**Prayer for victory**  26/2/23 dkm

Read: Psalm 20, Romans 8:31-39

Text: Psalm 20

Psalms: 147:7-11, 20, 33:10-22, 72old

Whenever we, my family, get into the car to go anywhere we pause to pray. We began doing this in India where driving is so hazardous and trains may or may not run! Our prayers would be to keep us from getting sick on railway food, to protect our luggage from thieves, and to reach our destination no more than a day late! Driving in Sydney is quite hazardous these days, so it is good to pray. Besides, we find that in pausing to pray we are thinking of where we are going and what we are taking; we forget things less than if we simply slammed the door and took off. When we embark on more extended journeys or on significant changes in our life we pray more, usually over days or weeks before.

This psalm was written by David as he prepared for battle; although the reference to a ‘day of trouble’ in verse 1 makes it applicable more generally, and applicable to us. The psalm begins with the people praying for the king as he prepares for battle, praying for the Lord to help and give victory. The king briefly responds, confessing his faith and his assurance of God’s help. They all offer up a final brief but confident prayer as the army sets off to face the enemy.

**1. Prayer before battle**

‘*In the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus, we have the victory,*

*In the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus, Satan will have to flee.*

*When we stand in the name of Jesus, tell me who can stand before,*

*In the mighty name of Jesus, we have the victory*’.

Do you know this song? It expresses the same confidence in the Lord as this psalm- only the enemy is different, or is he? David was in the first instance speaking of a physical battle against an earthly enemy with horses and chariots (20:7), but in the opening verse he leaves the situation open as a ‘day of trouble’, as we have mentioned.

The psalm begins with the people praying for their king or their ‘anointed’ (20:6); the ‘you’ in the psalm is singular. They are actually interceding before the Lord on behalf of their king: ‘May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble’ (20:1). The Philistines may have assembled yet again to attack Israel. King David would lead his army into battle, but not before seeking the counsel and blessing of the Lord. David went up to the house of the Lord to pray, and to make offerings and a burnt sacrifice (20:3). The temple was not yet built but the tent of meeting housing the Ark of the Covenant was in Jerusalem, set up on Mt Zion.

The words of intercession are for the Lord to remember, ‘**all** your offerings’, so maybe the reference is to David’s ongoing offerings and sacrifices. We should be in the habit of worshipping the Lord at all times, not just in the day of trouble. So when the day of trouble comes it is natural for us to seek the Lord. In the university where I taught in India, a Christian institution, I noted that at exam time the Catholic students became more regular in worship, while the Protestants stopped coming to church, apparently because they needed to study! I hope the true believers kept coming to worship just the same in the ‘day of trouble’.

‘May the name of the God of Jacob defend you’ they said (20:1). Jacob is the same name as Israel. This name simply, but importantly, identifies ‘the name by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12). Sometimes Hindu students would come to church in order to have another name or another god to help them. I trust no Christian thinks to do the same! And let us not think that some form of vain repetition of the name of God or Jesus will defend us. Let us not think that having a cross painted on our shield or helmet is acceptable. We do read of them carrying ‘banners’ in verse 5, but these were most likely tribal banners or flags under which they gathered for battle.

Furthermore, the prayer is, ‘We will remember the name of the Lord our God’ (20:7). They were trusting in this name because it is a name above every other name, a name associated with the living and all-powerful God. Knowing a name means knowing the person, and in this case believing in that person who is the covenant God of Israel. What happened to the sons of Sceva when they called upon the power of Jesus, ‘the Jesus whom Paul preaches’ (Acts 19:13f). The name of the Lord or of Jesus is not some magic charm. If you don’t know Jesus and don’t believe in his power to save you, don’t ask him! We must pray in faith. Studying for exams when you would normally be in church is not a demonstration of faith.

The prayer of the people was that the Lord send help from the sanctuary and out of Zion (20:2). The ‘sanctuary’ as such was the tent of meeting but the term itself can, and indeed does, refer to the heavenly sanctuary (20:6). The sanctuary on earth was built according to the pattern or plan the Lord gave to Moses. Zion is also a term that can, and does, have a heavenly reference. The people were not thinking of taking the Ark out of the sanctuary and into battle, as was done in the days of Eli- and the Ark was captured by the Philistines.

The people in this psalm were praying to God who is spirit and cannot be manipulated by men. We offer up our prayers and wait upon the Lord; we cannot force his hand. We pray in faith and we wait in faith. We wait for an answer just as these people did, but we wait with an assurance expressed in verse 6.

We have already referred to the offering and sacrifices made by the king, and presumably by the people also. Under the new covenant we offer up the sacrifice of praise, from lives offered to the Lord as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God (Heb 13:15, Rom 12:1). It is interesting that the giving of alms, as well as the prayers of Cornelius, are noted even before he was converted (Acts 10:1-2).

In presenting our bodies to the Lord as a ‘living sacrifice’, we are saying we are ready to do the will of God, that ‘good, acceptable and perfect will of God’ (Rom 12:1, 2). In doing this our desire becomes the same as the Lord’s will; our desire is to do the will of God. So when the people pray, ‘May He grant you according to your heart’s desire, and fulfil all your purpose/plan’, they know that the king’s desire is to do the will of God (20:4). It would have been utterly foolish to go into battle knowing it was not the Lord’s will.

