

PREP SCHOOL

PSALM 20:1-5 NOVEMBER 22, 2015

Good morning! It is an honor and a privilege to be with you today. Turn with me to Psalm 20. We always invite you to follow along in the text with us, whether that be in your Bible or on your phone or tablet. We believe that the Lord has a message for us today and that there is immeasurable power in the Word of God.

Here we have a song written by the great King David. Our text begins in verse one where we read:

Psalm 20:1-5 - ¹May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; May the name of the God of Jacob defend you; ²May He send you help from the sanctuary, And strengthen you out of Zion; ³May He remember all your offerings, And accept your burnt sacrifice. ⁴May He grant you according to your heart's *desire*, And fulfill all your purpose. ⁵We will rejoice in your salvation, And in the name of our God we will set up *our* banners! May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

It's been estimated that, in recorded history, there has only been 268 years of widespread peace on planet earth.¹ Of course, in the last few weeks it's been impossible to avoid news of the Paris attacks and the ongoing fighting in Syria. But we don't even have to go overseas to find examples of trouble and adversity. Here, in our church community, over the last 2 weeks, I've had various conversations with some of you. And just in those days there were reports of deaths and injuries, health concerns, a couple of car accidents, family members being hurt, homes being broken into, people struggling financially, people struggling relationally. All of these things and many more going on in our church family. In those situations some of us are gaining ground, some of us are losing ground. But, at first, I found myself thinking, "Man, a *lot* is going on around us." But then, as I continued thinking through that and looking through the prayer requests we collected at church last week, what really blew my mind for a moment was the fact that these last 2 weeks were, really, pretty normal. Another shooting. Another cancer diagnosis. All of these things, though not *constant*, are *characteristic* of our uncertain world. But today, in these verses we hear from our *certain* and powerful God.

Psalm 20 is a Psalm of great depth. First of all, it is generally regarded as being prophetic of the Messiah. It speaks of His life and work and His eventual rule over all the earth.

On a historic level, it's also a very interesting Psalm. If you go through the whole thing you find that there are 2 parts: The part that the people speak and the part that the king speaks. This was a Psalm that would be sung in the Tabernacle or Temple before a king went out to battle. Psalm 21 was sung once he returned. But here we see how David and the people would get ready for the fight ahead.

Now, on the personal level, this Psalm has a lot to say to each of us. Even if the passage isn't directly *about* us, it is of course very much *for* us. Because, not only is it directed to the people of God, but it is very applicable to the times in which we live.

Over the last few years a theme that has been recurring through our studies in the Bible is the realization that we live on a spiritual battlefield, in a war zone, and that God has sent us out as soldiers into the fight, behind enemy lines, to take ground and bring light and rescue those who are held captive by the Devil. And, more recently, we've been seeing in the Scriptures that our lives as Christians in this age are predominantly defined by our endurance through suffering.

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/books/chapters/0713-1st-hedges.html>

The Bible prepares us to face that reality. We remember that James says to us in his letter to count it all joy when we fall into various trials. Peter says that when we partake of Christ's sufferings, when His glory is revealed, we'll be glad with exceeding joy.

We *believe* that, but how do we *get there*? How do we *rest* in that instruction and activate that spiritual understanding in our lives?

Psalm 20 is a passage that gives us the theological *and* the practical. We are given insight here in how to prepare ourselves and prepare our hearts for those struggles and obstacles that we *know* lie ahead. But, of even greater value is the window we're given into the deep and never-stopping love that our God has for us.

Let's begin again at verse 1, where we read:

Psalm 20:1 - 'May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; May the name of the God of Jacob defend you;

What we have is a group of people who knew and acknowledged that trouble was coming. In their case, it was some actual enemy army coming against Israel. There, on the horizon, the troops were advancing. Of course, there were many preparations that would need to be done, but none more important than God's people gathering in God's house, to pray and worship and hear from the Lord.

In this life, especially as Christians, we should expect trouble to come. That doesn't mean we go through life acting like Eeyore: Always depressed. Always defeated. Always assuming there is no hope. That's not the kind of life God intends for us.

