

Ps. 21, Thanksgiving for the Lord's Resurrection
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Introduction

1. Subject:

When you were in school, did you pray before exams? I did. And when I was on the swim team, I prayed before races. In times of crisis and testing, we pray.

This is biblical. The Lord Jesus prayed often during his earthly life: before choosing the 12; before the Bread of Life discourse; and notably, before dying for us. Matt. 26:39,42, he asked that the cup of death might pass from him. NB: Not pass by him--this is not a prayer to evade death--but pass from him, so that after drinking from it, he would live again. We know from Heb. 5:7 that this prayer was heard. God raised him from the dead, an event that the world remembers once a year at Easter, and that we remember every week as the Lord's Day.

2. Messianic Function:

Ps. 21 is a Messianic psalm that predicts the Lord's prayer for life, and the Father's answer: v.4. Like many messianic prophecies, it has a double reference--first to historical events in the OT (in this case, in the life of David), and then to David's great descendant, the Messiah.

- a) In David's life, this Psalm is paired with 20. He wrote 20 so that the people could support him in prayer as he went to battle, and ask for the Lord's deliverance for him. (Probably this is the battle against the Ammonites of 2 Sam. 12:26-31, part of the war that begins in 2 Sam. 10. See notes below.) He wrote 21 after the battle, so that the people could join him in thanking God for saving him.

Historical notes: parallels of Pss. 20,21 with the Ammonite War, 2 Sam. 10:6-11:1; 12:26-31.

- 1) trust in horses and chariots, 20:7, cf. 2 Sam. 10:18, the equipment of the Syrians, whom the Ammonites engaged to help them in the initial phases of this war.
- 2) crown of gold, v.3, 2 Sam. 12:30
- 3) punishing the people in furnaces, v.9, 2 Sam. 12:31
- 4) "time of your face," of your appearing, v.9, 2 Sam. 12:29. The picture is of the king coming into the midst of an existing battle and bringing the decisive victory.

- b) Consider how the two Psalms fit in with the life of Christ. The great battle in view is his struggle with the forces of evil at Calvary. In Boston, people talk about the Battle of Bunker Hill. We can call this "The Battle of Calvary Hill." Cf. Col. 2:15, "he made a show of [principalities and powers] openly, triumphing over them in [the cross]." And what a strange battle. Usually, the victor is the one who lives. But

the moment the Son of God ceased to breath, Satan's power over us was gone forever.

- 1) 20: David's people upheld him in prayer when he went to war. Even so, the Lord wanted PJJ to watch with him in prayer, Matt. 26:38. In the Garden, they should have been praying Ps. 20! Instead, they fell asleep.
- 2) 21: David wanted his people to join him in thanking God for the victory. We cannot go back and repair the failing of the disciples to pray Ps. 20. But we can and should praise God for restoring his son to life, and we should consider what this resurrection means to us today.

3. Structure of Ps. 21.

- a) 1 & 13 are summaries, focusing on rejoicing. This is a psalm of praise for victories past and future. We learn first of the King's praise in v.1, then of the people's in v.13. In fact, it's not until we read the plural "we" in 13 that we realize that the people have been the ones singing this Psalm all the way through.
- b) There are two major blocks of material: 2-6, addressed to the Lord and speaking about the King in the 3rd person; and 8-12, addressed to the King and speaking about the Lord in the third person (v.9). In the middle, v.7 speaks to neither, but about both.
- c) As we go through 2-6 and 8-12, we'll see that they describe two combats--one past, one future. 2-6 describes how the Lord has answered the warrior's prayers for victory, and more, in the first combat. 8-12 promises that he will again give victory in the next.

A. 1, The Opening Summary

Here, the King rejoices in the victory. In v.13, the people do. Two things to note here.

1. This verse gives us a novel picture of the risen Christ. He is not sombre as he comes out of the tomb, but has a broad smile on his face. He is rejoicing, because the Father has delivered him from the burden of our sin and released him from the death that that sin imposed on him.
2. This deliverance reflects God's strength. Cf. Eph. 1:19-20, "[God's] mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." The heavens are only the work of God's hands, just finger-puzzles, but defeating sin and death displays the power of his strong arm.

B. 2-6, The Victory Past

Here we learn more details about the salvation that the Father gave his Son in delivering him from the grave. v.2 tells us that the Son

requested certain things from the Father. These were not just casual requests, but expressed the deep desire of his heart. The following four verses unfold for us those desires, by describing in more detail exactly what the Father gave the Son. (NB: Thus the *selah* at the end of v.2 really does mark a significant structural break.) In each case, we can identify the request and associate it with the response.

1. 3, Victory in the Battle.

v.3 describes the victory that Christ won over Satan on the Cross. In winning this victory, he was bringing glory to his Father, according to his prayer in John 12:28, "Father, glorify thy name." The two halves of the verse remind us of two pictures from elsewhere in the OT that help us to visualize this victory.

