



Psalm 20 How To Pray For Others

This morning we continue our look at some of the Psalms. So far we've seen Psalm 15 and 19, both written by Israel's King David, the warrior-worshipper. This morning we're going to look at Psalm 20, also written by David and next week we'll look at Psalm 21.

Psalms 20 and 21 form an interesting pair: Psalm 20 looks forward to something that's about to happen and asks for God's strength and blessing to face it. Psalm 21 looks back on something that has already happened and gives God thanks for showing up.

In between is what the Psalm refers to as, "the day of trouble." I know school starts next week for some of you, and it started last week for others – so maybe your "day of trouble" is already here. Trouble, of different scales and sizes, seems to eventually find us all, and that's one of the main reasons I wanted to look at a few of the Psalms before opening up Ephesians – the Psalms show us all the emotions and experiences of life and give us a pattern for how to respond to them.

This morning we'll see how people responded to difficulty on the horizon, and how they came to support the one who would face it head on, in this case, King David as the leader of the nation. I hope you'll find personal encouragement in these verses and see how they apply to your own life when you face difficulties and how can you best pray for and encourage others as they go through them.

Read the whole thing with me, will you? We start out with the people praying for the king as he faces something difficult:

Ps 20:1 May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble;
May the name of the God of Jacob defend you;
2 May He send you help from the sanctuary,
And strengthen you out of Zion;
3 May He remember all your offerings,
And accept your burnt sacrifice. Selah
4 May He grant you according to your heart's *desire*,
And fulfill all your purpose.
5 We will rejoice in your salvation,
And in the name of our God we will set up *our* banners!
May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.

And then we see the king's response:

6 Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed;

He will answer him from His holy heaven
With the saving strength of His right hand.

7 Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses;
But we will remember the name of the LORD our God.
8 They have bowed down and fallen;
But we have risen and stand upright.

And then a final word by those who were originally praying:

9 Save, LORD!
May the King answer us when we call.

When you read this psalm you can see right away something is going wrong and immediately addresses it in the first line:

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble;

Most commentators believe the psalm is looking forward to an upcoming battle that David, as king of the nation of Israel, must fight against some neighboring or invading group. They're showing signs of aggression. And so, the prayer of the people for the king: May God defend you.

Here's the point we need to understand from that: whether you're the king or not, the day of trouble eventually comes our way. And this doesn't mean a literal 'day,' 24 hours, of trouble. It can be a time, a season, of trouble. Sometimes our "Day of trouble" turns into a year of difficulty and pain. Sometimes it's a season that stretches on for years when the overall shade of your life seems a terrible muted grey – there are moments when the sun peaks in, or when you get little spots of color, but the grey skies quickly drift back into place. Friend, life is rough, it is a battle at times. Things will come your way, you don't get too just live and let live – sooner or later something negative and difficult is going to try to invade your life.

Think about David – he's doing what God has called and equipped and designed him to do, he's doing the right thing you could say. When he was just a boy the prophet Samuel showed up at his dad's house, out of nowhere, and anointed David, saying, "God says you're going to be the next leader of the nation of Israel." He wasn't looking for it, it just came to him. Even so, years and years passed by before it happened – and David had all kinds of difficulties to face while he waited. Do you remember that whole thing with Goliath?

Do you know that after his victory over the giant the king brought him to serve in the palace, but later got upset at him and threw a spear at him? Do you know he had to run for his life from his own government for a while? Do you know that he lived in caves for a season? There were a lot of 'days of trouble' in David's life.

But finally, he arrived. Or so it seemed – Saul died and David was actually anointed king: crown, throne, the whole works. And if that were you, wouldn't you love to think, "Finally, it's been a lot of hard work, there have been a lot of ups and downs, a lot of difficult times, but my moment has finally come. All that time of following God, trusting in Him, serving Him, has finally paid off." Wouldn't you love to think that? That you could finally arrive?

Do you think that? Do you think the time is coming when there will be no more days of trouble? Do you have this expectation that as soon as the kids move out, or as soon as you graduate, or as soon as you get your license, or as soon as you get that next contract, or next promotion, or whatever you're looking for, do you have this expectation that then, somehow, everything is going to be great and all the troubles will be gone?