But we should be people who recognize the reality of the fact that we live in a fallen world. In this fallen world there is sickness and instability and storms of all kinds. We have spiritual enemies whose desire is to tear down our testimonies and our families and our churches and the preaching of the Gospel. So, we should expect life to come with turbulence and choppy seas.

That reality shouldn't cause us to despair, but it should lead us to do what we see these people doing: Gathering together to consider the Lord and call out to Him.

It says there 'may the Lord *answer*.' To get an answer, you first have to call.

How wonderful it is to pause and consider that we belong to a God who accepts our calls.

Do you screen your calls? Even if you don't, I'm sure there's that person or two in your life that when you see their name pop up on your caller ID you think, "I'm going to let this go to voicemail."

But our God doesn't screen our calls! In fact, one of the persistent themes in David's Psalms is how God hears and answers when we pray to Him and when we call out to Him. Your prayers are not in vain. The God of all glory and all power is listening and He answers. He has given us a standing invitation to come into His presence and interact with Him.

But not only does God accept our calls, He accepts our troubles. The Psalm declares, "in the day of trouble, may God come to your rescue."

This is what our God does. Isaiah 53:4, speaking of Jesus, says, “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” Peter, in his first letter, instructed us to: “cast all our cares upon the Lord for He cares for you.” God invites us to bring our burdens to Him. He’s not too busy or too important to accept our calls and our troubles, because we also find here that He is a God who accepts *us*.

David there calls Him the God of Jacob. May the God of Jacob defend you. *THAT* God is the God we’re talking about.

There’s so much backstory in that name: The God of Jacob. The God of Jacob is a God of great grace and mercy. He’s the God who takes a scoundrel, a liar and a thief, and turns him into Israel, the ‘Prince of God.’ A man of so many faults and fears and failures transformed into a beacon of God’s long-suffering and providence and loving kindness. A man saved from his guilt and sustained through adversity and blessed beyond measure.

The God who did all that is the God who desires to defend you. Literally there in the language defend means to ‘set you on high.’ As we see in the Scripture what the Lord wants to do with us, we find that God’s purpose is not just to bring us to heaven, but to bring our thoughts there now as He raises us up and lifts up our heads and sets our mind and our gaze above, to remember that we march in victory with God as our lamp and our shield.

Sometimes we’ll call a friend or a family member and say, “Come pick me up.” That’s the same call we should give to the Lord, especially in the day of trouble. “Lord, come pick me up, to see Your will and Your ways. Lift me up above the trench and take me to the higher plane that I might be a person more like You. That I no longer be wrestling against You, but submitted to Your path for my life.”

Verse 2 continues:

Psalm 20:2 - ²May He send you help from the sanctuary, And strengthen you out of Zion;

Help from the sanctuary, strength out of Zion. Zion is the seat of God’s power. As for the sanctuary, Christ is our sanctuary and He dwells within us. In John’s vision of heaven he said, “I saw no temple there, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” These people knew their help comes from the Lord. Not from chariots or horses, but from God.

Verse 2 is not just a crossing of fingers. It’s not just a ‘I hope, *maybe* this will happen.’ We have to remember that this is an inspired message from God sent through David to believers that we might know how to deal with adversity in our lives.

Jesus proclaims that His desire is to help us and intercede for us. He came and lived and died and sustains this world in order to give us life and not *just* life, but life more abundantly. One commentator wrote about God responding back to our prayers and needs and said, “I asked for life, You gave me life eternal.” These are our promised supplies as Christians. I can certainly go to the Lord for help. I’m not expected to endure the storm alone. Christ said He wouldn’t ever forsake us.

But outside of Christ a person is left defenseless. Jesus said, in John 15:5: “without Me you can do nothing.” And in Romans 8:13 we read: “If you live according to the flesh, you will die.”

It’s very simple: God’s way leads to life. All other ways lead to defeat and death. But what we see in passages like Psalm 20 is that this God of grace *wants* to be in action in our lives. As we cling to Him, He shares the spiritual supplies we need for whatever affliction or opposition that comes

against us. He is armed with all of heaven's power at His disposal, paired with His infinite love. He sees and He knows and His desire is to defend and lift and help us as we go to Him.

Psalm 20:3 - ³May He remember all your offerings, And accept your burnt sacrifice.

