

The Strength Of The Lord

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Date: 15 June 2025

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[0 : 00] Psalm 21 is where we find our place. Let's read it together. To the choir master, a psalm of David.

! You set a crown of fine gold upon his head.

He asked life of you, and you gave it to him. Length of days, forever and ever. His glory is great through your salvation. Splendor and majesty you bestow on him.

For you make him most blessed forever. You make him glad with the joy of your presence. For the king trusts in the Lord. And through the steadfast love of the Most High, he shall not be moved.

Your hand will find out all your enemies. Your right hand will find out those who hate you. You will make them a blazing oven when you appear. The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath.

[1 : 15] Fire will consume them. You will destroy their descendants from the earth and their offspring from among the children of men. Though they plan evil against you, though they devise mischief, they will not succeed.

For you will put them to flight. You will aim at their faces with your bows. Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength. We will sing and praise your power.

Amen. Well, if we pay attention, and I think that you do that well, if we pay attention, the Psalms add an incredible richness and depth to our worship.

And that's useful for us because so many times in our lives, our private prayers, our public praises can remain somewhat generic in their content.

It's not necessarily that we're focused on the wrong things, but that we often just focus on the same things, saying the same things, rehearsing the same things.

[2 : 23] We tend to speak of, generally, of God's love and grace, and we should do that. The Psalms, they compel us to do something more than that.

They compel us to dig deeper, below the surface, to meditate on specific aspects of God's character, and how they're displayed in His saving work.

Psalm 21 is no exception to that. A cursory reading might lead you to think, well, this is just as basic and generic as any of the other Psalms, but a careful reading, a meditative reading will prove otherwise.

And that's what we want to do today. As a companion to Psalm 20, the Psalm calls for us to follow the king's lead in rejoicing in and praising the Lord's strength and power.

We have, at the beginning, verses 1 and 2, and then at the end, verse 13, functioning like bookends that highlight the theme. Just set your eyes on it. I want you to see the correlation of terminology here.

[3 : 31] In verse 1, O Lord, in your strength, the king rejoices, and in your salvation, how greatly he exalts. Now set your eyes on verse 13 at the end.

Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength. We will sing and praise your power, he says. Bookends, giving us something of a theme to the Psalm.

The beginning, we see God's king rejoicing in God's strength, and in the end, all of the king's people are called to join him in that praise. And then sandwiched in between the two, in the middle is the meat.

Two specific ways God's strength has been displayed to his people. First, we see in verses 3 to 7, it has been displayed in the establishment of the king's throne.

And then in verses 8 to 12, we find that it is displayed in the destruction of the king's enemies. Which brings us to an important question.

[4 : 39] If the Psalm is so hyper-focused on God's work in a particular individual, this king, why is everyone called to join him in this praise at the end?

This is fundamentally about the king. It's not about everybody else, right? So why are we brought in at the end? And of course, the answer is because our life is bound up in the king's life.

His blessings are our blessings. The defeat of his enemies means the defeat of ours. Therefore, with the king, we are called to worship God for his strength in salvation.

And in this way, a proper meditation on Psalm 21 will help to deepen our worship in a manner that brings honor to the Lord, that exalts his king, and that ultimately strengthens our faith.

Now, verses 1 and 2 are functioning as what we would call a bridge here. It's a literary bridge connecting the Psalm, Psalm 21, to the one before it.

[5 : 57] Now, we need to acknowledge every Psalm stands on its own, doesn't it? They function on their own. However, it's good to remember that they are intentionally arranged. Context is king when it comes to good Bible study skills.

And in meditating on a specific song, if we consider its placement in the entire collection of songs, it will help us better understand and appreciate its meaning.

Think of the Psalms like a modern hymn book. I know we don't... Do you teenagers know what those are? Hymn books? When I was growing up, when me and your parents were growing up, we went to church buildings when we worshiped, and we had these seats called pews.

And they called them pews because they were so uncomfortable that when you got up at the end of the service, you were like, phew, glad that it's over, right? It's a dad joke for Father's Day, right?

Come on, give me something. Here we go. Thank you. On the back of those pews were these racks, and there were these thick books. Sometimes they were red. Sometimes they were green. They were called hymn books.

[6 : 58] And what you did is you went into the service. You sat in your pew. You grabbed your hymn book and your Bible, and someone would stand up at the front, and they would say, stand with me, please, and turn to hymn number, whatever.

And they would give the number, and you'd flip there in your hymn book, and you would sing the song. Now, if you dig into those hymn books, and a lot of people would take them home, how many of you have a hymn book at your house somewhere? You ever just flip through it and read through the hymns?

