

Time of trouble

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Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] This next few weeks we're going to be looking at a short series of Psalms, Psalms 20 to 24. Let's begin by prayer. Lord God, as we come together today, we thank you for the beauty of your creation.

We thank you for the sunshine, a reminder of your ancient promise that as long as the earth remains, summer and winter, springtime, seedtime and harvest will never cease. You're a faithful God and we thank you for that faithfulness, that faithfulness that brings us to yourself and that faithfulness which keeps us for yourself.

And so help us this afternoon as we meet together for this short time. Bless us as we look at your word together and speak to us right into each one of our hearts and into each one of our circumstances.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now we're going to read Psalm 20 together. You'll find that on page 456 in the Visitor's Bible.

These Psalms, Psalms 20 to 24, are Psalms of the King, specifically Psalms of David. So let's read Psalm 20 to the Choir Master, a Psalm of David.

[1 : 29] 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. May he grant your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans.

May we shout for joy over your salvation. And in the name of 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.

[2 : 31] May he answer us when we call. Amen. That is the word of the Lord. I'm very fond of music, although I'm no musician.

And one of the things I love about music is its power to transport you to other places and other times. Different emotions, different scenes.

Maybe a Swedish pine forest. Perhaps a market day in Ukraine. Hope you're working out which pieces these are, by the way. The beat of the waves on the shores of a Hebridean island.

And the rich landscape of rural England. Now whether actually this is related to the titles we give to this music, I'm not sure.

But certainly it does have that power. And it's a power at which the Psalms, the Psalter, also has. The Psalter, of course, is musical, are musical compositions.

[3 : 34] And they run the whole range of human experience. They tell us great truths about God, about the world. They tell us great truths about ourselves.

They explore the heights. And they go down into the depths with us. Indeed, the title I've given to this little series is Songs for All Seasons.

Now you could, in fact, give that as a title to the whole Psalter. Because whatever mood you may be in, whatever circumstances you may be in, you'll find something in the Psalms.

And that's why I think the Psalms have always been particularly popular among people. They don't need a great deal of background to understand.

Sometimes, of course, the background is very important. But they speak directly into our situation. And they speak directly into our hearts.

[4 : 35] So Songs for All Seasons. And today we look at a time of trouble. Next week, the companion Sam is on a time of rejoicing.

Now this is an unspecified day of trouble. Verse 1, May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble. Although it's very clearly one of approaching battle.

There are seven. Some trust in chariots and some in horses. But we trust in the name of the Lord our God. And in the specific, in its earliest context, it refers, of course, to King David.

King David, as he goes into battle against his enemies, who are also the Lord's enemies. It's also the thing you might read about in 2 Samuel 7 and 8. So it's a royal psalm.

It's a psalm of the Lord's anointed. And what's its application to us then, if this is a psalm about and for David?

[5 : 34] Now remember who David is. He's not just an ancient king. He's pointing to Jesus Christ, the Lord's anointed. The Lord has won the victory against the powers of darkness.

Just as in his day, David fought the enemies of God. And because the Lord has defeated his enemies, the Lord's people can also defeat their enemies.

We can't do it in our own strength. We can't do it by our own efforts or our own cleverness. But we can win the victory because someone else has won it for us.

And notice the name of God, the Lord, the covenant name of God. He's committed to his people by promises that he cannot and will not break.

As we read it, you'll notice there were several voices speaking in the Psalms. You often get this in the Psalms because, as originally performed, you'd probably have solo voices, choral voices, and so on.

[6 : 33] This is what's happening here. So first of all, in verses 1 to 5, we have a prayer for blessing. May the Lord answer you.

Now, the you is the king, as I said. But then that you can be taken by all followers of the king because the king has won the battle. Now, how is this going to happen?

May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble. Well, it's easy enough to say that, isn't it? Rather like what we sometimes too glibly say, I'll pray for you.

Well, of course we want to pray for others. I'm more careful now when I say this because I found I was saying to almost everybody, I'll pray for you, and ending up praying for nobody.

I think it's very important when we say, I'll pray for you, we actually carry it out. So here, it's may the Lord answer you. First of all, how is he going to answer?