The great generosity of God is now compared with our personal devotion. You know, we are saved by grace, but God responds to faithfulness. We're saved by grace, but ultimately we are recompensed for our deeds. Facing their conflict, the people are calling out for help and assistance. They're calling out, "God, remember us!" And, in a moment of humility they look within and ask, "Have we remembered *Him*?" In the historical context, you wouldn't want to get to this worship service, enemy armies on the horizon, and get to verse 3 and say to a king, "May God remember all your offerings!" And have that king say, "Whoops. I don't make offerings to God. I don't give worship to God. I do not render sacrifices to Him."

It's important we recognize that this is not a "You do for me, I do for You" arrangement between us and God. It's not that I sang a worship song and said a prayer and performed the actions of devotion and now God owes me one. Not at all. But God calls us to a personal relationship with Him. He asks us to render love back to Him as He loves us. We all know people, or at least have the understanding, of those who do nothing to participate in a relationship with their friends or family, yet consistently try to take advantage of their friends and family. That's why Thanksgiving can be so tough sometimes. People who breeze in and breeze out, totally self-absorbed, and who have very little time for the rest of the family until they need something. In the day of trouble I want God to remember me, but have I remembered Him?

Now, God is not vindictive or malicious, He's a God of extravagant grace and generous mercy, but He is just. And He is not a respecter of persons. In Romans chapter 2 we're told quite plainly that God "will judge everyone according to what they have done. He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey." If you choose to reject God and not remember Him, you cannot expect His hand to be for you in the day of trouble.

We remember the story Jesus told of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Lazarus was a poor beggar, but he believed in God. The Rich Man had much when it came to earthly success, but died in unbelief. There in Hades, he called out to Abraham and, essentially, asked that God would remember him and his family. He called out for help, saying, "God do for me what I need." But it was too late. He had lived in rejection of God, refusing to acknowledge or remember the Lord and in the end he perished.

Psalm 78 talks about Israel and how despite all that God had done, all His wondrous works, all His revelation, they did not follow the Lord. And so their lives were consumed in futility. But then it says that "they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer." And again they returned and sought earnestly for God. And He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity.

For those of us who are saved, we also must remember God. Not just intellectually, but in action by offering ourselves as living sacrifices, which is our good and reasonable response to God, who loves us and has redeemed us. Because as our faith is exercised, our understanding and our patience and our ability to trust God grow, and we are prepared for the day of trouble.

Psalm 20:4 - ⁴May He grant you according to your heart's *desire*, And fulfill all your purpose.

So here we see that in the day of trouble God not only gives power for protection, but also provision for our progress: May He grant your heart's desire, may He fulfill your purpose.

On one level, desire is what *I* want. Purpose is what *God* wants. A verse like this should drive each of us to self-evaluation. Do I know God's purpose for my life? And then, right now, what is my heart's desire? I hope those two things are aligned. Because, as God loves us, He accomplishes an incredible purpose in and through us. We've already seen Jacob as an example. It is a marvelous thing to see what God's love can do in a person's life and how He can include us in His perfect plan for this world. But then we're reminded that we're to have the mind of Christ and find our identity in Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Those are to be the things that are occupying my heart and my mind and shaping my desires. So, when I look within and take stock of what I want, it shows me what kind of fruit I'm growing out of my life.

We're all starting to get those Christmas mailers from the stores. The other day Kelly's mom gave one from Target to our boys and said, "Circle the kinds of things that you like. You're not going to *get* them all, but that way I know the kinds of things you want." And they very carefully went through page after page looking for those items that they wanted.

If life was a catalog, and we had our Sharpie, what are we circling? What is it that we want and do those things line up with the purposes of God that we've been given in the Bible and that we've been called to by the Spirit? So many of the things that are desirable to our natural hearts are contrary to the warnings of the Bible. "I want to be wealthy." The Bible says that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. "I want to be safe and secure above all else." The Bible says that those who seek to save their lives will lose it, but those who lose their lives for Christ's sake will preserve it. When we're in a trial, almost all of us are prone to think, "My *desire* is to be out of this thing." When the Bible says that trials perfect us and improve our faith. That doesn't mean we can't pray for rescue, but we're to approach life from the spiritual perspective, rather than the physical.

