of victory more than the gift of victory*. Of all the things that David and the people are thankful for, *the greatest is the gift of God Himself*. Is that true of you?

Now how did David come to enjoy this confidence of not being shaken? What was the underlying reason for his victory and his stability? And can we enjoy such confidence today? Verse 7 is the key that not only provides the answer, but also shifts the focus of this psalm from God’s past actions on behalf of the king, to the present.

- ⁷ For the king trusts in the LORD,
And through the lovingkindness of the Most High he will not be shaken.

The king had trusted *in the past*, and now *presently*, the king is trusting in the Lord. We don't know who is speaking. Is it the choir director or David? It is difficult to know, but it does not matter. The point is: *the reason for David's victory is because "he had trusted" and "is trusting" in the Lord.* How about you?

A word about trust:

In an effort to strengthen his own trust during a time of adversity, Jerry Bridges began a lengthy study on the topic of God's sovereignty. What he learned changed his life. In his book *Trusting God*, he says,

"Can you trust God? The question itself has two possible meanings before we attempt to answer it. Can you trust God? In other words, is He dependable in times of adversity? But the second meaning is also critical: Can you trust God? Do you have such a relationship with God and such a confidence in Him that you believe He is with you in your adversity even though you do not see any evidence of His presence and His power?

"In order to trust God, we must always view our adverse circumstances through the eyes of faith, not of sense. Just as the faith of salvation comes through the hearing of the message of the Gospel (*Rom.10:17*), so the faith to trust God comes through the Word of God alone...the Scriptures teach us three essential truths about God—truths we must believe if we are to trust Him in adversity. They are: God is completely sovereign. God is infinite in wisdom. God is perfect in love."

The primary reason for David's victory—and all the people of God—is linked to that familiar term used time and time again in the Old Testament to speak of God's faithfulness. Its right there in verse 7, "*though the lovingkindness of the Most High he will not be shaken.*" This is important for one great reason.

God has promised David that his faithful love would never be taken from him (namely his seed). In the Davidic Covenant (*2 Sam.7:12-17*), God promised to bless His people—that is all who believe and trust in Him—through One who would come through David's lineage, the Lord Jesus Christ. God's faithfulness is as eternal as God Himself. Our life is fragile; His love is faithful. It is the love that refuses to let go. Dale Ralph Davis called it "love with superglue on it." It is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you trust in Christ as your Lord and Savior? If you do, death cannot annul it, sin cannot destroy it, and time will not exhaust it.

Exhortation: Trust in Christ is essential for experiencing the security of God and the blessing of God.

C. Anticipating God's Triumph (vv.8-13)

Whereas verses 1-7 recount the *blessings* of God received by the king, verses 8-13 express the *curses* which would be executed by the king. This portion *looks forward* and speaks in the future tense. However, the language used seems to point to someone else. In the psalms, David does pray "imprecatory" prayers for judgment, but the things described here can only refer to something that God *can* and *will* do at a particular time in the future.

If we ask, "who is the You in this section?" It cannot be David. This is a description of *what God will do throughout history and at the end of history.* Although the king has conquered, he is still *opposed*. So how will the King finally establish His kingdom? The answer is that this triumph will involve...

1. A certain exposure (v.8)

⁸Your hand will find out all your enemies;
Your right hand will find out those who hate you.

Who are the King's enemies? It is those who *hate the King*. And who are those who hate the King?

- **Deuteronomy 7:9-10**—Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; ¹⁰but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face.

Those who hate him are all those who oppose His rule in their lives—all those who refuse to bow the knee to His Lordship and trust Him.

Notice, carefully, what *characterizes* his enemies. Twice the phrase, "**find out...**" is used. "*Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you.*" That is suggesting that it's not obvious at first sight who the enemies are.

This is true in the kingdom of God. Why does His hand need to find them out? The King's enemies are often like the messengers of Satan—they are disguised as angels of light (2 Cor.11:14). Sometimes they are like "*tares among the wheat*" (Matt.13:25). In the ancient eastern context, one of the first things that a king had to do to secure his kingdom was to "*find out*" who was for him and who was against him. And this will be true of Christ in establishing His kingdom.

How will God's hand find them out? Now there are several ways that God's hand will find out His enemies.

