

A Time of Rejoicing

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[0 : 00] We apologise for the quality of the sound recording on the following Bible Talk. On page 457 in the Bibles.

And we're going to begin by reading the psalm. Psalm 21. On page 457. To the choir master. A psalm of David. O Lord, in your strength the king rejoices. And in your salvation how greatly he exalts. You have given him his heart's desire.

And have not withheld the request of his lips. For you meet him with rich blessings. You set a crown of fine gold upon his head. He asked life of you.

You gave it to him. Length of days for ever and ever. His glory is great through your salvation. Splendor and majesty you bestow on him.

[1 : 23] For you make him most blessed for ever. You make him glad with the joy of your presence. For a king trusts in the Lord. And through a steadfast love of the Most High.

He shall not be moved. Your hand will find out your enemies. Your right hand will find out those who hate you. You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear.

The Lord will swell them up in his wrath. And fire will consume them. You will destroy their descendants from the earth. And their offspring from among the children of men.

They will plan evil against you. They will devise mischief. They will not succeed. But you will put them to flight. You will aim at their faces with your bow.

Be exalted, the Lord, in your strength. We will sing and praise your power. And then that is the word of the Lord.

[2 : 23] Now, let's have a moment of prayer together. Good afternoon. Good afternoon. Good afternoon. We thank you for this book of Psalms.

We thank you for the way it runs the whole gamut of human experience. Never shrinking from the depths and continually soaring to the heights. And in between meeting every kind of circumstance. Every kind of opportunity. Every kind of blessing. And every kind of soul that we can imagine. It is a book about you.

It is a book that leads us more deeply into who you are. And we pray as we take these moments this afternoon. To turn aside from the good things and the bad things.

From the ordinary. And from the remarkable. From the everyday and the unusual. That you may indeed speak to us. That this particular part of your word.

[3 : 25] Will come to us as a message from you. From the living God. We do not know each other's hearts. We do not know each other's circumstances. But you do. And so we ask Lord.

That indeed like the psalmist here. We may indeed rejoice in your salvation. And be blessed as we listen to your word. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Roger Kipling.

A writer who lived in the late 19th and early part of the 20th century. One of his poems was a poem once well known called If.

Kind of thing that a generation or two ago school children were made to learn. Beginning with the lines. If you can keep your head when all around you are losing words and blaming it on you.

[4 : 27] Some of you will understand the sentiment. Even if you do not recognize the lines. Now in that poem which really is a development of these sentiments. There occur this other couplet.

If you can meet with triumph and disaster. And treat these two imposters just the same. If you can meet with triumph and disaster.

And treat these two imposters just the same. Now Kipling did not mean that triumph and disaster weren't real and didn't happen. That's not why he called them imposters.

He called them imposters because he meant that neither of them were the whole of life. That life has its triumphs. That life has its disasters. That life has its ups and downs if you like.

That neither of them are the whole picture. Now in this psalm, Psalm 21, which is a companion piece to Psalm 20 we looked at last week. We have triumph and disaster.

[5 : 30] In this psalm, triumph last week, disaster or at least trouble. In Psalm 20, the king of Israel, David himself and possibly some of his successors, are praying for victory.

And his people are joining him in that prayer. And here in Psalm 21, there is triumph as the people and as the king give thanks for victory.

Time of trouble has been replaced by the time of rejoicing. And again we have a number of voices.

The individual voice, which is the voice of the king, David, and probably I'll say his successors.

And we also then have the choral voices, the priests, the sinners representing the people. Now remember I said last week that we can't just take this psalm and apply it to us in the raw.

We are not David. We are not the king of Israel. However, the application begins by realizing that the king, our king, David's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ, has won the victory.

[6 : 42] Has won the victory over disaster, which brings in triumph. And in him we can win the victory. That's the point. Not saying if we were like David we would win victories.

He's saying because David's son, the Lord Jesus Christ, has won the victory over all these circumstances of life, we can rejoice in and indeed share in that victory.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice it's not through our own wits and our own endurance, our own faith, but through the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let's look at this psalm as it develops in three movements. First of all, verses 1 to 7. The king's strength is the Lord's strength.

O Lord, in your strength the king rejoices. David was a man of great strength. David first comes to us as someone as a tough and experienced shepherd, who had dealt with lions and bears and other predators.

[7 : 52] But here David, or as I say another king, is not boasting in that. He's not saying, I'm a tough guy, I've won all these victories. He's saying he rejoices in the Lord's strength.

And in the story which we always associate with David, the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, when David faces Goliath, he says to him that he had conquered lions and bears and other predators, but not because he was tough and resourceful, but because he says, the Lord delivered them into my hand.

