

Songs for a King

Trustworthy Name

Psalm 20

Mark Vroegop

"TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID.

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you! May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion! May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! Selah May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans! May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners! May the LORD fulfill all your petitions! Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. O LORD, save the king! May he answer us when we call" (Psalm 20).

I'd like to take a quick survey before I get into our text this morning. I have a question I'd like you to consider:

If you had the option, how many of you would want to know the challenges and trials you are going to face in 2019?

It's an interesting question, isn't it? I'm sure you've thought or said something like, "Man, I wish I could know what is going to happen this year." But do you really want to know? Would you really want to know all the details of the challenges you'll face in 2019?

One reason that it might not be helpful is the fact that anticipating a season of difficulty is often worse than actually walking through it. If you talk to Christians who've experienced deep suffering, they will tell you how surprised they were about how God supplied what they needed at just the right time.

Suffering Christians will tell you that they don't like the hardship. But they will also tell you that they've tasted and seen God's help through their trial.

So, if you are not a Christian, what will you hope in when difficulties come? I trust you know how important that question is. You may even be in church today because you are trying to figure that out. I'm glad you are taking that step.

Psalm 20, in just a few verses, helps us understand how God's people are to think about "troubles."

During advent, we are studying the royal psalms. They celebrate the reign of an earthly king, while also pointing us to Jesus. They highlight the trustworthiness and faithfulness of God as they relate to Israel, while also creating a longing for the Messiah.

Last week we looked at Psalm 18. It celebrates the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God at a very important time in David's life. Prior to that, we studied Psalm 2, a song that asked, "Why do the nations rage?" We learned about the paradox of God's reign and our rebellion.

Psalm 20 invites us and shows us the importance of three words: *hope*, *faith*, and *trust*. Hardships of any kind raise the question of what we hope in, what or whom we believe in, and what we trust in. Psalm 20 calls us to trust in the King of Kings.

This message may be helpful if you are walking through a season of "trouble" right now. You'll be able to see how David processes the challenges in his life, and you'll see how Jesus gives us even greater confidence. It may be that you are going to need the content of this message at some point in 2019. Perhaps you are not facing a huge challenge at the moment. You should listen carefully because there are concepts in this psalm that will be helpful to you for the future.

Let's use three words serve as guideposts for our journey: *hope*, *faith*, and *trust*.

Hope in God's Help

Every psalm in the Bible emerges from some kind of context or situation. Some of the best and most memorable songs are created in the same way, aren't they? Songs capture the full range of human emotions, and the book of Psalms, the song-book for God's people, is no different.

Psalm 20 starts with a focus on *hope*. Specifically, this psalm identifies the hope found in God's help.

Once again, we find a brief description before verse one. The text tells us that David composed this particular song, but we do not know the specific circumstances behind its writing. However, we have some clues.

As you look at verses 1-5, can you identify a repeated word? Notice that every verse starts with the word "may." In some verses, the word is used multiple times. Count all the uses of the word "may," and you'll discover seven appearances of the word.

Now, think with me about what that means. If someone says to you, "May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble" what is happening? The person would be blessing you or petitioning on your behalf. Or you could think of it as a prayer. That's what the first five verses are all about.

We have seven prayers connected to hoping in God's help.

However, what I find fascinating here is the fact that David wrote this psalm, and these prayers are offered on behalf of the king. In other words, David composed a psalm in order to direct the attention of his people in how they should pray for him.

Take note of this. Psalm 20 leverages the worship of God as the people of God pray for the king. David instructs his people how to pray for him. We'll learn more about why in just a minute.

As a pastor, I resonate with this idea of helping people know how to pray for you. I'm asked fairly regularly how people can pray for me. It's one of the great joys of pastoral ministry. But here's the thing—as I share the prayer request, I'm always mindful of both the kindness of the people asking and the opportunity to shape their prayer life by what I ask them to pray about. Imagine, for instance, how disappointing it would be if I said, "Pray the New England Patriots lose this weekend. Pray that traffic will be light during my commute on Monday. Pray that my kids get me a nice Christmas gift. Pray that I don't burn the hamburgers at lunch today." Do you feel the awkwardness?

Years ago, at my last church, our Christian school hosted an annual golf marathon as a fundraiser. One year I thought it would be a neat idea to position myself at one of the tee boxes and ask each dad, "Before, you hit your tee shot, let's take a minute and pray for your kids. Tell me what you'd like to pray about." It was telling. And often disappointing. The "go-to" answer was "Pray that my kids will be healthy and safe." Health and safety—that was the request for about 50 percent of the dads.

Now don't get me wrong, health and safety are important. But I would think—even hope—that there are bigger and more biblical prayers.