David has finally become king of the nation, and now, if anything, his troubles have only increased. Because now he's responsible for even more people and land and stuff.

But, as trouble looms on the horizon, he has two things going for him: his own relationship with God, and the encouragement of people around him. Let's consider both of those and how they relate to the situation David is facing.

First, the people who are praying for David know that he has a relationship with God. They pray and sing:

1 May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble;...
3 May He remember all your offerings,
And accept your burnt sacrifice.

They expect that David is calling out to God; people don't answer unless you're calling. That's how communication works – the answer is always in response to a call. Now, God can and often does initiate the communication, but in that case we're answering His call. The prayer here is that God would answer David, remember his offerings in the past, and accept his burnt sacrifice that is either recently made or will be.

If you know much about this man from the information we read in other sections of our Bible, you know that it was not unusual for David to respond to trials with prayer, fasting, and worship. It was a pattern of his life.

But what about us? How do we prepare to face the big things in our lives? Are we personally turning to God and asking Him for guidance and strength and direction? Are we searching ourselves and seeing if there is anything wicked in us that is influencing the situation – either bringing it upon us or weakening us when we need strength most?

David would have gone to the altar and made an actual sacrifice. We don't do that any more because the ultimate sacrifice has been made for us already. When Jesus Christ, the perfect and spotless, Lamb of God was sacrificed on the cross, He fulfilled what every sacrifice up to that point was anticipating. But do we at least reflect on that sacrifice when

we're facing the day of trouble? Do we 'cross-examine' our circumstances and ourselves, looking at everything through the filter of the cross?

Your phone or device has all kinds of filters that come with it automatically – and you can take pictures in color or black and white, you can make them all appear sepia like they're a hundred years old or chromatic like they're forty years old, and you can do all that instantly. You can instantly change the way the picture looks with the free tools that come preloaded on your device. Well, what would happen if you took a picture of your situation and applied the cross-tone to it? What would it look like then?

If you could see whatever it is that you're facing through the filter, through the lens, of the cross and Christ's work on it, what affect would that have? What would appear different? What would it make look better?

You see, God has remembered your offering, and He does accept your sacrifice, if Christ is your offering and sacrifice. When David and those around him looked on the day of trouble, there was the possibility for them to worry – would God actually receive, would He really remember and accept? They could always doubt a little bit and feel anxious. But we don't have that problem. Jesus cried out on the cross *Tetelestai*, it is finished. If you stand in Christ, you know that you are accepted.

And if you're accepted, you're His. The Bible speaks of Christians as children of God, as the servants that belong to Him, it speaks of us as His possession, and of the church as the bride of Christ. So, an assault on us, is an assault on Him.

The same thing was true with David, he was the king appointed by God over the nation chosen by God. A threat against him was seen as a direct assault on God too.

Some of you in this room have dealt with diplomatic issues. You understand the concept of deterrence – we make relationships and treaties with other nations that if someone attacks them we will come to their defense. And we use that threat of retaliation to keep people from attacking smaller nations that we want to have good relationships with. Well, God has made a covenant with us; He has taken us under His wing. But the great thing is, this isn't a *mutual* defense pact, we accrue all the benefits.

We see this illustrated clearly when Jesus appeared to Saul, who later became known as Paul. This man who wrote so much of the New Testament did not start off as a Christian. In fact, he was zealously opposed to Christianity. He watched as people were put to death for their faith in Christ, and he went around arresting others. He was on his way to Damascus, the same Damascus in Syria that we hear about in the news all the time, he was on his way to that Damascus from Jerusalem when suddenly, out of nowhere, God interrupted his life.

Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light and asked the question: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Me. Jesus asked Saul, "Why are you persecuting Me?" Well, he wasn't. We don't have any record at all of Saul ever being around Jesus while He was alive. It's

possible – they were both alive at the same time, but nothing ever mentions the two of them actually meeting. And yet, Jesus shows up, after His resurrection, after He’s ascended to Heaven, and asks Saul – why are you persecuting Me?

Jesus took Saul’s persecution of Christians as a personal assault. He took it personally. When Saul arrested some Christian for believing in Christ, Jesus said it was just as if Saul had arrested Jesus.