He says, the Lord will rescue me from your hand. And in a phrase that Goliath students are very familiar with, we are not David, but we have David's God.

And that is why this psalm is relevant to us. The God of David has not changed. We can know the victory. So the king describes the Lord's help.

And this is what he calls it. In your salvation, verse 1, or in your victory, the king rejoices. This is not just grudging acknowledgement. He's not saying, so well, the Lord helped me.

[9 : 09] He is rejoicing. He's thankful. He's praising. And notice as well, verse 2, you have given him his heart's desire. Now, they said last week, we can get what we want and then discover it's not actually what we want.

It's not actually our heart's desire. None of us, I'm sure, have had that kind of experience.

Encapsulated in R.L. Stevenson's phrase, to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive.

And God knows exactly, not only what we need, but deep down what we want. And I'm sure, when you look at your lives, there have been times when you are bitterly, bitterly disappointed because you didn't get something that you really wanted.

And to discover later, a lot of something far better, something laid up for you. And of course, ultimately, that will only be finally true in the new creation when our heart's desire is totally fulfilled. Our heart's desire in this world is never totally fulfilled. We're sinful. We're flawed. We get it wrong. And we meet all kinds of circumstances, as I say, of triumph and disaster.

[10 : 21] So this is not God's acknowledgement. It's real thankfulness. But also says more than victory. Verses 3 and 4. You meet him with rich blessings.

You set a crown of gold upon his head. And that, of course, was fulfilled in David's own life. But fulfilled, if you read the story in 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, after tremendous hardships, after tremendous setbacks, after great disasters of all kinds.

So it is true of David. But it's also ultimately true of all God's people. The New Testament talks about the Lord's people ultimately reigning with him in his kingdom because he's conquered death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all who believe.

Now, reigning doesn't mean that in the new creation we're going to be sitting around on marble thrones wearing crowns with gold circlets on our head. It means that we are going to resume God's ancient purpose to rule over the earth.

That was God's ancient purpose. Created humanity to be rulers, to be stewards of the earth. He's never changed his purpose. And that will happen in the new creation.

[11:37] Exactly what that means, of course, we don't know. But we will know when we experience it. So, crown of fine will, he asked life of you, you gave it to him.

Length of days forever and ever. Now, in the immediate context, that means, first of all, the endurance of David's dynasty.

Now, David's dynasty lasted for 400 years or so. It was until the people, because of their disobedience and unbelief, were taken off to Babylon.

Even in human terms, 400 years is a very, very long time for a royal house to survive. So, even in human terms, it's a long life. But ultimately, of course, forever and ever.

Because the kingdom that will come, the new creation, will not be like the Davidic kingdom. It will not just last 400 years. It will last forever.

[12:37] When Jesus, the son of David, reigns over all creation, that kingdom will never come to an end. Jesus will reign, but ere the sun does its successive journeys run, as we sometimes sing.

And the key to it all is in verse 7, the steadfast love, the love of the covenant, the particular love that God has for his people, promises he makes, which he cannot and will not break.

And he shall not be moved. That's established right at the beginning of the soul. So the righteous person, the person who lives the life of the kingdom, will not be moved, will be established.

So it's a wonderful little poem of rejoicing, of exulting, of hearts' desires fulfilled, of dreams coming true.

Now, of course, many dreams don't come true because they are just that, dreams. But this is a true dream. This will happen. And it will happen when the son of David reigns forever and ever.

[13:41] In Evidus was said before he was born into this world. Gabriel says to Mary, he will reign on the throne of his father David forever. Of his kingdom, there will be no end.

And then in the second movement of the psalm, verses 8 to 12, we have the defeat of the king's enemies. Obviously, this would originally celebrate a specific victory.

David won many victories, and some other kings did as well. It may refer to a specific victory. One of David's more worthy descendants, King Jehoshaphat, won a spectacular victory through trusting in the Lord.

You can read about this in 2 Chronicles 20. But he looks far beyond this to the final coming of the kingdom. Your hand will find out all your enemies.

Your right hand will find out those who hate you. Ultimately, for the third, as I say, when the king comes to reign. Now, notice this phrase, all your enemies.

[14:47] This clearly did not happen in David's reign. There were many enemies left. They didn't emerge for a while, but when his son Solomon started to go off the rails, they really emerged very soon and started nibbling away at the kingdom.

All your enemies clearly refers to the future. 1 Corinthians 15 again. Paul says that Jesus must reign till he has put all his enemies under his feet.

