

Psalm 20 Matt Taylor 7th June 2026

I want you to imagine with me that the lieutenant of your commanding troop is handing out the anthem that has been written by your commanding officer. There we go, there's another one there. And you're gathered round as your squad. The anthem has been written by your commander-in-chief, the King. He is your champion, the one who leads your army against the enemy. For years and years, David, your king, has had the same message. Look guys, others They trust in horses. Others, they trust in chariots. But we, the army of the living God, we trust in the name of the Lord. That has been his rallying cry. And he's lifted out. You all know the story of when he fought that Philistine giant. What was his name? Goliath? Everybody knew that he went when he was a shepherd boy to the then King Saul. And when Saul put the armour on him, David shook it off and said, no, I'll just go as in my normal kind of shepherd garb. And he said, I'm going to trust in the name of the Lord. And Goliath comes out to him with his sword and David says, no, I come to you in the name of the Lord. And we all know what happened, don't we? A little stone swung and smack the forehead Goliath falls down.

And so David pens this anthem for his people. And so altogether they say, may the Lord answer you when you are in distress. May the name of the God of Jacob protect you, etc, etc. And then verse 6, the king replies to his gathered people, now this I know, the Lord gives victory to his anointed. And then verse 9, altogether the people say together, Lord, give victory to the king, answer us when we call. You see, Psalm 21st written is a psalm written by the King David for his people on the verge of battle. The 2 main voices, that of the people, whether it's the army or the nation singing this anthem. We could debate that. But it's clear, verse 6 to 8 is the voice of the king. So the first voice, verses 1 to 5, is that of the people's, for want of a better phrase,

invocation to their king. And they say, may the Lord answer you, O king, giving us victory.

So look, there's seven times that word may comes up. And it gives that sense of the verbs that it's attached to, saying, let it be so, or as the youth from South East London used to say, allow it. Let it be so, let this happen. See, their lips are speaking to the king, but their hearts, well, they're directed up to the Lord. See, it's the Lord, their God, who's going to give, or they long to give, the king answer and protection, verse 1. Help and support, verse 2. Remembrance and acceptance, verse 3. His heart's desire and success, verse 4. So that, verse 5, they the people get that joyful victory in the name of the Lord. And so we've got the summary, invocation, that prayer with blessing. Prayer wish blessing, verse 5, may the Lord grant all your requests. The invocation, the prayer wish blessing of the people.

Have a look with me to verse one, because there's a key idea here, that the hope of the covenant people is focused in the covenant het, because in him lies their victory. So verse one, that's why they talk about the God of Jacob. See back in Genesis chapter 35, Jacob has said, I will build an altar to God. who answered me in the day of my distress. If you were to watch the box set of Genesis series 8, and that is the story of the sons of Isaac, Jacob and Esau, then you'll know that the day of trouble for Jacob was when he faced his brother. And his brother had 400 men with him. And behind Jacob was his household. See, Jacob, many years before, had cheated his brother out of his birthright. And Esau had said, I will kill you. And he meant it. So Jacob, what did he do? He fled and he spent many years with his relative Laban. And then he returned to the land of Canaan and he was going to meet his brother. And on the way back he met the Lord. He wrestled with him. And in that moment everything was in that meeting between Jacob and Esau. See if Esau and his 400 men killed Jacob, well the household were done for. All the hope of the household, the covenant people, was focused in on Jacob, their covenant

heads. You can read the story and you can find out that, well, Esau welcomed him. He had peace with his brother, life in the lands. And as with Jacob, so too with David and the nation of Israel in his day.

The people say, may the Lord answer you when you are in distress, in the day of your trouble. May the name of the God of Jacob protect you. That is literally to lift you up and put you on the high shelf. You know what it's like at home. Those precious things when the grandchildren come round that you actually don't want them to break. Where do you put them? On the high shelf. The place of safety and protection. And that is what the people are praying would happen to David, that as he goes into battle, the Lord places him on the place of protection, the high shelf.