The flip side is true too. Jesus said if people give so much as a cup of cold water to someone who was a Christian, they would never lose that reward.

Here’s the point – God takes a huge personal interest in what is going on with your life, just as He took a huge personal interest in what was going on in the kingdom of Israel. And the people who were praying for David understood that. So, they prayed for God to help – that since this was really God’s issue, they were asking God to do the work of taking on the threat.

Ps 20:1b May the name of the God of Jacob defend you;
2 May He send you help from the sanctuary,
And strengthen you out of Zion;

Christian, when the day of trouble is on the horizon, do you look to God to be your shield and defense? Do you look for Him to send you help and strength?

Think about the very wording of that! The prayer is: may He *send* you help. In other words, you don’t have it right now. You need it, but you don’t have it, so may God *send* it to you!

And that’s an interesting approach for David because David has been through battles. He’s got experience in war. He has faced enemies before – the idea of a fight is nothing new to him. And people could be reminding him of all his past victories. They could be trying to pump him up by recounting all the things he’s already seen and done, but they’re not. They’re saying, “May God send you what you need.”

So, when you pray for someone else, pray for God to defend them. Pray for God to send them help (and be prepared to be the help), ask God to strengthen the person you’re praying for, especially if they’re already walking with God and have their own relationship with Him, like David.

If their heart is in the right place as they face trouble, then you can go on and offer the next prayer:

4 May He grant you according to your heart’s *desire*,
And fulfill all your purpose.

David had a purpose; he had a plan for how to face the difficulty that was coming his way. Prayer and planning go together. They commend David for the sacrifice he has made, the

offerings he has brought to God, and now they pray that God would send him help and bless the plans he has made for dealing with the situation.

Christian, if your heart is in the right place before God, if you are allowing Him to influence your values and your approach to things, if God is governing your philosophy, then He has redeemed and is perfecting your heart and mind and you can trust their inclinations more and more as you mature in Christ – as long as you don't go wandering.

Submit to God, Worship God, Pray to God and then plan away. And bring you plan to God, ask Him to inspect your desires. Ask Him – “Father, this is what I think, is this on track?”

I mean, do you really want Him to let you have something or do something that He doesn't approve of or think is best? If you were David, would you really want to go storming off to face the enemy in a real battle, with real spears and swords, and have God just let you go ahead with your plan when you when He had a better approach, and you never asked?

But we do that, don't we? We hear the sound of enemy troops marching, we see the dust they're kicking up on the horizon, we get the reports that they'll be here soon – we know the day of trouble could be right around the corner, and we just launch right into contingency planning mode, don't we?

How many of us immediately start planning how we'll respond if this happens or that happens? Who among us actually responds with immediate prayer – “God, guide me in how I should respond to this.” And then you come up with an option and take that back to God and pray: “I think this is what I should do, what do you say? “

If you've been daily cultivating a relationship with God, spending time in prayer and in His word, you can generally trust those first ideas, those first responses, but if you haven't...boy, watch out!

But again, the people believed that David was seeking God, so they prayed that his plans would be blessed, and they looked forward to how God was going to grant victory – with confidence they proclaim:

5 We will rejoice in your salvation,
And in the name of our God we will set up *our* banners! (These are the flags that the units would carry into battle)
May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.

And then we see how David responds to all this encouragement:

6 Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed;
He will answer him from His holy heaven
With the saving strength of His right hand.

David is the Lord's anointed, God's chosen king. And he says, now that I know that you're all standing behind me, and praying for me, now that I know that I'm not facing this alone, I know that God is in it. I know that God will save me, and save us.

Christian, how many times have you been encouraged by someone who sent you a note, an old school hand-written card or letter, or an email or text, maybe they actually used their phone as a phone and called you or stopped you in the hall and looked you in the eyes and said – "I'm praying for you. I believe in God and I care about you, and I know this is hard, but I also know you're going to handle it well – hang in there and keep the faith." Has anyone ever done that for you? Have you ever done that for anyone?

David hears the people are praying for him and it gives him strength and hope to carry on.