Now, this sounds rather savage language. You want to remember, the new creation isn't going to come unless these implacable enemies are destroyed. Unless, and in particular, the last enemy, that chapter says, the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Death itself. Death, which, as Paul says, reigned and does reign. This grim frontier post that brings up our earthly lives to an abrupt end.

Now, this does not happen in this world. So that enemy, the last enemy, which in a sense includes and encapsulates all the other enemies, will be destroyed when the king reigns.

[16:08] destroyed at his final coming. But it doesn't, by saying that, of course, mean that there's no application at all to the present day. We will be careful with passages like this.

Glorious stuff. We will be careful we don't lapse into the so-called prosperity gospel. You know, the kind of thing. If you, you know, if you trust in the Lord, you'll have two or three cars in your drive.

Your bank balance will be full. Your children will be both beautiful and intelligent. And you'll always be healthy.

That's what God wants for you, we are told. That, of course, leads to utter disillusionment and despair, even. Now, these things can happen. Sometimes God does bless us.

That is the point. He does bless us sometimes in this world. And we mustn't deny reaction against the prosperity gospel. We're to the opposite extreme. And say, God never gives blessings in this world.

[17:10] Death will get us all in the end unless the Lord returns in the lifetime of people in this room. But, however, death is still defeated.

Death, I'm sure there are people here who are being rescued from the very brink of death. That's a very serious illness. Perhaps something, some kind of circumstance where you despair of life which is anticipating the defeat of these enemies.

The devil will pursue us to the very gates of heaven. Nevertheless, we often find that we are rescued from these enemies. As I said, there is a need for evil to be destroyed.

Verse 9, you will make them as a blazing oven. The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath and fire will consume them. Fire is a picture of God, of God's holiness, of God's power, of God's all devouring presence.

As I say, you cannot have a truly new creation with death raining, with the spiritual powers of evil rampaging.

[18:17] You have to be destroyed. And, it's interesting in a later psalm. Psalm 98 talks about the rejoicing of creation.

Wonderful, colourful language, the rivers clapping their hands, the trees of the field rejoicing before the Lord, for he comes. What does he come for? He comes, says the psalmist, to judge the earth. In other words, he comes to establish righteousness, establish justice, and create his kingdom. So, the king's enemies will be destroyed, including the last and greatest enemy of all.

And, finally, final movement, verse 13, we end with the praise of the Lord. You notice these companion psalms, look back for a moment, chapter 20, verse 1, may the Lord answer you, may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.

And then, verse 13, be exalted, O Lord, in your strength. We will sing and praise your power. David has dropped out of view there.

[19:21] It is the Lord himself, whose kingdom will come. And, just two things. First of all, why are we so often encouraged in the psalms to praise?

Why does God appear to need praise so much? After all, we don't much admire people who insist on praising themselves, do we? The definition of a bore is someone who talks about themselves, and you want to talk about yourself.

It is not greatly pleasing to listen to people talking about their achievements or talking as if no one else has a family and that their family are something so special that the author inflicts their stories on them and you.

Why is it that God wants us to praise? You see, it is not that God needs praise, as if you are going to be diminished without our praise, it is that we need to praise.

Indeed, we are most human when we praise. When we whinge and complain and moan, we become something less, don't we?

[20:27] When we praise, it is what C.S. Lewis says, inner health made audible. In other words, inside there is a rejoicing spirit that comes out. Now, once again, the sounds are also full of lament.

Lament is not whinging and mourning about the bus being late or about the or about something like that. It is raising the huge questions, why, how long, dear Lord?

But if you read these lament psalms, you'll find interesting thing in all of them. The psalmist refuses to let go of God.

In the bleakest and darkest of all the lament psalms, Psalm 88, he addresses God as the God of my salvation. even in the deepest, darkest pit, he realizes God is the God of salvation.

So, why praise? We praise because it creates inner health and also it's a testimony, as I say, to the world around, which is why the Bible talks about the sacrifice of praise.

[21:37] And secondly, to return to where we began, it means that triumph and disaster in this world are ultimately imposters. They're not the final word.

They're only when the disaster is something which God is a good time will lead us out of, and the triumph is pointing forward to the greatness of the kingdom he has prepared for us.

Be exalted, O God, in your strength. We will sing and praise your power. Amen. Let's pray. Praise the Lord.

Praise him in the heavens. Praise him, you shining stars. Praise him, you sun and moon. Praise him, you winds. Praise him, all you people.

Sing melody to our God. And Father, we pray that our lives may be lives of praise, lives of thanksgiving, lives of, lives that give thanks to him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[22 : 46] Amen.