David Michael recently wrote a fabulous 65-page book called *Big, Bold, Biblical Prayers for the Next Generation*. Here's what he said:

. . . when we pray for the next generation, our first prayers should be for the greater things—the big things—the Kingdom-sized things, as we trust God for the lesser things. This does not suggest we should neglect praying for the smaller things, but rather we should prioritize our prayers toward the greater . . . It is certainly fitting to ask our heavenly Father to give our children a fun day, help them learn to share with their siblings, do well on their math test, heal them when they are sick, encourage them when they are discouraged, provide for their education, give them a godly spouse, and provide us with lots of grandchildren! However, too often our prayers for the next generation are limited to our concern for lesser things, and we neglect to pray God's greater purposes for our children. . ."¹

So, as we think about the word *hope*, what are hoping for? And what does that say about where you are spiritually right now? Your prayers, and what you ask people for, says a lot.

If we look at verse one, we can guess that David composed this psalm as he anticipated a battle or some major trouble in front of him. If we look at verse 7, we see a focus on chariots and horses, which seems to further suggest that David anticipates a war. And he needs the prayers of God's people.

Trouble of any kind clarifies what we really long for and desire. Hardship tends to reveal our hearts and focus our prayers.

¹ David Michael, *Big, Bold, Biblical Prayers for the Next Generation*, (Minneapolis: Truth78, 2018), 17.

So what kind of requests does David make? What kind of hope in God do we find through his prayers? There are seven:

1. God hears (v. 1) David's petition is simply that God would hear his request in the day of trouble. When anguish, difficulty, or problems come our way, this psalm directs us to place our hope in a God who hears our cry. This psalm calls on God because the psalmist believes that God cares. By the way, this is one of the reasons Jesus stunned his disciples by inviting them to address God as "Father" (Luke 11:1-2).

2. God protects (v. 1) The second prayer is for God's protection. But the text specifically says "the name of the God of Jacob." This statement connects God's protection to the historic name of God. The name of God is directly associated with God's character, name, and power. When Moses delivers God's people, he goes with the name of God (Exodus 3). Jesus invites us to pray in his name (John 14:13). God's name is protective because of the substance and character of the creator is behind it.

3. God provides (v. 2) The third prayer relates to spiritual power and divine assistance. Sanctuary and Zion are words that represent spiritual resources. The people ask for God to provide supernatural help. In the New Testament, we talk about this as God providing grace. God promises to give us the grace we need (2 Cor. 9:8). Because of Jesus, we are invited to ask him for the grace we need (Heb. 4:16).

4. God forgives (v. 3) The people pray that David's heart would be in a right relationship with God. They ask that his sacrifices and offerings would be acceptable to God. They are hoping in God's mercy that David's heart is in the right place. No wonder the writer of Hebrews marveled at the one-for-all sacrifice of Christ, so that Christians who've received Jesus can now pray, "Help _____ remember that he's acceptable to you through Jesus" (Hebrews 10).

Notice, by the way, the Selah after this verse. This is a place to pause and consider. It's the only one in the entire psalm. I wonder if it is because of the importance of what verse three communicates.

5. God fulfills (v. 4) The people pray that David's desires and his plans would be fulfilled. This does not mean they are asking that everything David desires, God grant him. Rather, they are asking God to help his plans so they fit with God's will. This would be similar to how Jesus prayed, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

6. God delivers (v. 5) The people anticipate and hope in the deliverance that God can provide. They pray expectantly for the day when they will shout for joy at the way in which God helped David. The people imagine setting up victory banners because of what God has accomplished.

7. God answers (v. 5) The final prayer longs for David's prayers to be answered. The people pray for the success of what David requests. They desire for God to intervene. "Answer his prayer, O Lord!" is what they ask.

Now when you take this list together, it's an amazing catalog of some big, bold, and biblical prayers. Some of you have personally experienced these types of prayers. You may have faced a season of trouble, and you have personal experience that God hears, protects, provides, forgives, fulfills, delivers,

and answers. You've seen it. But you may need to be reminded today how the Lord helped you in the past so that your faith can be strengthened today.

You may be listening to this message, and you don't know where to turn. The trials of life have actually opened your heart to consider some foundational and personal things. The first step is realizing you need help.

Advent reminds us that God intervened in our trouble. God displayed that he hears, protects, provides, forgives, fulfills, delivers, and answers through the sending of his son!

Faith in God's Salvation

The second critical word that we need to know in trouble is *faith*. Trouble challenges what we believe. Hardship requires faith. In other words, what you believe is tested when uncertainty, difficulties, or confusing circumstances emerge. This psalm expresses confidence in God's ability to save.

The voice of the psalm shifts in verse six. After praying the seven petitions in verses 1-5, the people are now directed to affirm what they believe. The blessing of their king now shifts toward a collective recommitment to what they know to be true.

Take note of this if you are in pain or if someone near you is walking through difficulty. It is important to rehearse what you "know" so that you continue to "know it" as you make your way through challenges or when you face troubles. We need to preach to ourselves!

It sounds like this in verse six—"I know that the Lord saves his anointed." There is faith in God's promises and in his power.