Verse 2, may he send help to you from the sanctuary, from the good place, the father's home, the mountain of the Lord, from Zion. This is just the drama that we saw a couple of weeks ago in Psalm 18. when the cords of death were entangled around David and the Lord came down from heaven and rescued him and brought him out of the waters of chaos and landed him onto the safe place. That experience of David so much of the time in his life, that is what they are praying that the Lord would do for him on the verge of this battle.

And then verse 3, may the Lord remember all your sacrifices. Now these sacrifices, verse three, they're not the guilt offerings and the sin offerings that were to cleanse from sin. No, they're actually the grain offerings and the burnt offerings, which are the ascension offerings of the tabernacle and the temple. And the way that these worked is that you would identify with your lamb or your goat. And as that goat was offered up on the altar and it was consumed and the smoke raised up into the heavens, it was as though you were united to that and you ascended up to God. It was an offering that spoke of the sanctification of the person, that they were one with the Lord.

They had ascended up the mountain of the Lord, if you want. And so as the people say, may the Lord remember your grain offerings and accept your burnt offerings, what they're asking is for their king to be one with the Lord. That he would be the righteous king. Because remember, all their hope is founded on their covenant head, the king.

And we get this theme coming through in verse 4 again. See, it's key for the people that their king is friends with the Lord. First of all, that he may give him the desires of his heart and make all his plans succeed. And this is really key if you're a private in the army. This week I've been listening to the rest's history podcast and they've been doing a couple of series on Gallipoli, which is 1915, when the first sea lord of England, that's why Winston Churchill had a great plan to capture Istanbul and kick the Ottomans out of the war. And let's just say, if you don't know your history, Gallipoli doesn't work. The plans of the first sea lord failed. And that was disastrous for 130,000 souls lost by the plans of a man that failed. Do you see that the plans of your commander in chief, your champion, for them to succeed what does that lead to, verse 5? Shouts of joy of victory, lifting up your banners in triumph. No wonder the invocation, the prayer at the end of verse 5, may the Lord grant all your requests.

And after the people's invocation, then comes the king's reply. Verses 6 to 8. Now this I know, the Lord gives victory to his anointed. See the king replies and he essentially says, look guys, there's one truth I believe and that is that the Lord gives victory to me, his anointed. In one sense you could summarize the beginning of verse 6 in three words. Yahweh, the Lord, the covenant God, the one who made promises to Abraham and has kept them, the one who met Moses in the burning bush, the true God of the Bible, Yahweh gives victory. I mean, in the Hebrew, the word is Yeshua, from which the people called people Joshua, which then in the New Testament is Jesus. And Jesus's name means God will save his people from their sins. Salvation. The Lord,

salvation, who? His anointed or his Messiah. Yahweh, Yeshua Messiah. This is the one truth that David knows.

It's the drama of Psalm 18. He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand, rescuing him. This is the thing, the cycle they know, the Lord rescues his Messiah. And so verses 7 and 8, this is the refrain. Hey guys, the Ammonites, the Egyptians, the Philistines, they trust in horses and chariots, the drones and the nuclear warheads of their day. But we, the army of the living God, we trust in the name of the Lord. And look at the outcome. Verse 8. The others will be brought to their knees and full, conquered under the Lord's king. And yet we will rise up and stand firm. When the guys who were translating the Old Testament into Latin came to this verse and the word rise up. They used the word *resurreximus* from which we get the word resurrection. We rise up, resurrected to life, salvation, victory.

You can imagine the stirring emotion around the army as this song, this anthem is sung. And the people's prayer is summarised, verse 9. Lord, give victory to the king. Answer us when we call. You could paraphrase the anthem as this. God save the king.

This is how King David and his people would have sung Psalm 20. But I think there's another way in which David would have sung Psalm 20 as singing it about his seed, his son to come. You see, God had made a promise with David that actually there would be a greater son of David to come in whom all the promises of God would find their fulfilment. that this king would not just bring peace and victory to the nation of Israel, but to the whole cosmos. And we've been seeing that, haven't we, in Psalms 15 to 24.