[7 : 30] May the name of the God of Jacob protect you. The power of God's name. Now, this doesn't mean simply repeating it as a kind of mantra, the Lord help you, the Lord help you, the Lord help you.

Because Jesus said, don't imagine if you simply keep on repeating phrases all the time, that that will make any difference. Because that's what pagans do. You read the great story in 1 Kings 18 about Elijah the prophet confronting the prophets of Baal.

They had an all-day prayer meeting, and they had nothing to say to Baal except, Baal, help us. Baal, help us. Baal, help us. Hour after hour, they repeated this mantra, hammered on Baal's door, and Baal wasn't in.

Of course he wasn't in, because he didn't exist. It depends which God we are praying to. There's no point in praying to Baal or any other God. This God is the Lord.

The Lord's name. The name that he told to Moses when Moses, back in Exodus 3, Moses said, who shall I say sent me? The Lord says, say, I am sent me.

[8 : 40] God the I am who I am. The God of the past, the present, and the future. The God who was there before us, who is with us every day. And the God who will be there at the end and beyond.

Even in ordinary life, the phrase, use my name. You're rather nervous. You're going to see somebody, you're nervous. And someone who knows the person very well says, use my name when you go.

And that gives you a kind of, that gives you some kind of influence. Now, this is different. This is not just influence. This is the name which is above every name.

That's why we pray in the name of Jesus. It's not just parroting the phrase, oh, in Jesus' name. It's because we realize deep down, unless we pray in the name of Jesus.

In other words, unless Jesus himself presents that prayer, we're not going to be answered. We've no right to be answered. But if we pray in the name of Jesus, we will be answered.

[9 : 42] There's the power of his name. And then there's the protection of his sanctuary. May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion.

The sanctuary, the place of his presence, Zion, the city of God. Zion, of course, the Jerusalem, was often destroyed and often rebuilt.

But this is not just the earthly Zion. This is the heavenly Zion. The place where God's people gather and where God's people will all ultimately gather.

The heavenly Zion, which can never be destroyed. You see the point that's being made here. If this is a psalm about battle, battle against God's enemies, the earthly Jerusalem may often be destroyed.

God's people are often destroyed in this cruel world. But ultimately, there is a place where all God's people will be safe. Zion, the city of our God, which can never be destroyed.

[10 : 42] The power of his name, the protection of his sanctuary. And then notice how, verse 3, May he remember all your offerings, guard with favor your burnt sacrifices.

Don't misunderstand that. That doesn't mean trying to curry favor with him. That is obeying what he has commanded. And in the Old Testament, this is what he commanded.

Approach him with sacrifices. Approach him with offerings. But make sure you do it with your heart. And when Paul talks about that in Romans, he says, Present your bodies a living sacrifice.

So, it's not a case of currying favor. It's a case of obeying his word. And then there's anticipation of the answer.

Verse 5, May we shout for joy over your salvation. And in the name of God, set up our banners.

Anticipating the answer. And just before we leave this section of the psalm, look at verse 4.

[11 : 41] May he grant your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans. Now, these are not identical. We could have all our plans fulfilled and be disappointed with them.

You know how sometimes we think we want something, we get it. That's an anticlimax. As Ariel Stevenson said, to travel, hopefully, is a better thing than to arrive. That's why it's balanced with grant your heart's desire.

You see, for our plan to succeed without our heart's desire is disappointment. But as we pray, we put ourselves in the presence of God.

And part of prayer is to align ourselves with his will, so that increasingly what we pray for is his will, rather than our own fantasies.

So, first of all, then, I say we have a prayer for blessing. In verses 6 to 8, we have confidence in God's help. It may be that the first verses were sung by a choir or a group of singers, and now a solo voice, possibly David himself, breaks in at this point.

[12 : 50] It's almost as if the singer's face lights up with assurance. Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed. He will answer from his holy heaven.

This isn't whistling in the dark, of course. This isn't saying everything will be just fine. This is, first of all, not trusting in ourselves. Some trust in chariots and some in horses.

Now, chariots and horses were the military hardware of the time. The kings of Israel were told not to acquire great numbers of horses. It's not the Bible is anti-horse.

It's that horses were a symbol of military strength. Basically saying, don't trust in your military strength. I doubt if many people here are trusting in their military strength at the moment.

