

CELEBRATING AN ANNIVERSARY

Psalm 21

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This now is the twentieth psalm of David out of the first twenty-one psalms. Only Psalm 1 had not been a psalm of David thus far. We're still in the first of five books of the psalms.

“O LORD, the king rejoices in your strength. How great is his joy in the victories you give! You have granted him the desire of his heart and have not withheld the request of his lips. *Selah* You welcomed him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked you for life, and you gave it to him—length of days, for ever and ever. Through the victories you gave, his glory is great; you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty. Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence. For the king trusts in the LORD; through the unfailing love of the Most High he will not be shaken. Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies; your right hand will seize your foes. At the time of your appearing you will make them like a fiery furnace. In his wrath the LORD will swallow them up, and his fire will consume them. You will destroy their descendants from the earth, their posterity from mankind. Though they plot evil against you and devise wicked schemes, they cannot succeed; for you will make them turn their backs when you aim at them with drawn bow. Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength; we will sing and praise your might” (Psalm 21:1–13, NIV).

I have called this psalm “Celebrating an Anniversary.” It is an excellent anniversary psalm whether birthday or wedding. The reason why I’m calling it an anniversary psalm becomes apparent when you look at the other royal psalms that we have examined thus far. There have been three different moments in the life of the king when a prayer has been offered. Now Psalm 21, most Bible scholars feel, is a psalm which was used as part of the anniversary celebration for

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one of the kings of Israel—beginning with David and then on to his successors. The great day of the anniversary would come and the choirs would be gathered and the people would all be out and the priests and Levites would all be arranged as a great biblical choir.

This psalm is very similar as a public liturgical of work. It's similar in its outline to Psalm 20. It starts off with someone singing to the king then the king's response then everybody joining in on a benediction. This psalm, Psalm 21, takes pretty much the same motif. There is first in verses 1–7 a part where there is an emphasis on the king and the Lord. Maybe the priest or the choir is first of all singing of the relationship of the king to the Lord on his anniversary date. Then the middle part of the psalm, verse 8–12, focuses upon the king and his enemies. They're looking back on how the Lord has helped in the past but mainly the thrust of that segment of the psalm is forward. An anniversary is not simply a celebration of what has been. It is anticipation of what is yet to occur. Then the last part of Psalm 21 is the Lord alone. It's everyone joining in on a praise together. "Be exalted, O LORD, in Your strength" (verse 13).

Before we start looking verse by verse at this Psalm I want to approach the whole idea of how we interpret a psalm like this. I'm comfortable as I read verses 1–7. I am somewhat uncomfortable when I remember the Lord's word on loving your enemies as I read verses 8–12. Who around me do I want to pray that their descendants be destroyed from the earth? That part of the psalm gives us pause. Then we want to say too that if this was a liturgical psalm that was used for a king's anniversary, what's that got to with us?

I look at a psalm like this three ways. I think this is scriptural. This psalm was not just written for David. It was written for us if we believe what 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that all Scripture is given for our profit. The three ways that I look at this.

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First of all this psalm does relate to David and the kings which followed him. That's the historical approach. This had meaning within the context of which the Holy Spirit first brought it into existence.

The second way is that all the psalms must be related to Christ. For the Psalter was His prayer book. I think Christ is the only one who has hands pure enough to pray any prayer about enemies and judgment. When He prays that kind of prayer it's not an "I'm going to get even with you" kind of a prayer. But it will be a prayer that comes from a holy life and a holy heart. When we read the first part of Psalm 21 we see how excellently it is fulfilled in the Lord's own life and death and resurrection.

The third way we ought to pray this kingly psalm is that it relates to us who are called in the New Testament kings and priests unto God. So we are also in the kingly line. It is possible therefore to look at this psalm and internalize it. Make it relevant to our present-day experience.

I think it's also possible when we read a psalm like this and he specially focuses on the first seven verses to acknowledge the fact that we may not be able to sing all of the verses in this psalm right now in our life. You may just have had a string of unbroken, unmitigated disasters. You're sitting here this evening and you're saying, "I defy you to get me to say, "The Lord has granted me the desire of my heart." I think we must recognize that there are moments when we need to step outside of this present moment and say there are going to be moments in our life where we look back, If I'm not able to say that right now there will be a day I'm able to say that wholeheartedly, unequivocally without any fear of contradiction.

