**Joy and thanksgiving in victory**  12/2/23 dkm

Read: Psalm 21, 2Thessalonians 1

Text: Psalm 21

Psalms: 45:1-6, 61, 16:7-11, 72old

If you lived in North America you would enjoy Thanksgiving Day, an annual holiday that began when reformed Christians settled in America. We have no such holiday, although we have adopted Halloween from the Americans. Our Anzac day is a day to remember soldiers who fought to keep us free; years ago this extended to thanking God for victory in those wars. War stimulates prayer; there are no atheists on a sinking ship, as they say. But do we hear praise to the Lord amidst our songs of victory?

David and the people of Israel always sought the Lord’s counsel and help when they went to war, which seems to have been often. In Psalm 20 we saw the people and the king in the temple praying before going to war, maybe against the Philistines. They asked the Lord to give the king the desire of his heart, namely victory over his enemies (20:4). In Psalm 21 we read that the Lord has ‘given him his heart’s desire’ (21:2). Psalm 21 is a song of victory and thanksgiving following the prayer of Psalm 20. Both psalms are attributed to David.

**1. King praises the Lord for victory**

The psalm is ascribed to David so it is probably David speaking in the third person here in verses 1-7; although it could be someone else or a group speaking about the king. The king acknowledges, with thanks and rejoicing, the Lord’s help in giving victory or salvation to the king and his people (20:1). Victory meant they were not taken captive by the enemy. Victory meant they did not die at the hands of the enemy. Victory meant God’s name was honoured rather than brought to shame.

David makes direct reference to his prayer before going into battle, saying, ‘You have not withheld the request of his lips’ (21:2). It was David’s desire to conquer in the name of the Lord. We cannot pinpoint the exact battle; this prayer and this victory song reflect numerous situations in the life of David.

A king and his army pausing to pray before going into battle might be ridiculed today, but not in David’s day; even pagan armies sought the help of their gods. It is not enough to clean your rifle and polish your boots in preparation for battle! It is even more important in spiritual battles that we pause for prayer, earnest prayer. It is foolish to go into battle against Satan, against the world, the flesh and the devil, without prayer. And the one who fails to return thanks to the Lord is dishonouring the Lord, especially if they take glory to themselves.

David acknowledges wonderful blessings from the Lord, blessings of goodness, and indeed a crown of pure gold (21:3). This may have been a captured crown, but this and other features of these verses point to a king greater than David, namely Messiah. We saw pointers to Messiah back in Psalm 20 with reference to ‘His anointed’ in verse 6. And in Psalm 8 David similarly speaks of the ‘Son of man’ being crowned with glory and honour’, a reference which the writer to the Hebrews applies to Jesus (Heb 2:7-9).

When David went into battle he asked the Lord to strengthen him and preserve his life; wars are places where death is close at hand. The cry, ‘O Lord, save the king’ means keep the king from defeat and death. In verse 4 David admits to asking for life from the Lord, and acknowledges the Lord gave this to him: ‘Length of days for ever and ever’ (21:4). While such language could, by way of hyperbole, be used of a king like David, it can be applied literally to Messiah, to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord promised David that a son or descendant would sit on his throne forever (2Sam 7:13-16). David died and was buried, as were all his descendants, until the coming of Jesus. Jesus died and was buried but rose again and ascended to heaven where he sits upon the exalted and eternal throne of God.

David refers to glory, honour and majesty which the Lord has given his victorious king (21:5). Again, while such language could be used of the blessings bestowed on King David, it can also be used of Messiah, the anointed one. Jesus prayed for the Father to glorify the Son, along with himself, on the night before going to the cross. It is not for man to accept glory because all glory belongs God, even and especially in a king’s victorious return from battle. Jesus, as the Son of God, conquered sin and death for us and is worthy of all glory and praise. His prayer was that the Father glorify him with the glory he had ‘before the world was’ (John 17:5). In other words, Jesus, the Son of God and King of heaven, came into this world to engage the enemy, our enemy Satan, and having conquered Satan he returned to heaven.

Satan’s power was in death; he gained this power when he deceived Adam and Eve into rebelling against God. Jesus, through his death and resurrection ‘destroyed him who has the power of death, that is the devil’ (Heb 2:14). The victory that Jesus won is a victory in which we who believe share (1Cor 15:57). David knew and believed Messiah would come and achieve this great victory even as he went off to a physical battle against the enemies of God and his people, and even as he established a kingdom of earth in which God would be worshipped and glorified. This psalm is one of a number of royal psalms which point through King David to the King of kings (e.g. Ps 45:3).