- a) "Prevent" here has an archaic meaning, "go out to meet someone as he comes" (*pre-venire*, before the coming). Just before the end of the Battle of Calvary Hill, our Lord commanded his spirit into the Father's hands. We can imagine the joy in heaven as he died and entered his Father's presence. The Father comes out to meet his victorious Son, and showers goodly blessings on him.

Gen. 14:17-19. As Abraham returned from defeating the kings who had captured Lot, he was "prevented," met, first by the king of Sodom (where Lot lived), and then by Melchizedek, who "blessed him." So as the Lord Jesus returns to heaven from defeating the Prince of this World, who had held us captive, he is met by his Father with blessings.

- b) The gold crown is one of the clues that the incident in view in David's life here is 2 Sam. 12:26-31, for there we read that when David conquered the city, the crown of the defeated king was set on David's head. So our Lord, by his victory, has won dominion over all that Satan previously controlled, in service of his Father's kingdom, 1 Cor. 15:28, "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."

2. 4, Everlasting Life.

Victory required that our Lord die for us. But he wanted more than victory. He wanted to return to life again, as he prayed in the Garden. v.4 notes that the Father gave him this second desire of his heart.

3. 5, Divine Honor.

v.5 records that another way in which the Father fulfilled the Son's request was by giving him glory, honor, and majesty. Any one of these three words by itself describes the splendor of God, and by extension is applied to kings. But there is only one other passage in the OT in which they occur together, and there it is God, not just an earthly king, who is in view: Ps. 145:5, in which the Psalmist prays to God, "I will speak of the glorious

honour of thy majesty," literally, "the glory of the honor of thy majesty."

In John 17:5, the Lord had prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." In response, after his resurrection, "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

4. 6, A Blessing for Others.

Victory, resurrection, and divine glory--yet the Lord wanted more than this. All these are, in some sense, for his benefit. But he came, and suffered, for something more than his own prestige. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). His prayer was not just for himself, but for these as well: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (John 17:9). The thought of saving them was the "joy that was set before him," Heb. 12:2; cf. Isa. 53:10,11: "when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

This verse reminds us of his pleasure, and relates that to "For thou hast made him most blessed for ever." Literally, "Thou has made him blessings for ever." The point is not that he receives blessings, but that he becomes a blessing to others. The promise is like that to Abraham in Gen. 12:2, "I will make you a blessing," which has as its result that "in thee shall all nations be blessed." The result obtained by our Lord is even stronger: he is made, not just a blessing (singular), but blessings (plural).

C. 7, The Secret

This verse is the transition between the victory past in 2-6 and the victory to come in 8-12. While 2-6 speaks TO the Lord ABOUT the King and 8-12 speaks TO the King ABOUT the Lord, this verse speaks TO neither and ABOUT both. It looks in both directions.

1. 7a explains how the King received the blessings just described: he "trusteth in the LORD." That trust was expressed in the fact that he laid the desires of his heart before his heavenly Father in prayer; as we have seen, the four aspects of his victory are all fulfillments of those requests.
2. 7b describes the steadfastness of his reign in the future. Again, it is not due to his own might, but through the mercy, *xesed*, covenant-love of the Father.

D. 8-12, The Victory to Come

The verbs in this section may be read either as future indicatives,

"Thou shalt," or as jussives, "May thou" They all anticipate a conflict yet future, and each verse describes the defeat of the enemy from a slightly different point of view.

Application: Though Satan is defeated, he is still alive. He cannot win, but he can fight, and our lives as believers are constantly occupied with battling against him. This portion of the Psalm assures us that our King will bring us victory in this current battle.

1. 8, "You will find them."

"hand shall find out" = they will not be able to escape from you; if they run, you will overtake them; if they hide, you will discover them. Jonathan uses the idiom to describe what Saul was never able to do to David, in 1 Sam. 23:17, "And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee." As a result, no matter how hard Saul tried, David was always one step ahead of him. When the Lord comes after his enemies, just the opposite will be true; they will never be able to escape.

2. 9, "You will destroy them with divine wrath."

Note how closely the King is linked with the Lord here. The King's fiery anger is the Lord's burning wrath, the fire of judgment.

Two details here recall 2 Sam. 12.

- a) The destruction of the enemy in fire; 2 Sam. 12:31 recalls that David made the defenders of Rabbah "pass through the brick-kiln" (better, "brick-mold"). The sense is obscure, but may mean that he burned them.

Application: Recall that the judgment the Lord Jesus will bring on his adversaries at the time of his return will be "in flaming fire," 2 Thess. 1.

- b) "In the time of thine anger" is literally, "at the time of your face," "when you appear." In 2 Sam., David was not with the army personally when siege of Rabbah began, but came for the final attack and victory. The Psalmist anticipates that this future victory will be of the same sort.