This prayer will ultimately be prayed by everyone who is a king unto God. Since we're going to pray it in the future if we're not able to pray it now we might as well do a little bit of theologizing that I think the writers of Revelation did. The church described in Revelation was in

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a time that it was getting whipped around. Political powers that were persecuting and making the martyrs were very strong. But they got up to heaven and heard the hosts of heaven saying, “The Lord God omnipotent reigns.” They borrowed a little bit of that atmosphere and jammed it into the present. If the Lord God is going to reign then, then we’ll just say He’s reigning now. That’s taking the future and making it present in our lives. We want to do that. Even today if we don’t feel like the Lord has granted us the desire of our heart there will be a day when it’s ultimately experienced by us.

We also can recognize in the early ministry of Jesus, here were times in His earthly life when this prayer would have had a hollow ring on His lips. When He was in the Garden of Gethsemane for example. He would not have been able to say, “You have not withheld the request of my lips.” He could not say, “You put a crown of pure gold on My head.” In fact on the cross He’s given a crown of thorns. Even in the Lord’s life there were times that this psalm, in order to be fulfilled, had to wait for its fulfillment. We have to know Christ in His suffering if we want to know Him in His resurrection.

King David in his life saw the literal fulfillment of this psalm. I’d suggest that probably when we pray this psalm we’re going to see in our own experience some of the King David elements where God gives us a special victory and we may see some King Jesus elements where we’re not able to sing this psalm totally until we’re on the other side of the resurrection.

I. Let’s look at the first third of the psalm: The King and the Lord.

That’s the focus. The king’s relationship to the Lord, to Jehovah, verses 1–7. These seven verses celebrate seven reasons why the king has joy on his anniversary. I think they are good ways we can celebrate God’s precedence in our life also.

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A. The first is victory. “The king rejoices in your strength. How great is joy in the victories you give” (verse 1). It is a wonderful thing to feel like you’ve won. It’s great when the award comes through, when the contract is signed. It’s marvelous to go through victories. And part of an anniversary experience ought to be celebration of victory. Because anniversaries, whether they’re birthdays or weddings or whatever, can focus on defeats and losses and missed opportunities. I’m sure David had his share. But the focus of the celebration is God has given us victory. There are no victories if there are no battles. And there are no battles if we do not take risks.

The king has gone out and risked and the Lord has granted victory. His strength is greater than ours; that’s why we have won. There are many things I’m not strong enough to do but what this psalm is celebrating for the king is, no matter what your strength is the Lord is strong enough for them. So on your anniversary celebrate His strength. We owe our success, whatever it is, to the Lord.

Think of any victory that you feel like celebrating. Say to the Lord, “You got me that victory.” Then project past that to think of all the victories in heaven that you’re going to be enumerating that you don’t feel right now celebrating. But project into that day all the things you’re going to say, “It was Your strength that did it.” Can you name one victory in your life that can be attributed to God alone? Anchor it to this psalm, verse 1. Thanksgiving for victory. There’s joy because there’s victory.

B. The next reason why there is joy is because, verse 2, there have been desires granted. “You granted him the desires of his heart and not withheld the request of his lips.” At first I called this verse “answered prayer.” We rejoice when our prayer is answered. But then I realized that’s not

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right because all prayer is answered. There's obviously answered prayer that is "No," and "Wait a while," and then "Yes."

It had been a desire of the heart and it became a request of the lips. Those are the only true prayers where the heart's desire is first and the lips' request follow after.

Is there disobedience within us? Is there wrongful motivation in our own life? Is it that we are expecting something to happen overnight that is going to take time to accomplish? Is our desire being blocked because God is allowing another person to exercise their own free will? Is it being blocked because there is spiritual warfare going on? Is the desire not being granted because God is bringing other things to pass which are refining and tempering and are even going to change my desire and turn it into something greater than it started out being? The believer knows in the ultimate sense all desires are granted.

C. A third thing that David has joy over on the anniversary is position. Verse 3. "You welcomed him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head." He is thinking back to the time when he was installed as king and not only did the people welcome him but God proclaimed him His anointed one. This has a great deal of significance on the lips of Jesus as well whom God welcomed and anointed Him as King. Does God have a sign over His door: "Do Not Disturb"? This psalm is saying, no, He welcomes us in His presence. He welcomes with rich blessings and He gave the king a crown of gold. God intends to lavish on His people rich gifts. God intends to lavish on us His riches.

