

## Summer in the Psalms, Part 5: Royalty Psalm 21

What makes a good king?

In my home country, we don't have a king; we revolted against one, and made a republic. But our presidents still have a lot of the functions of a king. Their job is to enforce the laws of the country and to protect it from foreign threats.

My German teacher taught us the word "Fremdshamen" -- when you're ashamed for someone else. And she was quick to point out that American politicians are usually the best examples. This is why a lot of Americans in Europe pretend they're Canadians.

Sometimes the people of Israel experienced Fremdshamen over their kings and rulers. But not in Psalm 21. This psalm is a celebration of David's success---especially in protecting his country from foreign threats.

And this psalm deals with God's work: past, present, and future.

**First, the song celebrates things God has done in the recent past. Like what?**

1. God gave David victory.

*Verse 5: "Through the victories you gave, his [David's] glory is great; you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty!"*

The song celebrates God's victory through David, defending Israel against their enemies. The people sing, "Even as we celebrate David, LORD, we are celebrating *you*--and what *you* have done in David to protect and save us!"

What else in the recent past are they singing about?

2. God showered David with his pleasure.

*Verse 3: "You came out to greet him with rich blessings. You have placed a crown of pure gold on his head."*

In the ancient world, if a king won a battle, his army would return, and the people would go outside the city and meet them, cheering, shouting, thanking them.

## Summer in the Psalms, Part 5: Royalty Psalm 21

The people of Jerusalem did this when David won. But in verse 3 they're not singing about themselves---about their cheers. They're saying it's Yahweh the LORD who went out to greet David; who welcomed him back into the city with words of praise; and with a crown of gold!

You know, when Napoleon became emperor of the French, instead of kneeling and having the the bishop put the crown on his head like every other French king, he had the Pope say some words, and then he took the crown off of the altar and put it *on his own head!*

Not David. David kneels and receives a crown from the Lord God himself. And Israel celebrates as God says to David, "well done, good and faithful servant." There's no greater pleasure for a human than to hear those words from God.

### 3. God shaped David's heart.

They're not just singing about how God gave David victory, and how the Lord showered his pleasure on David. The third thing they're singing about is how God shaped David's heart.

*Look at verse 2. "You granted him his heart's desire. You gave him the requests of his lips."*

You see, when the LORD gives us what we ask for, we've got two things to be thankful for. It's not just "thanks for saying 'yes' to my prayers!" It's also "thank you for shaping my heart to ask for what would honor you! Thanks for changing my heart so that the success you give isn't going to make me proud and arrogant!"

So much of the Christian life is learning to ask for what's near to God's heart, and to ask it in such humility that God can safely give it to you. God has to do this in our lives! And he did it for David. It was just as big a victory as his military victory. And the people celebrated it.

So the psalm celebrates what God did for David in the recent past. Giving him victory, taking pleasure in him, and changing his heart.

### **Second, the psalm celebrates what God will do in the future.**

Look what else David asked for. Not just victory in a battle.

## Summer in the Psalms, Part 5: Royalty Psalm 21

Verse 6: “God, don’t just give me victory today in this battle; give me *unending* blessings.”

Verse 4: “Lord, don’t just give me a long life, but give me length of days forever and ever!”

He’s asking, whether he knows it or not, for eternal life! He’s been promised that a king will sit on his throne forever--2 Samuel 7. I’m not sure he knows he’s asking to live forever. But he surely believes that *someone* from his family will always be on the throne. And in that way, David prays, I could live forever.

When the LORD gets hold of our hearts, he brings us to a place where he can say “yes” to our prayers. But he also brings him to a place where he can say “yes, and ...” to our prayers.

“David,” the LORD says as the Bible continues to unfold, “you’re not just going to live *through* your descendants. I’m going to give you a life that will literally never end.

Do you know what I think is happening here? With David? With me? With you? Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has placed eternity in the hearts of women and men. We don’t always feel it. But it’s there---the desire to live forever; the reality that we were *made* to live forever.

And, as John’s gospel especially helps us to see, growing as a follower of Jesus is in some ways as simple as realizing that eternal life has already begun for us in Jesus. Every day for a Christian believer is a new chance to believe in, and to live from, the eternal life that’s already ours in Christ.

So the psalm sings of God’s grace in the recent past: God’s victory in David’s battles and in David’s own heart. It sings of God’s gracious gift for the future: eternity for David’s throne and even for David.

### **Third, the people sing of God’s work in the present.**

What’s interesting is that in verses 8-12, the singers turn from praising God to encouraging the king. Why does he need encouragement? Because he’s still got enemies (8). There remain battles to fight and win. There are still foes out there who

## Summer in the Psalms, Part 5: Royalty Psalm 21

(11) are plotting all kinds of evil. David needs encouragement---even after a great victory.