Remember that the royal psalms are formative in our understanding of the Messiah. The word "anointed" here is where we get that title from. And once again, we see the double meaning here. The people are expressing confidence that God will deliver the anointed one—David. God promised the long-term reign of David and his family line.

So, their confidence was not in David, but in the promise of God. They had faith in what God said about David and his future. And they prayed in light of those promises. You need to know that these people were not just wishing something would happen; they anchored their requests on the bedrock of God's promises.

One of the reasons God's people lament is because they know God's promises and the world doesn't always immediately line up with what they know to be true. Lament is the language for living between believing the promise and seeing the promise.

They also believed in God's power. When they prayed about God answering them with the saving might of his right hand, this goes all the way back to how God had powerfully worked in the past. God's right hand is a symbol of his power. The Song of Moses, which was written after the deliverance from Egypt and through the Red Sea says,

“Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy . . . Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them” (Ex. 15:6,11–12).

God’s right hand was the means of deliverance for Old Testament Jews.

The people based their prayers on what they knew to be true and on what God did. They said, “God, I know what you said. I know what you’ve done! Do it again, Lord!”

Advent celebrates the ultimate moment of God’s promises and his power. For generations, the people waited for their Messiah, and then God delivered. For centuries there was a longing for a permanent sacrifice to reconcile God and mankind, and God did it! The coming of Jesus was the merging of God’s promises and his power in one person.

In the same way that Israel looked to the right hand of God as their symbol of deliverance, we look to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Messiah died and rose again. And every time we have a funeral we say, “I know what you said. I know what you did. Do it again, Lord!” We look for the day when God will deliver every person who has trusted in the Messiah.

We put our faith in him now for the forgiveness of sins. We believe his promises. We have faith in his power. We rest in his ability to deliver us. And when we doubt (which we all do), we remind our hearts that the promise is sure, his power is great, and the battle is won.

We know that the Lord saves his anointed. The Lord saves all his children!

Trust in His Name

The final word I want to highlight from this text and for you to consider is *trust*. This psalm invites us to have hope, to have faith, and now to trust.

Remember, this psalm records the desired prayers for a king as he goes into battle. The issue is not if he trusts in something; the question is what he is trusting in. We all trust in something. Even the atheist trusts that he or she is right that God doesn’t exist. Atheists trust in their belief that you cannot prove God is real. Human beings do not live trust-free lives. The problem is where our trust lies.

Notice in verse seven how the objects of trust are identified: “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” (20:7). The challenge with this verse is that we don’t feel it like the people of Israel would have. Chariots and horses do not have emotional effects on us.

But put yourself in their context. When they were going to battle, the number of chariots and horses were very important. Why? Because the other side has them! And they are critical to winning battles. You don’t win without horses and chariots.

Objects of trust typically have a few characteristics. First, they are useful. I know what they can do. Chariots work! Second, they are common. Other people have them. Third, they are safe. Their absence

makes you nervous. If everyone has something useful and you don't have it, you will feel insecure or become fearful.

I met with a team to help me with today's sermon, and we developed a list of things that are "chariot-like" that we trust in: money, careers, morality, technology, gifts, image, religion, intelligence, government, control, people, and the military. None of these things are bad, but they are not worthy of the kind of trust mentioned in Psalm 20.

Verses 8-9 celebrate the hope of the people of God as they consider their future. They are confident because of whom they are trusting. They appeal to God for help because he is their ultimate trust.

Can I ask you to consider what you are trusting in today?

If you are a follower of Jesus, I want to remind you that God calls you to trust in Christ—not just once but for the rest of your life. Have you allowed other good things to creep into your life such that they are having too much control? How would you know? Well, you know something is controlling you if you start to act ungodly when you fear losing something. In other words: If you lose it over losing it—that's it!

Why not recommit your heart right now? Tell the Lord you aren't going to trust in _____; you are going to trust in the name—the promise and the power—of God. You may be on the brink of a great year or a hard year. But I want to remind you, God is worthy of your trust. While everyone else is trusting in other things, you can trust in God's name.

Let me also speak to those of you who are not yet Christians. I would not be surprised at all if you were in church today because of "the day of trouble." Most of us found Jesus that way. It usually takes something big to wake us up out of the slumber of self-reliance.

So, let me ask you: What are you trusting in? If you died today, what are you trusting for the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life? In Psalm 20 we get a hint of what comes in plain sight in the New Testament. God doesn't deliver through chariots or horses; he saves us through Jesus.

Why not come to Jesus today? Why not trust him today and let him take over your life? Why not believe in his name? The Bible promises you: "as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

You may not want to know the future, and you can't know what's going to happen in 2019. But the Bible is very clear. After you die, you stand before God. Then what? Your only hope on that day is faith in Jesus and trusting in his death for you.

Hope. Faith. Trust. Three words that make all the difference now and in eternity.

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