D. There is a fourth thing that is given to cause joy. Verse 4—eternal life. The covenant that God made with David called for him to have an eternal reign. Not him personally but his descendants would always reign on the throne. The Old Testament makes a great deal of this promise to David. The New Testament does too because it's fulfilled in Christ. So this psalm is celebrating

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the immortality of David's line but it's also celebrating the immortality of all those who follow Christ. This is an excellent funeral psalm.

E. A fifth cause for joy is a noble self-concept, verse 5. "Through his victories his glory is great. You have bestowed upon him splendor and majesty." The Lord is saying to us, "You have worth and dignity as My child. No matter how down you feel about yourself, no matter how rough life has been you're a special person of dignity and honor."

One of the great curses we all live with is struggling to meet some fantasy that we or someone else has about us. We figure until we can be perfect we're not clothed with glory and majesty and strength. But if I understand anything about justification, God has already declared us perfect. That means that in His eyes we're perfect and now we're growing and gaining. We take away strength and dignity from people when we say, "You've got to meet my perfect ideal before you're really clothed with glory and majesty." I find that God gives us glory and majesty in our fellowship with Him just on the basis of Christ's perfection, not on our own.

F. The sixth thing that David rejoices in is personal fellowship he has with God. "Surely you've granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence" (verse 6). If sin is resolved the prospect of being in God's presence is not one of dread but of joy. David knew personally the experience of being banned from a king's presence as he was banned for years from Saul's presence and he also knew the experience of banning his own son Absalom from his presence. He knew what it was like. There is great joy in being in the presence of the king. David says the Divine Potentate has invited us to enjoy his presence. The King of Kings has invited us to enjoy His presence in His throne room and His dining room. When you look at the Scripture you find we're going to stand before God's throne and we're going to rejoice with exceeding joy but we're also going to be with Him in the dining room at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

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Both the throne room and the dining room, the place of imperial majesty and the place of personal fellowship are going to be great.

How is God going to find time for each one of us individually? I don't know. To me that's one of the miracles of His omnipresence. His being everywhere at once. But He's going to somehow do it.

We can spend joy in His presence now in prayer. I find I need the lift of prayer. Time spent with the Lord brings clarity to life. Joy in Him. And there will be joy in heaven with Him.

The great thing about a relationship with God is we're going to be extremely aware we're in His presence but He's going to be aware we're in His presence too. Two-way communication. And we can be in the presence of the Lord every day.

G. The seventh thing that David is thankful for on this anniversary of his being king is security.

“The king trusts in the LORD. Through the unfailing love of the Most High he will not be shaken” (verse 7). Nothing can spring him out of God's love and care.

These are great reasons to rejoice in the Lord. When we read these psalms we think of those seven things.

II. Then the psalm switches tone, verses 8–12.

The theme is on the king and his enemies. It basically is a calling upon the Lord to enable the king to go out and win more victories, destroy all of the enemies and make the descendants of the enemies perish from the earth and do away with all their wicked schemes.

How do we filter a phrase like this? I treat it this way. Other than the devil the only enemies I have are the ones inside of me. Therefore I pray God will slay them all. Kill them dead in the water. Now maybe you have some enemies. I refuse to call anybody who has odds with me my enemy. If God in Christ is reconciling the world to himself I don't want to call anybody my

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enemy. The enemies are all inside of me. I pray a psalm like this in a different way than David prayed it. And Jesus himself I think uses psalms that way. He did not pray on the Cross verses 8–12 of Psalm 21. He prayed, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

The second way I understand this is that Christ is at this moment in time seeking to reconcile His enemies unto himself. Therefore at this moment even in the heavens, Jesus is not praying this prayer. He’s praying for us, interceding for us. But ultimately in a prophetic sense these verses will be fulfilled against all who oppose Christ because God will not change the will of someone who refuses to have that will changed. If God doesn’t destroy in the end time all the enemies it will simple mean the devil moves into heaven and I don’t want to go through eternity with the struggles we go through in life. If God doesn’t kill those enemies, sentence them to outer darkness, it means we’re all going to be miserable forever and ever. So sometime there’s got to be a line drawn and said no more. But God in Christ hasn’t drawn the line yet—until that day. He still invites us to repentance.