It's good to know we're not alone, isn't it? And that's why God calls us into fellowship – that's why you need to connect with other Christians. That's why you need to hang out for a while even when things are awkward the first couple of times you visit the church or the women's Bible study or the men's breakfast or youth group – you need to push past the awkward and get to know others.

Someone has to make the first move, but it needs to happen so that we can eventually be there for one another when times are rough. Because they will be – the day of trouble is coming, or for some of you it's here. Others of you have memories of what the day was like and you can share the lessons you learned from that day with others who are about to face it. So get connected, get involved in the lives of other Christians, be the voice of hope and encouragement that helps them know God is still there, and He will deliver them through it, even if He doesn't deliver them from it.

Now look at what David has to say next:

7 Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses;
But we will remember the name of the LORD our God.
8 They have bowed down and fallen;
But we have risen and stand upright.

I know that doesn't seem like a big deal to you – chariots sound kind of cool, not intimidating and you wish you could get the chance to go horseback riding again sometime soon. But you have to go back to David's time when horsemen and chariots were the most advanced weaponry you could face on the battlefield with just a few of them you could do a lot of damage to enemy defenses and morale. They were shock and awe long before we had 20,000lb bombs.

And in all likelihood, this is what David is facing – an enemy armed with horses and chariots. Friends, the Bible is real. We're not just talking quaint little polite problems. David is facing life and death, blood will be shed, some people will not sleep in the bed woke up in ever again. It's real. And how does he intend to face this threat?

But we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

Another one of the psalms, this one not written by David, says:

Ps 46:1 God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
2 Therefore we will not fear,
Even though the earth be removed,
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

Can you really do that? Can you really remember and trust in the name of God when you face real, tangible, difficulties in this life? Yes. Yes. A thousand times, yes. We are called to look at everything that happens through the reality of God's existence and His very real concern for us. God wants us to know who He is and who we are and what a difference that makes.

God wants us to have the confidence Paul commends in Romans 8 when he asks:

Romans 8:31 If God is for us, who can be against us?

It's a theologically oriented defiance of your present circumstances. It's the ability to say, "I don't care what life throws at me, even it's the worst they've got, I know that God knows and that His presence makes a difference." To understand that there is a real difference between how you experience a situation with God and how you experience it without Him.

After all, the enemy is experiencing it without God, right? And so, they're doing the best they can – they've gathered the latest military technology available. They've strengthened themselves, they're putting on their game face and trying to intimidate. They face the conflict without confidence and assurance that comes from knowing God, so they try to muster up confidence and assurance in their own preparation and skill and perhaps make some sort of appeasing motion toward a deity hoping for some favor.

But not David, not Israel, and not the Christian today. We should know that God is here, He is real, and that nothing comes our way that He has not permitted. That doesn't make it all good – there are days of trouble, there are bad things that come our way, and yet when they do, God wants us to pull out that cross colored filter and understand whatever we're facing through it. He wants us to have a confidence and comfort from knowing that He knows, and believing that He will guide. He wants to be the rock under our feet and the strength when we are weak. He wants to give us extraordinary wisdom and discernment to know what to do.

And the people praying for David are simple enough to believe that will make all the difference. Look at their final prayer:

9 Save, LORD!
May the King answer us when we call.

May the King of kings hear our prayer for our king, and save us all today. The people recognize that their help may come through the hand of David, but it ultimately comes from the God who sends him that help from His sanctuary in Zion, which is another name for Jerusalem.

You and I have the complete confidence that God will do the same for us. That He will hear when we cry out to Him through Jesus' name, and He will give us strength. If you are a believer in Christ, He is already dwelling with you, in you, through His Holy Spirit. He has already sent you what you need. And this morning we're going to pause to remember that by receiving communion.

The day of trouble may be on the horizon, or it may already be here. And you need strength. Turn to Jesus. Cross-examine your life. How does the reality of God and His love for you change what you're facing? You came here this morning and now God has brought you these touchable, tasteable reminders of who He is and what He has done. What difference do these things make?

Or perhaps you're not the one facing the issues right now, but someone you know and love is. How can you be praying for them in light of what we've seen? How can you encourage them as they face the day of trouble? How does God want to use you to pray for them and speak to them?

Take some time to consider these things as the elements are passed out and then we'll consume them all together.

Let's pray.