The king has consulted the Lord and made offerings to the Lord, so he went off to battle anticipating victory. The people went off with the same expectation: ‘We will rejoice in your salvation’ or victory (20:5). Again, ‘The name of the Lord’ is their battle cry, just as it was David’s in his very first battle against Goliath (1Sam 17:45). The tribal banners under which they assembled for battle will be held high in victory.

When the apostle Paul was contending with false teachers in the church at Corinth he wrote of spiritual warfare (2Cor 10:3-6); he was not going to fight according to the flesh or the world, but with spiritual weapons, mighty weapons given us by God. Prayer is the greatest of these weapons (Eph 6:18), along with the word of God and the shield of faith. Paul was determined to fight error in the church in the strength of the Lord, and he was ready to punish disobedience. We are in a spiritual battle today, a battle for the hearts and minds of people who are lost and captive to Satan. We must be putting on the armour of God, as Paul says in Ephesians 6, and be ready to defend ourselves against the attacks of Satan. That said, we know that the victory is ours in Jesus Christ. Our aim in life and death is to bring glory to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (2Thes 1:11-12).

**2. Confession of faith and assurance**

The ‘now’ in verse 6 brings a sudden change in the psalm, a change from ‘we’ to ‘I’. It seems that the king is responding to the intercessory prayer of the people. He is responding with faith and assurance, along the lines of the apostle Paul in Romans 8:31: ‘If God is for us, who can be against us’ (Rom 8:31). The battle is still future, but he speaks as if it has already been won- what we call the ‘prophetic perfect’.

The people said, ‘May the Lord answer you’ (20:1), but David now says, ‘He will answer from his holy heaven with saving strength in his right hand’ (20:6). We said previously that ‘sanctuary’ and ‘Zion’ were ultimately in heaven, and here David makes it clear that an answer will come from ‘His holy heaven’ (20:6). That answer will be seen in the Lord coming down to save them by his right hand. David went off to fight, but he did so in the Lord’s strength. He did not sit down and watch for the Lord to act, or watch as his troops went off to war- except for the time he committed adultery. We are in a spiritual battle, and we must pray, but we must also be holding up the word of life, knowing that this word is powerful to save (Heb 4:12).

David’s assurance was in the Lord saving ‘His anointed’ (20:6). The Hebrew word is ‘*messiah*’. While David was anointed king of Israel by Samuel, he was not **the** anointed of God. We have been referring to the spiritual battle that we are in today, and we noted in the words of the old hymn that victory is assured in the name of Jesus. Jesus fought the fiercest of spiritual battles when he came to live among us. He was pursued by Satan from beginning to end. The cross appeared to be victory for Satan but God raised him from the dead, thwarting all the plans of Satan and his agents. Even the cross was God’s purpose because on the cross Jesus took the penalty for our sins, thereby setting us free from bondage to Satan.

David’s confession is memorable; it reflects Moses’ victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea (Deut 20:1, Ps 33:16, 17). Pharaoh trusted in his chariots, as did the Philistines, but not David. In fact, the Lord punished David severely when, towards the end of his life, he was moved to take a census of his troops (2Sam 24). Moses saw the Lord destroy Pharaoh and his army, while delivering his own people. David trusted in the same God, the Lord our God, knowing that the name of the Lord was more powerful than the most powerful army on earth. He could trust in, or swear by, this name (20:7, Isa 48:1).

God is good at bringing down those who trust in their own strength, and raising up those who trust in him (20:8). Is this your experience? It is amazing to see Christians going to court instead of trusting in the Lord to bring them justice and victory. I once had a fellow in the church who kept his lawyer busy writing threatening letters to anyone who upset him, even to people in the church. He was also a man who boasted in personal contacts with famous people!

**3. Benediction prayer**

‘O Lord, save the king; answer us when we call!’ is another translation of the closing verse of this psalm, but what we have in the NKJV is more literal; note we have a capital ‘K’ for ‘King’, referring it to the Lord. I call this a ‘benediction prayer’, a prayer or cry to the Lord from the people and their king as they marched off to battle. You may not pay much attention to our benediction prayer but it is an important part of worship; it is not simply to mark the end of the service! It is a call to go out from the Lord’s presence to serve the Lord.

You might also reflect on the national anthem we once had, namely, ‘God save the king’; you will hear this soon at the coronation of our new king. Apparently this anthem comes for this verse, which means it is not only God save the king but the king and the people. We are to pray for the king and all in authority (1Tim 2:12), more so when we do not have a godly king like David, and when the battles we face are more often spiritual than physical.

‘Lord, give victory!’ is what the people mean by, ‘Save, Lord!’ Just as this psalm began with a cry for the Lord to answer, so it ends, ‘May the King answer us when we call’ (20:9). But it is important to note that this prayer is offered in faith and assurance, not in some vague and vain hope. They are assured that the Lord will answer their cry because as well as being the living, all-powerful God, he is also faithful to the covenant he made with them.