

2. When We Feel Vulnerable

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[0 : 00] Now, if you turn, please, to page 448 in the Bibles on your seats, and we're going to read Psalm 20.

This is one of the Psalms we're looking at in this little series, which I've called Encouraging Songs in Discouraging Times. They're realistic Psalms, and they recognize that life is difficult.

Psalm 20, page 456. To the Choir Master, 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 offerings, burnt sacrifices.

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.

[1 : 09] 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. 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 when we call. Now, we're all familiar, some of us perhaps only too often, with the kind of situation where we're almost overcome with nervousness.

When our hearts thump, when our throats go dry, and we feel we're not going to be able to make it. Perhaps it's an interview. You sit waiting for the interview, and even more so, you sit waiting for the result of the interview.

Perhaps an appointment where with somebody we'd rather not meet. Perhaps an exam. Perhaps some ordeal where we feel we can't go through with it.

[2 : 20] Maybe even now, in this room, there are people who are facing such a situation. In a way, it's very familiar. And this is what this situation, Sam, is about.

What happens when we feel vulnerable? Where do we do? What do we do? Where do we turn? Now, I think it's very important not to misunderstand this, Sam.

This, Sam, is not inviting us to live in La La Land. It's not, notice the word may, that's repeated over and over again. This is a prayer.

This is not saying, this is not saying, verse 4, God will grant all your desires and fulfill all your plans, and so on.

The Lord will fulfill all your petitions. That's not what it's saying. This is a prayer. It is important to see how the psalm develops. Verses 1 to 5 is a prayer for God's blessing.

[3 : 18] All these are good things. All these are wonderful things. All these are desirable things. And then, in verses 6 to 8, the speaker, probably the king himself, probably David, talks about the way that the Lord will answer.

And then, in verse 9, he turns again to prayer, because he knows very well that even when you're rescued from one situation, there will be others to come.

So that's the way we'll look at the psalm then. First of all, the prayer for God's blessing. In verses 1 to 5, May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble.

The day of trouble, probably here, one of David's battles, but it refers more widely, as I said, to the kind of situation I've talked about at the beginning, the kind of situation where we feel we can't cope.

And there's a particular emphasis here on the Lord's protection. May the name of the God of Jacob protect you. Now, names in the ancient world weren't simply given because people liked them.

[4 : 30] Names in the ancient world were given because it was believed that names themselves had power. The names stood for the person. May we still use that?

You have to go and see somebody, and you're rather nervous about it. And someone who knows the person well says, Go and use my name. In other words, if you go to that person and tell them you know me, that will help you to get a hearing.

What's being said here is the name of the Lord, the authority of the Lord, will protect you. That's what's being said. And the Lord, the Lord is the special covenant name, the name of Israel's God, the God committed to his people by promises that he cannot and will not break.

I say it's a special covenant name, the name of relationship. Now, anyone in a relationship knows that people have pet names which are meaningless to others.

And it's very wise, actually, particularly not always to say these names in front of others. I remember when our kids were in their teens.

[5 : 42] My wife and I became very careful about using our pet names for each other because, you know, Oh, do you know what mum calls dad? Or do you know what dad calls mum? And so on. So if any of you have teenage children, be warned.

They'll listen and they'll tell. But this name is the special name. This is at the very heart of Israel's faith. My help, says the psalmist in another psalm, is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

And so, the prayer for God's blessing is not just a prayer to a God. It's not just a vague prayer uttered into empty space.

This is the name which commands power. And in the New Testament, we are told to pray in the name of Jesus. Not just to repeat it at the end of a prayer as a kind of mantra, but because of who Jesus is, because of what he has done, and because all power in heaven and earth is given to him.

And notice also, this is not just the Lord. This is the God of Jacob. Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God are called Jacob stroke Israel all the way through.

[6 : 58] Jacob reminding them what they had been. The twisters, the cheats. Israel reminding them of who they had become. This particularly comfort is the God of Jacob. If I'm behaving like Jacob, which I often do, then it's very comforting to know that God will still hear me.

So the Lord, the God of it, may he send you help from the sanctuary, give you support from Zion. Once again, Zion, Jerusalem, used right through the Old Testament. The city, on which the city on the hill of Zion, which David conquered, but also the people of God.

glorious things of you are spoken. Zion, city of our God, he whose word cannot be broken, chose you for his own abode.

