

## **Series FolkSongs of Faith**

### **This Message The LORD's Strength on Display**

#### **Scripture Psalm 21**

Today we will think about Psalm 21. As I mentioned last week, Psalms 20 and 21 are usually linked. Both Psalms were written by David, and many commentators think that David was referring to himself in both Psalms. Psalm 20 is a prayer in which the people of Israel sought the LORD's favor on their king during a time of threat and danger. They wanted him to be protected and empowered and successful as he fulfilled his kingly duties on their behalf. Psalm 21 is a celebration of the victories which the LORD granted the king.

#### **Read Psalm 21**

Themes of salvation and victory and strength run through both Psalm 20 and 21. In Psalm 20, David referred to the "saving power" of the LORD's "right hand." In today's reading the "strength" of the LORD is specifically mentioned in the first and last verses. Victory and salvation are described as gifts of the LORD (*verses 1, 5*).

Both Psalms are categorized as "royal" Psalms because of the prominent emphasis on the activities of the king. However, we need to keep in mind that the king was just the agent through whom the LORD displayed His strength and gained the victories. David understood this, and placed his trust in God whenever he faced a significant problem. Many commentators apply verses 2 through 6 to David, but it seems to me that the words describing his blessings come across as too overstated and amplified and grandiose to fit the activity of a human king. The statements could apply to David in a general sort of way, but I think there is a better, more significant way to think about this Psalm.

This Psalm is properly categorized as a "royal Psalm" because the principle figure is the king. However, this Psalm is more than a "royal Psalm;" it is actually a Messianic Psalm. David did not write this Psalm about himself. He was describing the Messiah, the ultimate King over all the earth. He was prophetically looking into the future.

This was the reason for his style of writing. If David had been writing about himself, he would probably have used “first person” pronouns, “I,” “me,” and “my.” “I rejoice in your strength,” and “How great is my joy in your victories.” This Psalm uses “he,” “him,” and “his” pronouns because David was referring to someone else, to the Messiah. And because David was writing about the Messiah, there was a valid reason for the amplified and grandiose descriptions of the King. The Messianic King did indeed achieve much more significant victories than did David.

Let’s think about this Psalm as the interaction between the Messiah and God the Father. In verse 1, King Messiah rejoiced in what the Father had done for Him. King Messiah rejoiced about the “victories” given by the Father. The word “victories” also can, and perhaps should be, translated “salvation.” This Psalm is about the “salvation victories” given by the Father through His Messiah King.

King Messiah was granted the desires of His heart. These desires related to the justification of sinners and the forgiveness of their sins which caused Him to endure the cross in obedience to the Father.

King Messiah deserved the “crown of pure gold” and the “glory” and the “splendor and majesty” and “eternal blessings” given to Him by the Father because of His willingness to atone for the sins of humanity. King Messiah was given eternal resurrection life following His death on the cross, and, after the resurrection, King Messiah ascended to His place in the presence of the Father, at His right hand.

The blessings in verse 6 are described as “eternal.” These words, “eternal blessings,” do not imply that the blessing were bestowed on the king for his benefit, but rather that the king was granted the privilege of blessing others — of imparting and dispensing blessings. As the verse states, the blessings were to extend for eternity. What can we think of here? Salvation, the indwelling Holy Spirit, peace with God — there are many, many such blessings provided by King Jesus.

Verse 7 is a confirmation of the king’s loyalty to the LORD. The word “trust” implies a dependent relationship. King Messiah looked to His Father for his needs while on earth. He announced to His followers that He only did those things that the Father wanted Him to do (*John 5:19*). The LORD, who is here called the Most High, responded to him through “unfailing love.” This phrase literally means “lovingkindness (*Hebrew “hesed”*) that will never diminish and is unending.”

Because of the King's trust and because of the "unfailing love of the Most High," the King Messiah "would never be shaken." Even at the moment of His greatest need, the King could confidently say to the Father, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." He could be forever confident and secure about his relationship with the Father, and because of His victory on the cross.

In verses 8 through 12 the emphasis continues to be on the LORD's activity. The words in these verses project our thoughts far beyond the Israel of the Old Testament. These verses describe how the LORD will "consume" all His enemies "in His wrath." Verse 8 — "Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies" and on all "your foes;" verse 9 — "At the time of your appearing, you will make them like a fiery furnace;" and "In his wrath the LORD will swallow them up and his fire will consume them."

The statements here are very similar to the words of the book of Revelation and other passages of the New Testament which speak of judgment. We know that the descendent of David, the Lord Jesus Messiah, the One who was given to humanity because of the Father's love, who laid aside His deity and came to earth, who was anointed by the Holy Spirit, who lived a righteous sinless life as a man, who suffered on the cross, who was taken into heaven — we know that He will someday be given permission to return to earth in order to judge everything evil and all evildoers. Messiah Jesus will "lay hold on all the LORD's enemies," cast them into the place of eternal fiery punishment, and rule as the eternal king. The Messiah will destroy all those who "plot evil and devise wicked schemes" (*verse 11*), along with all the descendants of evildoers (*verse 10*).

I hope you recognize that David was not describing himself when he wrote this Psalm. He was prophetically looking into the future. Yes, there are some parallels between David's rule over Israel and the rule of Messiah over the nations of this world. Just as the LORD helped David to defeat the enemy armies of his day and to have an established kingdom known as Israel, his unique descendant, Messiah LORD Jesus, will establish the universal kingdom of God, the kingdom which will last forever.

This Psalm begins and ends with references to the strength of the LORD. The word "strength," as used in this Psalm, referred to the ability of God to carry out His purposes. The achievement of those purposes required the Father to send His Son to earth, and required the Son to lay down His life as an atonement for the sins of humanity. Psalm 21 is an early Old Testament picture of what the Father will do on earth through His Messiah King representative.

Verse 13 is the only statement in which David speaks for himself. It is his reaction to and response to the future work of the LORD. David rejoiced in the strength of the LORD, and wanted the LORD to be exalted. In recognition of all the wonderful achievements worked out by the Father through the Messiah, David offered up songs and praises and encouraged others to do so also.

To summarize, let me list some of those strengths of our King Messiah. To a limited extent, each of these things was true of King David, but they are much more true of David's great descendant, King Messiah. Each line in verses 3 through 6 is best applied to Jesus, victorious after His great work on the cross.

Jesus was willing to come to earth and to die on the cross. There is a verse in the letter written to the Hebrews which declares that Jesus, "for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame" (*Hebrews 12:2*). Jesus did this because of His desire to please the Father and to provide atonement for sinful humanity.

After His atoning victory on the cross, Jesus was "welcomed into heaven with rich blessings." All the inhabitants of heaven sang, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (*Revelation 5:12*)

Jesus was given a "crown of pure gold" because He is the "the King of kings" and "the Lord of lords" (*Revelation 14:14*).

Jesus "asked for life, and it was given to him." The life He requested was not just for Himself. He wanted His life to be passed on to others. "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself" (*John 5:26*), and "It is the Father's will that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life" (*John 6:40*).

Jesus was given glory and splendor and majesty. "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (*Philippians 2:9-11*).

The most notable victory achieved by King Messiah was over death. Isaiah wrote, "He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever" (*Isaiah 25:7-8*). The Apostle Paul quoted part of that verse in one of his letters and added, "The sting of death is sin, ... but thanks be to God, He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (*I Corinthians 15:54-57*).

Jesus rejoiced in the presence of His Father. Just before He was crucified, He prayed, "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (*John 17:5*). After His resurrection, God the Father raised Him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in heaven (*Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 1:3*).

No wonder David exalted the LORD. We should join him in singing and praising the accomplishments of our LORD.