You know, if you're someone who does not trust in Christ, one of the hardest things to get you to accept, is that you cannot win the battle against the evil inside you and around you.

But, for those of you who *DO* trust in Christ, one of the hardest things for you to really believe is that, with Christ at your side, you *really can* win battles against the evil inside and around you.

With the smile of your Father waiting for you to return from battle; with his words of blessing on the tip of his tongue, ready to be spoken to you when you return; with a crown of righteousness ready to put on your head when you come home.

With Jesus you aren't helpless against sin and temptation, against despair, bitterness, laziness, anger, rage, jealousy, envy. Why? Because, thanks be to God!, he gives us the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ, and we fight in his strength.

Jesus has won the decisive battle: past; and Jesus has guaranteed that the war belongs to him too: future. And that makes all the difference as you get up out of bed and fight another day---for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit to be worked out in your attitudes, words, and actions, all day long, for his glory and for your good!

### **Jesus Sings Psalm 21**

Really? Can I really rely on God's victory to empower my daily battles? David and his people believed it all those years ago. But can we believe it today?

We can, and we must, because Jesus has sung Psalm 21 with his own voice and with his own life, for us.

God the Son was almighty for all eternity. But then he became a baby, and a boy, and finally a man. Entering into our weakness, frailty, need.

## Summer in the Psalms, Part 5: Royalty Psalm 21

Jesus learned to pray *as a man*. It's one thing for him to speak to God the Father as God the Eternal Son, equal in power and glory. It's another thing for Jesus to pray as a human in frail human flesh, facing temptation, feeling the weakness that is common to all of us.

Most of us, if we're weak, but we persevere, we grow stronger. But even though Jesus always persevered through temptations and trials, he is ultimately stripped of his strength. Jesus goes to the cross and became so weak that he, the author of life, actually lost his life.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, he prays to his Father. He must have prayed, verse 3, "Father (verse 3), I'm going to go out to battle, and as I win this horrible victory at the cross, promise me that you'll come out to meet me, crowning me with a crown of gold, and blessing me with your words."

The crowds ran out to greet him and hail him as king on Palm Sunday. But the Father calls him to go out into battle---outside the city walls, to Calvary---to win for us the victory.

As he lays down his life and says "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," he's trusting that his Father will sing (verse 4) "You asked for life, and I am giving it to you for ever and ever."

When Jesus trusts his life to his Father and is obedient even unto death on a cross, he's trusting that the cross and the grave won't be the end. He's trusting that his Father will raise him, vindicate him, in that his Father will say (verse 5) "Through the victory I am giving you, your glory is going to be great."

You know, the New Testament is interesting when it talks about the resurrection of Jesus. *Who did* the resurrection? Sometimes it says that Jesus rose. "He is risen!" But sometimes it says that God the Father raised him from the dead. Sometimes it says that it was the power of God the Holy Spirit who raised him from the dead. I think this is marvelous.

And he's trusting that whatever happens, in the end, his Father will say (verse 5) "Through the victory I am giving you, your glory is going to be great."

## Summer in the Psalms, Part 5: Royalty Psalm 21

Who won David's victory? God. And David. David through God. And God through David.

Who won Jesus' victory? God the Father. And the Spirit. Oh, and Jesus. Jesus through Father and Spirit. But also God the Father, in the power of the Spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who wins your little battles when you are tempted to be harsh and not gentle; to hold a grudge instead of to forgive; to be envious instead of grateful? Who wins your big battles over the temptations to be proud instead of humble, fearful instead of courageous, bitter instead of joyful? Christ. And you. You through Christ. And, let's not forget, Christ *through* you.

If you're trusting in Christ, then you have a decisive victory in the past, won for you by Great David's Greater Son, King Jesus. You have the promise of a future with never-ending blessings and overwhelming joy for eternity. But even if you're in Christ, you've got to wake up tomorrow and live for Jesus when every temptation inside and out calls you to live for yourself. How are you going to possibly live the whole day for the honor of your King? How are you going to make it through the day at all?

Answer? (9) Appear for battle clothed in Christ. When you wake up tomorrow, bringing all the power of Christ's past royal victory with you, and all the security of your eternal life with the King with you, stand up with Jesus, in his strength, and go to battle against the evil in your own heart, and in the world around you---not fighting people, but fighting evil--in the power of Christ.

There are pubs all across England called "The Lamb and Flag". And usually there's a slogan written on their logos--it's also the slogan of the Moravian churches: "Our Lamb has conquered. Let us follow him."

Your King, Jesus, the Lamb, has conquered.

Let's follow him.

Amen.