So, may he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices. That doesn't mean that you are saved by good works.

That means that these burnt offerings and sacrifices have showed you are serious with God. that you actually want to do business with him. And then, may he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans.

[8 : 14] Now, the point that's being made here is not just, I can say, right like awful commercial that used to be on a few years ago, oh Lord, give me a Mercedes-Benz. That's not what this psalm is saying.

What this psalm is saying is if we are truly praying to the Lord, if we are truly praying to the God of Jacob, our desires, the plans of our heart will be in line with his will.

And because of that, verse 5, may we shout for joy over your salvation. In the name of God, set up our banners. May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

So, you see, this prayer in the day of distress, this prayer in the time of vulnerability is concentrating on who God is. If I begin my prayers concentrating on who I am, I'm going to get very depressed.

Prayer is saying, God, I can't cope, but you can. I'm weak, but you are strong. That's the first part. That's the first part of the psalm, the prayer for blessing.

[9 : 15] And then the second part, verses 6 to 8, anticipates the answer. Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed.

He will answer from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. That's not saying everything's going to be just fine.

That would be misunderstanding this totally. First of all, it's projecting into the future. It means that ultimately whatever happens, the long-term future is safe in the Lord's hands.

But it also means, of course, that even in this life, God answers prayer. All of us, I'm sure, here can look back to times when prayer was answered in a wonderful way, when the Lord answered from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand.

That's what happens, after all, when you pray for somebody to come to the Lord, and they do. Now keep on praying until the Lord answers from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand.

[10 : 21] Now, notice verse 8-7, some trust in chariots and some in horses. Now these are the most formidable defenses in the ancient world.

That's why, that's why the Old Testament, the prophets warned the kings not to multiply horses, not because they're anti-horse, but because horses are symbols of military power.

Chariots and horses are a symbol that we're depending on ourselves and not in the name of the Lord our God. Because if we are going to know the power of God, if we are going to know the answer from his holy heaven, we're not going to get it by building up chariots and horses.

They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. And throughout Scripture, this is a point made over and over again.

In the book of Isaiah, Isaiah says to King Ahaz, the same thing, don't trust in chariots and horses, trust in the Lord. If you do not stand in faith, says the prophet, you will not stand at all.

[11 : 35] And that's what's happening here as well. It doesn't mean that the kingdom shouldn't defend itself. It doesn't mean that because we trust in God, that we don't need to do as Cromwell said, keep our powder dry.

But ultimately, the outcome is in the hands of the Lord. And the outcome for those who trust in the Lord is we will rise and stand upright. That may mean after a crisis, but it also, of course, means at the very end, we will rise, rise from dead and stand upright.

That's what the end of the book of Daniel says, Daniel, you will sleep now, meaning he's about to die, but in the latter days, you will stand upright and receive your reward.

So, we have the prayer, we have the answer anticipated. Don't ignore verse 9 though. Oh Lord, save the king, may he answer us when we call.

Now, David is realizing that one answer isn't enough. We have to keep on praying. Once the immediate crisis is over, it would be nice to think that when the next crisis comes, we immediately trust.

[12 : 50] No, we don't, of course, because every crisis is a new test of faith. Oh Lord, save the king. And the king here is David, but David is also representing his people, of course.

So, the time of trouble, the day of trouble in verse 1, has become the time of prayer. And if we are going to experience the blessing of the middle part of the psalm, we're going to have to realize it's sandwiched between two sections of prayer.

What this psalm really is, it's a call to pray. Jesus told the parable in Luke of how people always ought to pray and not to give up.

Now, what does praying do? Praying is looking at the reality, looking at the world, but also looking beyond it at the unseen reality, the Lord sending help from Zion.

So, what do we do when we feel vulnerable? Samus tells us we need to pray and by praying, we're putting our vulnerability within the power of the living God.

[13 : 59] We're placing our weakness in God's hands and saying, God, you are in charge, I'm not. That's what prayer is about. So, let's pray now.

Amen. God, our Father, as we live our lives in this world, we know that we are very vulnerable. We know that we cannot handle the things that life throws at us.

And so, we trust in you, our shield and our defender. Yours is the battle. Yours shall be the praise. We thank you for the privilege of praying to you and ask that we may indeed, day by day, pray and keep on praying, believing that you, the Lord, will indeed send help from the sanctuary and give support from Zion.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.