Application: How nicely this fits our situation today. We, like Joab and the army of Israel, are fighting Satan's hosts. We have our Lord's promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against us, but we cannot win the final victory until he appears in person. It is only "when he appears" that his fiery judgment will bring an end to the conflict.

3. 10, "Their line will die out."

Not only will they be destroyed, but so will their offspring. Sheriff Matt Dillon could kill one set of bad guys, but there were always more to come along later. When the Lord Jesus wipes

out evil, no more evildoers will come along later.

4. 11, "Their evil plans will be frustrated."

This verse is better translated as conditional, with the last clause as the main clause rather than a subordinate one. "If they intend evil against thee and imagine a mischievous device, they will not [or, let them not] be able to perform it." Not only they and their lineage, but even their purposes, their plans, will vanish from the earth. Their cause will be forgotten. When the Lord Jesus returns, he will inaugurate a world without sin.

5. 12, "They will be reduced to slavery."

This verse is not so much an additional fate to befall future enemies as a summary of the abject position to which they are destined.

The rendering in the AV is problematic. Note:

- a) "arrows" is in italics, and the word "strings," while often used in the OT of tent ropes, is not the usual word for "bowstring."
- b) "Turn the back" is not the usual phrase; and if the enemy has "turned their back," how can the King shoot his arrows "against their face"?

A carving from the temple of Karnak in Egypt may hold the clue. There, captives stand shoulder to shoulder, as the ropes that bind them are handed to the king, standing in front of them. "Back" in our verse is literally "shoulder," and we can read the verse, "You shall line them up shoulder to shoulder; with your ropes shall you stand before them." Thus it describes the traditional final scene of war, with the victor leading the remaining survivors of the other side on leashes like a pack of dogs.

The point in reference to our Lord is that he will subdue every foe under his feet. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25). The Psalmist shows us this final scene, with the enemy completely subdued.

E. 13, The Closing Summary

With this great prospect in view, the people add their praise to that of their King. Yet their focus is not on the King's strength, but on the power of the Lord who has given him the victory, both initially and throughout the war. So we ought to praise God,

1. not only for the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
2. but for the victory in our daily lives that is ours through the same God who raised him from the dead,
3. and for the sure hope that one day the Lord Jesus will return and completely defeat every foe.

Analysis

LA/M:NAC."XA MIZ:MOWR L:/DFWID

A. The King rejoices. cf. Heb. 12:2

B. Address to YHWH about King: Why does the King rejoice?
amplification p

1. text:

2 T.A) :AWAT LIB./OW NFTAT.FH L./OW
WA/) :ARE\$ET &:PFTFY/W B.AL-MFNA (:T.F
S.ELFH

2. amplification:

a) victory in the battle

3 K.IY-T:QAD.:M/EN.W. B.IR:KOWT +OWB
T.F\$IYT L:/RO) \$/OW (:A+ERET P.FZ

b) life

4 XAY.IYM \$F)AL MI/M./:KF NFTAT.FH L./OW
)OREK: YFMIYM (OWLFM WF/(ED

c) divine honor (cf. Ps. 145:5)

5 G.FDOWL K.:BOWD/OW B.I/Y\$W. (FT/EKF
HOWD W:/HDFDR T.:\$AW.EH (FLFY/W

d) means of blessing

6 K.IY-T:\$IYT/"HW. B:RFKOWT LF/(AD cf. Gen. 12:2
T.:XAD./"HW. B:/&IM:XFH)ET-P.FNEY/KF Isa. 53:10,11.

C. About King and YHWH;

7 K.IY-HA/M.ELEK: B.O+"XA B.A/YHWFH
W./B:/XESED (EL:YOWN B.AL-YIM.OW+

D. Address to the King about YHWH: future victory over his
enemies.

1. You will find them.

8 T.IM:CF) YFD/:KF L:/KFL-)OY:BEY/KF
Y:MIYN/:KF T.IM:CF) &ON:)EY/KF

2. You will destroy them with divine wrath.

9 T.:\$IYT/"MOW K.:/TAN.W.R)"\$ L:/("T P.FNEY/KF
Y:HWFH B.:/)AP./OW Y:BAL.:(/"M W:/TO)K:L/"M)"\$

3. Their line will die out.

10 P.IR:Y/FMOW M"/)EREC T.:)AB."D
W:/ZAR:(/FM MI/B.:N"Y)FDFM

4. Their evil plans will be frustrated.

11 K.IY-NF+W. (FLEY/KF RF(FH
XF\$:BW. M:ZIM.FH
B.AL-YW.KFLW.

5. They will be reduced to slavery.

12 K.IY T.:\$IYT/"MOW \$EKEM
B.:/M"YTFREY/KF T.:KOWN"N (AL-P.:N"Y/HEM

E. Address to YHWH

13 RW.MFH Y:HWFH B:/ (UZ./EKF
NF\$IYRFH W./N:ZAM.:RFH G.:BW.RFT/EKF