- One way is to allow the built-in punishment of sin to expose them. Moses warned those who would disobey the Lord, "*be sure you sin will find you out*" (Num.32:23).
- Another way that God finds out His enemies which are outside of our lives is when those who we thought were friends of the King, stand in opposition to His Word (Matt.13:21). We thought they were friends, but because we are seeking to follow Christ, they cease to be our intimate friends.
- But some of those enemies are from within our own lives. These are enemies like our secret sins, our deceit, our waywardness, and our stinking pride!

As Jesus works in us, through His Word, He often goes down deep to expose our twisted hearts, like a Master surgeon cutting down to the bone in our bodies, so that He might expose the cancer and disease.

This is how the King works now—through *providence* and *His Word preached*—but when He comes finally on the last day, John describes Him as the One who comes with His armies and "*from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron, and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty*" (Rev.19:15). Because there is no escaping, friend, will you not lay down your arms, stop your opposition, and accept the gracious offer of the King?

2. A complete destruction (vv. 9-10)

" You will make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger;
The LORD will swallow them up in His wrath,
And fire will devour them.
¹⁰ Their offspring You will destroy from the earth,
And their descendants from among the sons of men.

Judgment by fire is a common image in the Old Testament (*Is.37:9; Mal.4:1*), but the image reappears in the teaching of Christ Himself. Jesus tells two parables of the end times in Matthew 13—one of the separation of the tares and the wheat and the other of the separation of the good fish and bad fish (*13:37-43; 47-50*). Both conclude with a similar warning that the unsaved man will be thrown into the "fiery furnace."

- and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Gospel is a message of how God's mercy is poured out on all who will receive it in Jesus Christ, but Jesus makes it clear that God is a consuming fire (*Heb.12:29*), who cannot be trifled with. He will redeem and restore those who repent, but He must consume those who align themselves with evil and refuse to accept His mercy. God, through the agency of fire and wrath, will consume His enemies so completely that no progeny will be left behind in this world.

3. A just defeat (vv.11-12)

¹¹ Though they intended evil against You
And devised a plot,
They will not succeed.
¹² For You will make them turn their back;
You will aim with Your bowstrings at their faces.

They were *intending evil, devising plots, scheming*, and seeking to *connive* and find ways to overthrow the King's rule, but His defeat will be *just*. *They will get what they deserve*. And it will not be a subtle defeat. God's defeat will not a blow from the side flank or some skillful maneuver from the rear, but *God will boldly meet His enemies to their faces*—"You will aim Your bowstrings at their faces." Openly. Boldly. Publicly. And at that moment, the truth of God will cause the error of every rebellion in man to fall in defeat. You cannot succeed against God. He stands with His bow drawn at you, but He will lower it, and receive you if you repent and trust in His Son.

Conclusion

The psalm ends as it began—exalting God! From victory unto victory.

- ¹³ Be exalted, O LORD, in Your strength;
We will sing and praise Your power.

In 1990, I was in the morning of my ministry, and my wife and I had hit a rough patch in our marriage. In the providence of God, another ministry was emerging called the Promise Keepers. It exploded on the scene and met a need in the life of the church that had been lacking at the time. Stadiums filled up across the

country—5000, 10,000, 20,000. The high point was no doubt the Stand in the Gap gathering at the National Mall in Washington DC on October 4, 1997. It was estimated that between 600,000 and 800,000 men came.

At the time, the Lord provided the means so that we were able to take about 15-20 men. On the very night that we were to fly out, the tire on our Jetta burst on the freeway. We hit the center divider and flipped over into oncoming traffic. While the car slid on its roof for about 100 yards, Jordan dangled from the backseat as Mary and I prayed for God's help.

Every car stopped at least 25 to 50 yards away. We got out of the car, with minor bruises and cuts. Obviously shaken, I thought it was best to stay behind, but Mary insisted that I go ahead to the event.

When we arrived at the Mall, shofar horns were used to call us to worship like sacred assemblies in ancient Israel. I remember one of the first songs they played that echoes the theme of this psalm.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Ye soldiers of the cross;
Lift high His royal banner,
It must not suffer loss.
From victory unto victory
His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished,
And Christ is Lord indeed.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Stand in His strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you,
Ye dare not trust your own.
Put on the Gospel armor,
Each piece put on with prayer;
Where duty calls or danger,
Be never wanting there.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
The strife will not be long;
This day the noise of battle,
The next the victor's song.
To those who vanquish evil
A crown of life shall be;
They with the King of Glory
Shall reign eternally.³

³ George Duffield, *Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus*

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