So David prays in verse 1 that the Lord would answer this son of David in the day of his trouble against those cosmic enemies of sin, Satan and death. that Yahweh would send him help from heaven, that he would be in the closest

relationship with the Father, truly ascend up to the mountain of God and know the Lord, that all his plans and desires of the righteous King would succeed. Psalm 18, that he would be the head of the nations, that all things in creation would be united under one head. even the son of David, and such that there would be cosmic joy, that the mountains and the hills would break forth with songs of joy, and the trees and the fields, they would clap their hands in rejoicing of the victory of this son of David.

And this David is sure of because he knows one thing to be true, verse 6. Yahweh Yeshua Messiah, the Lord gives victory to his anointed. David knows that evil will surround this son yet to come. Yet the Lord will answer him from his sanctuary. He will give him victory. Now this son of his won't trust in the sword but in the name of the Lord and will literally be resurrected up from the dust of the grave. and will stand firm in all eternity.

And so David prays Psalm 20, God save the king. God save the king. And we know, don't we, that the Lord answered this prayer of David in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was surrounded by his enemies in the Garden of Gethsemane. facing that great day of trouble. But he didn't trust in the sword when his disciples whipped them out in the garden. He said, put them away. He trusted in the name of his Lord. He was crucified, dead and buried. But as we proclaimed in the Creed, on the third day he rose again. And he's ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Standing firm forever.

You see, our hope after the covenant people of God is in our covenant head, our King, who is Jesus. And because our hope is focused in him, that means we can have salvation and joy. It's why we can sing, as we did at the beginning this morning, our God reigns. He is seated on the throne. And that is literally true. That's amazing, isn't it? And that should be stirring our hearts. We gather Sunday by Sunday to proclaim this reality. And yet, we

shed tears, don't we? Because our ailments, our sins, our sufferings mean that we do not yet see Christ reigning over everything. Creation groans, not shouting with joy. We long for the day. We know that we have some victory, the penalty of sin being paid for. And what a joy that is, that we can know the presence of God, we can meet with the Lord in the Lord's Supper. And yet we still pray your kingdom come.

Maybe this diagram is helpful. I can see flaws in it already. But the Bible speaks, God speaks to us that we are the body of Christ, that united to Christ by faith and we are his body. Christ is the head and he is in heaven. And we the body are still here on earth. this metaphorical reality. And it means that actually we can still pray and we should be praying Psalm 20 with our lips towards Jesus and our hearts lifted up to the Father, praying this invocation, this prayer wish blessing upon Jesus Christ. with us as his body here on earth. We can sing Psalm 20 about Jesus.

Because I don't know about you, but the anxieties, sins, sufferings of this life, it's tempting not to put our trust in Jesus but the visible powers of our age, chariots and horses if you will. Money, self, politics, all these things are going to be our hope to get us to the good place. But the call of Psalm 20 is trust in the name of the Lord our God.

We need to sing Psalm 20. Lord, answer Jesus. Verse 1. When he is in distress, protect him, lift him up to the high shelf. In his body, the church persecuted. Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Jesus said, when Saul was persecuting the church. praying that the Lord would protect us when we're tempted to sin. And we pray this in hope, knowing the future to come, that death is not the final story, that life triumphs over death.

And verse 2, help sent from heaven to the body of Christ on earth. That word help comes up in Hebrews chapter 4 verse 16. And what's remarkable there,

as the writers in the Hebrews says, is not that we just wait here on earth and are asking for help to be sent from heaven, but actually we can have confidence to draw near to the throne of grace ourselves. Because united to Christ by faith, our life is in heaven. We can come to the throne of grace to receive mercy. and grace in time of need. The mercy, the tender compassion and kindness of our Saviour. The one who's more willing to give than we are to ask. And grace, the strength to endure those ailments in our lives which just won't go away. Longing for our resurrection bodies. Grace, that faith in times of fear. I do believe, O Lord, help me overcome my unbelief. Patience to keep walking with Jesus in the dark valley of suffering. Self-control in a moment of temptation to obey. The grace of courage to witness. On Monday morning, what did you do at the weekend? I went to church and we learnt about the hope we have to come. Or the wisdom in those perplexing moments, I just don't know what to do, Lord, give me your wisdom from above. Praying, verse 2, to the Lord that he would send the body of Christ help from his sanctuary.