Paul actually gives us a little starter list of things we should be desiring: He says in 1 Corinthians 12:31: "Earnestly desire the best (or most helpful) [spiritual] gifts." Those gifts of the Spirit that are given to serve the church and glorify God and accomplish ministry, Paul says *that's* what should be on our proverbial Christmas list. And if I *don't* have a desire within me for those things, or I *don't* want to serve the Lord or edify others, then something is wrong. I'm not in the same position that I see the people of this Psalm in.

And, if we're thinking that we've gone off track here, or that we've forgotten the original discussion about what we do for the day of trouble we need to realize that God's love and power and endurance flows through people who go His way and follow His will. It's when we submit to His will that He's able to supply all that we need in the day of trouble. Throughout the Bible He explains His way and says, "Come down this road. We'll walk it together. This is how to get where you want to go." After all, we know that the Lord has a love for us that wants the very best. He wants to give us the desires of our heart and complete His purpose for us in our lives, but if we do not remember Him or do not activate our love for Him, then we will be disconnected from so many of these things that God wants to do.

The Bible is full of stories of people who chose to turn off of God's path and onto another one and the end was always defeat. Certainly, we can think of people in our own lives who have lived that out as well. But rather than avoid or disregard God's way, we should celebrate it.

Psalm 20:5 - ⁵We will rejoice in your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up *our* banners! May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

Notice that the people rejoiced *before* the battle began. They saw the fight approaching, they gathered together to pray and prepare. They spent time thinking about and declaring what kind of God our God is and their response was this wonderful attitude of rejoicing praise. The day of trouble was still coming, but they were able to receive the peace and the confidence of heaven, knowing that God is a Savior and a Sustainer and a Help to His people. He sees and He hears and He moves.

We're able to count our trials as joy because we know God is working and that He answers us. We know that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. We may find ourselves facing a tough, tough battle ahead, but we can be assured that we are *definitely* moving toward victory in Jesus. And we're told here how we move forward: By setting up our banners.

For us when we think of a banner we most often picture a party decoration. In this context it's a rallying point that the army would gather under. I think it can represent both of those ideas for us. As we live out the Christian life, we're walking in the name of our God. God's banner over us is love. And so under the banner of God we can celebrate and rejoice. Every time we look to that name, our hearts can be merry and delighted in His goodness. We also move forward through life rallied under that banner. Walking in power. Walking by faith. Living under the guidance and direction of the Lord who knows the path to victory. He knows the way out and the way through.

In the day of trouble, I'm to rally under the banner and move out onto the battlefield, knowing that my God is able and He is with me and He does not abandon me to fight alone. No matter who or what I'm facing, He is able to deliver or defend or sustain me. So I can rejoice and I can confidently call out to God and know that my call is accepted because *I* am accepted. Today, if you're one of the many people here going through some difficult circumstance, be encouraged that God has not forgotten you. He knows you and He is with you. I'd invite you, during our final time of prayer and worship, to call out to the God who accepts our calls and our troubles and ask Him to refresh you and strengthen you for whatever is ahead.

But, as we close, there's another group here - there are a few of us, I'm sure, that don't have those storm clouds or those enemy armies gathering outside of our windows. You can still find a place in this Psalm. There, the people would gather to send off the king into the battle. But, of course, those same people would be the ones supporting the king. They were a connected community. So, they had these prayers for David. May the Lord answer *you*, may the Lord help *you*. But a victory for David was a victory for them. And a defeat for David was a defeat for them.

There in verse 2 it says that the Lord sends help from the sanctuary. Of course, for us, the building is not consequential the way it was to Israel. But, since God dwells *in* us, His help can come *through* us. Because God uses His people to do His work. We are the Body of Christ, filled and enabled to minister in His power.

The prayer there was that God would send help and aid and support to that person facing opposition. All of us can be a source of those things, as we stand in physical and spiritual support of our brothers and sisters. God, we know, has limitless supplies of grace and strength and you and I are called to be conduits of those great gifts in the lives of the people around us. May we remember God in prayer and praise and be prepared for what lies ahead, and may we rally together, under His banner, knowing we are not alone, but we're covered by a God of boundless love and limitless ability. May we celebrate His presence in our lives and support one another to endure.