

SUMMER PSALMS -
Lesson 4 – Psalm 20 - The “May” Psalm

July 26, 2020
Craig Crawshaw

Psalm 20 For the choir director. A Psalm of David.

1. May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble!
May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!
2. May He send you help from the sanctuary and support you from Zion!
3. May He remember all your meal offerings and find your burnt offering acceptable! Selah.
4. May He grant you your heart’s desire and fulfill all your counsel!
5. We will sing for joy over your victory
And in the name of our God we will set up our banners.
May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.
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 boast in chariots and some in horses,
But we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God.
8. They have bowed down and fallen, but we have risen and stood upright.
9. Save, O Lord;
May the King answer us in the day we call.

When we were reading the Psalms together as a congregation, this psalm caught my attention because so many times a line begins with “May ...” As such, it read to me as a prayer of blessing for someone that the author cared deeply about, such as: “May God do this for you ...” and “May God do this for you as well ...” I then checked to find out that none of the other Biblical psalms is constructed in this way, and it became all the more intriguing to me.

Now a good rule of Biblical interpretation is to recognize that most texts have multiple layers of meaning. For instance, most commentators believe that this psalm was a song written by King David as what his loyal subjects would sing to him as he went out to fight a significant battle. It was a song that would be a prayer from the people to the king for protection and success. Now whether this song was ever actually sung by the people to David is unknown. But it was written as if they might. Here the “you” of the psalm is King David, and the “we” of the psalm are his well-wishing subjects. Thus, “*May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble*” would be the people wishing King David the Lord’s protection. This would be considered an historic interpretation of the psalm.

But a second layer of meaning would be to interpret this psalm prophetically, that is, as if written as a song to the Messiah King for protection and victory in His battle for the souls of men. And if you read it as such, the “Lord” of the psalm would be God the Father. And the “you” of the psalm would be God the Son – Jesus Messiah. The “I” of the psalm would be the author of the prayer, and the “we” of the psalm would be the combined children of God bringing their praise, boasting in the name of the Lord. Thus “*I know that the Lord saves His anointed*” (v. 6) is the author knowing that God the Father saves God the Son. And “*we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God*” is the cry of all of God’s elect. To read it this way, it becomes a glorious song of praise to the Holy Father and the Messiah Son.

Yet a third layer of meaning would be to interpret this psalm devotionally. We evangelicals believe that all Scripture is to be read as if written as God’s personal Word to us. We get this largely from Paul’s exhortation to Timothy:

1 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

We take “*All Scripture*” as referring to both the Old and New Testament. And though we recognize that all Scripture has an historical context, and often a prophetic meaning, we also look to see how it relates to

our lives today. And more than not, we discover a rich well of personal application revealed to us by the Spirit of God's inspiration. It is not inappropriate to ask of a Scripture, "what does this mean for me?"

Young's Literal Translation is the author's best attempt to give us in English the most literal translation of what the Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic text says. It doesn't always read so smoothly, but it gives the basic sense of what a Bible passage says, without the slant of making it comfortably "readable." From the literal translation we learn that this psalm is a statement of what Jehovah *has already done and continues to do*. Thus, Young's verses 1-2 read as follows:

"Jehovah doth answer thee in a day of adversity. The name of the God of Jacob doth set thee on high. He doth send help from the sanctuary, and from Zion doth support thee."

So interpreting this psalm devotionally, I can take this as a statement to me personally, as well as to my fellow believers. And I can pray it to my fellow believers as a confident prayer of what the Lord will indeed do for them. "*May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble ...*", etc. So, this "may" is not just an "I hope this will be so" prayer, but a prayer of confident assurance that the Lord God will indeed do these things for his anointed children of faith. With this devotional interpretation especially in mind, let us see what this psalm teaches us about God's care of His chosen anointed ones.

VERSE 1 – Help to rise above troubles

VERSE 2 – Specific help from fellow believers and His Church

VERSE 3 – Remembering both praise offerings and "sin offerings" of confession

VERSE 4 – Granting the heart's desires and wisdom

VERSE 5 – Celebrating victories and fulfilling requests

VERSE 6 – Rescuing and saving from harm by His power

VERSE 7 - Acknowledging complete trust in Him above all else

VERSE 8 - Raising to stand upright through all

VERSE 9 – Ever answering a call for help

If you add all this up, you will find well over a dozen promises of God's care!

VERSE 1

1. God promises that He will always be accessible and available to His children in times of trouble

Psalms 37:39-40 But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in Him.

Psalms 46:1-2 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth would change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea.

2. God promises to set His children securely on a high place, out of danger.

Psalms 27:5 For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock.

Psalms 91:14 [God talking] Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name. (Ps. 59:1, 107:41; 2 Sam 22:31; Job 5:11)

At this point it is critical to point out that this promise of God's answering and rescue, and all the other wonderful promises of this psalm are only available to God's children who are not walking in direct disobedience to God. God gives no such assurance to non-believers nor to disobedient children.

