

PSALM 21 – The King shall Joy in Thy Strength! (part 1 of 2)

INTRODUCTION – It is hard to imagine what it is like to be the king of a country, even more so to be the king of the nation of Israel, the people of God. David was one of the few who were endowed with this honour and privilege. He did not ask for it. It was given to him by the LORD. He penned Psalm 21 by the inspiration of God, relating the goodness and provision of God in his life and reign as king of Israel. By the grace and mercies of God, we are given a glimpse of what was in David's heart and mind when he reigned as, arguably, the best king of Israel.

Psalm 21 relates the times of joy he had as a king. His joy was based entirely upon what the LORD has done for him and his people through him. The use of at least ten active verbs, with the LORD as the subject, sums up the theme of this glorious psalm of great joy and victory. This psalm was not for David alone but for all of God's children as well. If the LORD could help a king like David who trusted in Him with all his kingly and king size problems, how much more is He able to help every believer whose problems pale into insignificance compared with David's. How sensitive David was to the presence of the LORD. This psalm is full of the deeds of the LORD and magnifies the power of God in his life. The LORD protected him and thwarted the evil attempts of his enemies.

David attributed his success during his entire reign to the LORD. He knew it was always the LORD and never him who brought peace and prosperity to the nation of Israel.

I. Kingly Desire Granted – 21:1-2 – The first statement of the verse usually declares the main theme of a psalm. In this case it is, "The King shall joy in thy strength, O LORD." Man seeks after joy through wealth, fame, friends and loved ones. But these avail only temporal happiness because they all fade away. None of these things last. But the joy that David experienced lasts a lifetime and beyond. The reason is that the LORD never dies or fades away. His strength remains constant, for He is immutable. David could always lean on the strength of the LORD because of the personal covenantal relationship that he had with his LORD. He knew the LORD personally. More importantly, the LORD knew him personally. This gave David strength to go through the many vicissitudes that kings would face. In David's case, perhaps he faced even more because he was the king of the people of God who also had Satan as their enemies. Note that although strength is linked to the power of God, David did not address God as God but as the LORD. He deliberately emphasized the fact that the strength he enjoyed from the LORD was based on their covenantal relationship. If David had used "elohiyim" for God, then the emphasis would have been the power of God rather than the relationship. It is one of emphasis only, as both aspects of God were experienced by David throughout his life.

The nature of the strength of the LORD that David highlighted here was with reference to salvation. This salvation is not to be limited to the spiritual salvation from sin which David already enjoyed before he became king. This salvation has to refer to the daily deliverance from evil men and circumstances and sin that David must have faced constantly. Using a chiasmic structure and synonymous parallelism, David emphasized the greatness of the LORD's salvation in verse 1. Such rejoicing that is based upon a personal relationship with the LORD is priceless. It strengthens one's faith to know that the LORD is near.

Verse 2 – The desire of the king's heart was granted by the LORD. Based upon Scripture, we know that the LORD will do all things according to His holy and perfect will (cf 1 John 5:14). Thus when the king's desire was granted by the LORD, it means that the king's desire was in line with God's will. The king has to be in close communion with the LORD in order to know His will. Therefore, he has to have good knowledge of God's perfect Word to know the will of God. Again using synonymous parallelism, David emphasised the LORD answered his cry according to his heart's desire. This is also true for every believer today. Knowing the revealed will of God in Holy Scriptures is the key to answered prayers. As the believer's knowledge of God increases, he begins to think like God. His goals and desires and motives are Bible based. He sees the world and his future in light of God's truth. Slowly but surely and through the sanctifying power of the Word of God, he begins to have more and more of the eyes of Christ!

II. Kingly Desire Elaborated – 21:3-6 – What are some of these kingly desires that David had and which the LORD granted? The first on the list is that David experienced the LORD's foreknowledge in his life. He said that the LORD "preventest him with", i.e. provided for David in advance, blessings of goodness. The blessings that were characterised by goodness were David's experiences in life even in the midst of trials and difficulties as king of Israel. These were not about material blessings, for as the king, David already had them all; rather, these blessings were spiritual for he was the man after God's own heart. The magnificence of these blessings was described by an emblematic parallelism. It was the LORD setting a crown of pure gold on his head! This was the highest honour bestowed on someone. To experience such a concentrated focus from the LORD was a delight to David's soul. David not only knew that all things would

work together for good to those who love Him, this goodness was anticipated even before it happened! This is also true for all believers today because of the omniscience and omnipotence of God. God knows and can do all things and nothing happens outside of His divine and sovereign knowledge.

Verse 4 – David’s second desire was to have life, and the LORD gave him life, even length of days forever and ever. This is a desire that we are very familiar with. We all want long life on earth! The question is: why do we want to live a long life on earth? David knew that he was ordained by the LORD to be king of Israel. He knew his calling was to be king and the place of his calling was Israel. Therefore, his request for long life was so that he may continue to be king to rule God’s people in a manner pleasing to God. David was the best king who ever lived in Israel. God used David as the yardstick to measure every other future king of Israel - whether they were good or bad. The LORD granted David’s desire, for it was to do the will of God and be a blessing to God’s people. Now why do we want to live long on the earth? If it is not to serve God and be a blessing to others, why would God grant us our desire? If it is for personal reasons and not the glory of God, then such a selfish and self centred desire will surely not be fulfilled by the LORD. The LORD gave to David even length of days that lasts forever and ever. It either refers to David’s salvation or to the fact that David’s posterity would rule Israel forever. The latter seems more plausible as the context is not on salvation but rather on kingship. This is what most kings want. David had a spiritual reason. The longevity of David’s dynasty meant that Israel would continue to exist. It also meant the fulfilment of God’s prophecy to David that his dynasty would reign forever. For these two reasons alone, David’s desire for long life was within God’s will and for God’s glory.

Verse 5 – David’s glory was great in the LORD’s salvation. The world today knows about David the King of Israel. To this day, generations of Israelites continue to remember King David. In his day, David had peace with surrounding nations. Those nations respected and honoured him. He had honour and majesty throughout his reign. Using synthetic parallelism, David declared that the LORD had laid them upon him. He did not earn them. He did not buy them or commit any transgression like compromising to get them. He trusted in the LORD and the LORD placed them upon him. David gave God all the glory and honour.

Verse 6 — This was not due to his ingenuity or his great political manoeuvrings or his mighty army that had every nation cowed. It was purely the LORD who “made”, i.e. appointed, him to be most blessed. This trend of thinking that it is man’s wisdom or ingenuity that makes him great is foolishness especially for believers who ought to know better. David is a prime example of one who gives God the glory and how we ought to be close to God and lean on Him perpetually, and not only in times of trouble. This was David’s way as king and so must it be ours as ordinary believers with all our problems. If God could help David, He can help all of us! David declared without apology that it was the LORD who “hast made him most blessed forever.” The forever blessedness has to include salvation, in addition to his kingdom which would culminate in Christ, the King of kings. The word for “blessed” is always used to mean a spiritual relationship with God especially when the LORD is the One who declares one as blessed in His sight.

Using synthetic parallelism, the LORD adds to the first line the manner in which the king was made blessed. It was with the countenance (i.e. the face) of the LORD. David was made exceedingly glad by the LORD because he knew that the LORD was pleased with him. What wonderful knowledge it is, that the face of the LORD is upon His children and that He is pleased with their lives and service. This was David’s experience. Is this also your experience as God’s child?

[to be continued]