‘You have made him most blessed forever’ (21:6). David has already referred to ‘blessings of goodness’ he received from the Lord in battle and in triumphant return. He went off to battle in accordance with the will of God, and returned, having completed what the Lord sent him to do. When we are doing what the Lord has called us to do, we also will know the blessings of the Lord. Jesus walked in obedience to the will of the Father, even when obedience led to the cross. But knowing the will of God, he endured the cross because of the ‘joy set before Him’; that joy was to be in the presence of the Lord, to ‘sit down at the right hand of God’ (Heb 12:2). To return to the presence of the Father was his ultimate aim and joy.

Moses would not move on unless ‘Your Presence’, God’s presence, ‘go with us’ (Exod 33:15). Paul’s greatest desire was to be with Christ, to be in the presence of his Lord and saviour (Phil 1:23). David writes of being ‘exceedingly glad’ because of the Lord’s presence (21:6). Sin resulted in our first parents being cast out from the Lord’s presence. When, through the blood of Jesus, our sin was removed, we again enter the presence of the Lord; but not fully or finally until the Lord comes again. Even so, as we join in the means of grace, in prayer and worship, we get a taste of being in the presence of the Lord, a taste which I pray you savour and desire more of.

This song of victory and thanksgiving began with, ‘The king shall have joy in your strength O Lord’. Here in verse 7 we again hear reference to the king, probably by David in the third person as we suggested. But here it is by way of confession and assurance, like verse 7 of the previous psalm. The king trusts in the Lord and is assured that through the mercy or steadfast love or covenant love of the Most High he shall not be moved/shaken’ (21:7). While ‘Lord’ is the covenant name of God, ‘Most High’ has wider reference.

While the Lord was David’s covenant God, he was also the Most High whom all nations must acknowledge. The kingdom of Israel would one day extend throughout the whole world as the everlasting kingdom of God. Jesus established this kingdom when he came to earth and now rules over this kingdom from heaven above. He will shake all the kingdoms of this world but his kingdom will not be shaken (Heb 12:26, 28).

**2. King’s enemies will be destroyed**

In most wars the enemy is subjugated but not annihilated. But in holy war, war against the enemies of God, annihilation was and is God’s policy. Such wars are means of divine judgment. Joshua’s war against the Canaanites was holy war; he was executing God’s judgment upon the Amorites (Gen 15:16). The battle against Satan that Jesus entered into when he came into this world is a spiritual battle and a holy war. Jesus won the victory through the cross and resurrection, but Satan and his agents are still on the prowl. Their defeat is certain but is not yet completely realised. The day is coming, and the end is coming when, ‘He puts an end to all rule and all authority and all power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet’ (1Cor 15:24-25). As believers, we live between the cross and the end. We are engaged in this spiritual battle (Eph 6:12, 2Cor 10:3-6).

David’s words in the second part of this psalm are addressed to the Lord and fit better into the messianic context than to the immediate situation faced by David. His words of redemption and victory in the first part give way to words of condemnation and judgment in the second part of the psalm. He begins this part referring to the Lord’s hands finding or reaching his enemies wherever they may be (21:8). The same strong hand that saved David will find and destroy his enemies (cf.20:6). There will be no place in the universe for them to hide (Rev 6:15-17). The Most High is just, and must punish those who oppose him and his righteousness - Satan being chief of reprobates.

God’s wrath is righteous anger (21:9). His judgment is just and will come as no surprise to anyone- except those deceived by Satan. God’s judgment will come in the form of fire: ‘Fire shall devour them’ (21:9), ‘Flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (2Thes 1:8-10). The apostle Paul was speaking of the Day of the Lord, and David seems to be doing the same. ‘Our God is a consuming fire’ (Heb 12:29).

We might think that destruction of their descendants from the earth is unwarranted and unfair, but remember how victorious kings destroyed all the sons of a defeated king, lest they rise up in the future and threaten his reign. This is holy war in which none are innocent. God has his chosen covenant people, and the rest are the children of Satan and therefore his enemies.

**3. King and people praise the Lord**

This psalm, like the previous one, ends with a united cry to the Lord, a cry from king and people. The previous cry was one of faith that the Lord will save. Here it is a cry of praise because the Lord has saved his people. The king takes no glory to himself because the battle is the Lord’s, and the victory was in the Lord’s strength (21:13). We might picture the king and the people returning to the house of the Lord where they had prayed before the battle, now to give all praise and glory to the Lord for victory. The saints in heaven gather around the throne giving glory and honour and power to the Lamb on the throne, who was slain but now reigns over heaven and earth (Rev 5). Shall we not sing praises to our great God and Saviour today?