Psalms 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.

The only prayer that God will hear, or answer, from a non-believer would be the cry to save. And the only prayer that God will answer from a rebellious child is a prayer of confession and contrition of sin.

VERSE 2 3. God promises specific help from fellow believers and His Church.

To say that God will send help “*from the sanctuary*” and support “*from Zion*” can translate for us that He will send help from the members and establishment of His Church. So often the “very present help” we need comes from fellow believers and from the church to which we have aligned. It is so important for believers to stay under the “covering” of a loving and caring church body.

VERSE 3 4. God promises to remember both our praise, **5.** and our sin offerings.

A “meal offering” was an offering of thanksgiving, or praise. It was not for a sin committed, but for a blessing given. And every time we praise God for a blessing bestowed, He remembers those offerings of thanksgiving, being pleased by them.

Hebrews 13:15-16 Through [Jesus] then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

And a “burnt offering” was an offering for a sin committed. Now today we are not to offer a sacrificial animal for our sin, but a prayer of confession (agreeing with God that it is sin) and contrition (an attitude of humble acknowledgement of our wrong). God accepts these offerings as well.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In my song of Psalm 20, to refer to God remembering our burnt offerings of thanksgiving and our sin offerings of confession I use the phrase that God remembers “your praise and your sigh,”

VERSE 4 6. God promises to grant you your heart’s desire,

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Just as a good father wants to delight his children with their appropriate wishes, so our good Heavenly Father tells us in no uncertain terms that He wants to delight His children with their heart’s desires. Gladly God knows which desires of ours are truly good for us, and He makes that determination. These might not even be desires that we pray for, but only hope for, but God gives us those as well.

7. And we remember that James taught us that God will give us the wisdom we need when we ask. This is what it means to “fulfill all your counsel”

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

“Without reproach” mean that God won’t even make you feel bad in asking for the wisdom!

VERSE 5a 8. God promises to rejoice with us in our victories. He “sings for joy” and “sets up banners” in celebrating with us.

VERSE 5b 9. God promises to fulfill all your petitions, These are our specific prayer requests. As Jesus taught, if we ask unknowingly for a snake, or anything bad for us, he will give us a fish, or something good for us, instead (Matthew 7:10). But the ultimate request will be met. That is what it means to “fulfill” our petition – that He fills up our requests with good things always.

1 John 5:14-15 And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request which we have asked from Him.

VERSE 6 10. God promises to save His anointed ones with the strength of His right hand. Oh how we need saving from our own strong wills and opinions and often from our own stupidity. When we “fall” He will always lift us up, brush us off and give us a fresh start.

Psalms 71:19b-21 Oh God, who is like you? Your who have shown me many troubles and distresses will revive me again and will bring me up again from the depths of the earth. May you increase my greatness and turn to comfort me.

VERSE 7-8 11. God will acknowledge my complete trust in Him alone. Though some boast in the strength of the world, whether it be chariots and horses (as did many kings gone by, which displeased the Lord), or in riches or fame or in accomplishments – God recognizes when we trust in Him alone. Our “boast” of success must be in Him only. King David boasted in his Lord. Messiah Jesus boasted in His Heavenly Father. And so must we “boast” or trust in God alone. And when we do, we don’t “fall” but we “rise up” and “stand upright” as verse 8 tells us.

VERSE 9 12. Our final verse comes back again to say that the “King” will answer us in the day we call. For David’s people, it was their king David who would answer. For David, it was his King Jehovah who would answer. For Jesus, it was His Heavenly Father who would answer and save Him. And likewise our confidence is in our King Jesus who will always answer us in our need, always respond to our call and always answer in His perfect wisdom,

What a marvelous psalm of David! It is unique in its construction. It is so affirming in the multiple ways that God cares for us, His children. And it is set forth poetically in our revised versions as a pray of “May the Lord ...” do this and that for you.

Historically, King David prayed this psalm as a prayer for himself for victory over his enemies. Prophetically, it could certainly be a prayer for Jesus’ victory over His earthly battle for our souls. And devotionally, it is a prayer we can rightly pray for ourselves or for any fellow child of God.

In this psalm are a dozen or more promises of God for YOU. And as we close, I sing this song to you and for you, that I wrote to summarize the many “may’s” of this beautiful psalm. May the Lord do this for you – and be assured that He will!

May the Lord answer you in your trouble.

May He set you securely on high.

May He send you the help and support that you need

And remember your praise and your sigh.

May He grant you your heart’s deep desires.

May He rescue whenever you fall.

May your boast be alone in the name of the Lord.

May your King answer you when you call.

May this poem help you to remember and rejoice in God’s “May song” to you!