But we all do trust in chariots and horses, don't we? We trust in our money sometimes. Trust in our insurance policies. Trust in our intelligence.

[13 : 52] Trust in our connections. Trust in all kinds of things. None of these things are necessarily wrong in themselves. Because, after all, chariots and horses were necessary to fight the Lord's battles.

It's actually, what do we ultimately depend on? Paul criticizes, I think it's in 1 Timothy, those who trust in uncertain riches rather than in the living God.

The key word there is trust in riches. And he did not say in that letter, as many misquote him, money is the root of all evil. What he said is the love of money is a root of every kind of evil.

Money is a good and necessary thing. There's many a work of God that would not survive were it not for wealthy people who use their money in the Lord's service.

So we don't despise these things. I've even heard people saying you shouldn't take out insurance policies because the Lord will protect you. Well, it does seem to me that if there are insurance policies available, that is the Lord's way of protecting you.

[15:02] But people have to make up their own minds about these kind of things. Excuse me. I'm sure the microphone picks up all this sort of thing as well.

So negatively, we don't trust in ourselves, but positively, we trust in the name of the Lord. We trust. Literally, we make mention of the name of the Lord.

We talk about him. We proclaim his name in worship, in preaching, and in singing. It's said that the cavaliers tremble and Cromwell's iron sides raise their psalms.

I'm sure the principalities and powers of the dark empire tremble when they hear the name of Jesus. Jesus, the name high over all in hell or earth or sky, angels and men before it fall, and devils fear and fly.

See, not repeating the name as a mantra, as a talisman, but recognizing the power of that name. And when you read the Gospels, you discover how the powers of darkness fled at the mention of the name of Jesus.

[16:16] We have confidence in God's help. Notice verse 8, they collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. Now, of course, we remember very well that this doesn't always happen in this earthly life.

In this earthly life, God's people are often defeated. God's people are often killed. And ultimately, all of us die. But this is pointing forward to the greater victory that the Lord's anointed, great David's greater son, won over death and hell.

So, ultimately, this will be true. What about verse 9 then? Oh, we've looked at prayer for blessing. We've looked at confidence in God's help. And now in verse 9, we still need to keep on praying. It would be very good if we could have one prayer that would solve everything, wouldn't it?

One great experience that would set us on the road and we would never falter or sin again. I'm afraid that just does not happen.

[17:26] That's not the way it is. Thank confidence in God's past help gives us confidence in his future help. But we always need to keep on praying.

May he answer us when we call. Oh, Lord, save the King. May he answer us when we call. One victory needs to be the basis on which we look for other victories.

That's one side of it. The other side of it, this is suggesting that we can confidently pray to him again. Because if we keep on harping on past victories, past triumphs, it's as if the Lord can only move in the past.

You know, jam yesterday and jam tomorrow. Never jam today. We need to keep on praying because we keep on being needy.

Now, if we read David's life in Samuel and Chronicles, David made many blunders. Indeed, David sinned appallingly sometimes. But ultimately, David was a man who trusted in God.

[18:36] And this sermon is saying to us, when the day of trouble comes, And it would be very, very surprising if many of us here either were not facing the day of trouble ourselves or didn't know somebody who was also facing the day of trouble.

Now, what's the answer? The answer is, in the name of the God of Jacob. The answer is, in the name of the Lord our God. My final comment is this.

Back at verse 1. The God of Jacob. Jacob. Jacob, Israel. This is a parallel phrase throughout the whole of the Old Testament.

Jacob is not the deserving, worthy individual. Jacob is the cheat. Jacob is the twister. But Israel is what God made him. We come to the God of Jacob because we are so weak, because we are so fickle, because we are so sinful.

And if he saved and delivered Jacob, then we can be confident he will hear us when we pray. So let's pray. Lord God, we live in an uncertain and in a turbulent world.

[19:51] The international scene is threatening. The scene in our own land is so often so muddled and so confused. And in our own personal lives and in our hearts, we often find that we do not know where to turn.

So help us, Lord, not to trust in our chariots and horses, whatever they may be, but to trust in the name of the Lord our God and to trust in the one, the Lord's anointed, who has saved us.

It is in his name, the name which is above every name, that we bring our prayer. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.