Verse 3, remember your body on earth, that it's sanctified with Christ, that our life is with him in heaven, that we can enter into God's presence now, really, through Christ. That as he's ascended into the heavens, we too are ascended with him. Or verse 4, praying that the Father would give Jesus the Son the desires of his heart. And what is that desire of Christ? Well, John 17, Christ tells us it is the complete unity of his people to have that glory shining out. And we need that, don't we? In all our differences. We need that unity, that love, that desire of Christ. And what's Christ's plan? Well, it is to have all things gathered under him. and we can pray to the Father asking that his kingdom would come and the desires and the plans of his heart would succeed.

And then verse 3, praying that we would shout for joy over your victory, both now but in the future, praying and longing for that glorious day when all our words will be hallelujah and praise to the Lord. What a great day that will be.

We can pray in faith verses 1 to 5. And as we do, we can hear the voice of our King replying in verse 6. Now this I know, the Lord gives victory to his anointed. Yes, we've seen that in David. We've seen it in Jesus on the cross. But there is a last battle to come. When Jesus will destroy all sin, death, Satan once and for all. How do we know that victory will come? Yahweh Yeshua Messiah. Or Lord Jesus Christ. Our hope is found in Christ alone. Or as we sing, in Christ alone my hope is found.

And as we do so, as we set our hope in Jesus Christ our Lord, there will be others around us trusting in the horses and the chariots, the visible powers of this age. And the outcome is that they will be brought to their knees and fall, both in this age and the age to come.

Last Saturday I was ill and I couldn't do much so I binge watched a program called The Cage on BBC iPlayer. It's like a five-part series. And in this BBC drama there are various characters who have a wealth of various differing problems Whether it's their family problems, addictions or life cycles they've got themselves into. And the cage in the casino where all the money is stored, in one scene it kind of throbs as the answer. And so through various schemes and the drama drags out over 5 episodes, they all place their hope in the money, the horse, the chariot of this age, to give them hope. And what happens? the very thing they put their trust in, the cage, entraps them. They end up falling to their knees in this age. There is no hope actually at the end of this five episodes. Don't watch it. Well, you can watch it, but that's the answer. There's no hope found in the cage.

But the world around us will tempt us to put our trust in these horses and these chariots. But we need to sing Psalm 20 to encourage each other that in Christ alone our hope is found. Don't trust in the money, trust in the Lord.

How are we to do this? Well, we sing God Save the King. These Psalms 15 to 24, they're in this kind of chiasm structure, if you will, chevron shape. And so Psalms 20 to 21 are paired with Psalm 18. And if you hear when I preach Psalm 18, you'll know that I began it by quoting the Scottish national anthem. A flower of Scotland, it pained me to do so as a proud Englishman. So as this kind of lines up with Psalm 18, I'm going to encourage you to sing the English national anthem.

God save the King. And I hope as the World Cup starts that you'll get to hear it eight times all the way to the World Cup final. And as you sing it, reappropriate that and sing it of our King, the Lord Jesus Christ. God save our gracious King. I can't remember the rest of the words. Long live the King. God save the King. And as you're there in front of the TV with your snack bowls and your Coke ready, send that up as an arrow prayer, will you? For the King, the gracious King, to reign supreme, for Jesus to come back and restore all things, for in him alone our hope is found.

Let me lead us in a prayer. Lord Jesus, you are the conquering king. In you we hope. We long for that day when we will shout for joy over your complete victory. Where our own broken, stupid, sinful selves will be done away with once for all. where the suffering we endure from this broken world will be but a memory. We long for that day when we'll lift up our banners in the name of our God and all our words will be but hallelujah, praise to the Lord.

May the Lord answer you when you're in distress. May the name of God of Jacob protect you. May he send you help from the sanctuary, grant you support from Zion. May he remember your sacrifices, accept your burnt

offerings. May he give you the desires of your heart and make all your plans succeed. May the Lord grant all your requests.

And all God's people said, Lord, give victory to the king. Answer us.