It's such a wonderful devotional practice. If you're having a bad day, open up a hymn book, a good one, a good hymn book, and just start reading through some of those hymns. It'll do a lot for you. You have that.

What do you find when you open up that hymn book? Each song stands on its own, doesn't it? Each song, you don't have to sing other songs in order to understand basically what it's trying to say, but yet all of those songs are arranged in a particular way.

They are intentionally placed thematically with other songs so that when we take all of them together, we can get a fuller understanding of what the theology is of the songs that we're singing.

- [8 : 02] The Psalms are functioning the same way. In the hymn book, David, most likely for a lot of them, has come through and has arranged them for us. He's placed them in specific places in a liturgical order so that when we take Psalm 21, the first thing that we want to do is we want to start looking around it to see, okay, what else is happening here in these other Psalms?

Will that help me understand this one? And when we get to Psalm 21, it's essential that we do that because as we find in verses one and two, there's this bridge that connects us directly to Psalm 20.

They are meant to be together because together they present a continuous story of God's messianic king.

It covers his suffering and then his salvation. Then it covers the establishment of his throne and then the final judgment of his enemies.

Here, David underscores the king's response to God's salvation, which was focused on in Psalm 20. Having been delivered from his suffering, the king rejoices in the Lord's strength.

- [9 : 14] He exalts in God's salvation. This word exalt is such a helpful one. It refers to a feeling or an expression of elation.

It's joyful triumph. It sets the tone for the psalm. It sets the tone for what God's people are to do when they sing it. We are to observe God's strength and how he has worked in our salvation and then exalt in his great power to save.

Expression of elation, joy, triumph. That's the tone of the psalm. And then we're reminded in verse two that this was the heart's desire and earnest prayer of the king.

Now this connects us back to Psalm 20 as well. Just look back at Psalm 20 in verse four. Part of the prayer, the blessing that the people were praying about this king, may he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans.

Verse five, may the Lord fulfill all your petitions. That's the prayer that the people are praying for the king. And now we get to Psalm 21 and immediately David says, the king now responds to God's salvation.

- [10 : 40] And he responds by saying, you have given me my heart's desire. You fulfilled my petitions. Now what was it that the king petitioned God to do?

His petitions weren't about material wealth or earthly power. Instead, he sought the salvation of his people through his own suffering and deliverance.

God the Father heard his prayer and gave him his heart's desire. And then we get to the end of verse two and we have that common liturgical term, that Selah.

What does the Selah cause us to do? It wants us, it's instructing us to stop for a second. It's instructing us to pause and just consider what's been said.

What is it that David wants us to meditate upon? Who is this king who rejoices in God's strength and exalts in God's salvation? And we must, in our meditation, realize that this psalm is not about David.

- [11 : 50] He doesn't sing of himself here. No, this psalm is about the future Davidic king and Messiah promised in God's covenant.

The king through whom God would defeat all his enemies and bring an eternal kingdom that will have no end. This psalm is about Jesus.

Jesus, the one who leads us in worship of God's strength. The one who suffered and was raised for our salvation. Now David and the Israelites, they can only sing this in anticipation of what God would do.

That's not the case for us. We sing and pray the psalm in reflection on what God has already done. But I want you to notice the way the language is given to us here.

So confident is David and the people who join him in this praise. So confident are they in God's promise that they sing of this future Messiah in the past tense.

[13 : 01] Do you see that? Verse 1. Oh Lord, in your strength the king rejoices and in your salvation how greatly he exalts. You've given him his heart's desire.

You've not withheld the request of his lips. You've already done it, God. Except, historically, he had not already done it. What is this telling us?

Well, at the end of Psalm 20, David was reminding the people to trust the Lord's promise. And here he's giving them a song to indicate that trust. They sing of God's promise as if it's already been fulfilled.

Why then do we so often, who are more blessed than they, to know how all the pieces fit together in a way that they did not know?

Why is it that we so often would sing a song like this or pray through a psalm like this with a sense of anxiety or doubt or even apathy?

[14 : 04] It's instructing us, isn't it? Now, at the end, all of God's people are called to join in the king's praise here.

But there's two motivations for worship that are expressed. First, why should we worship God for his strength? Let's see what the psalm has to say about it. First, in the Lord's strength, the king is established.

In the Lord's strength, the king is established. Look at verses 3-7. 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, forever and ever. His glory is great through your salvation. Splendor and majesty you bestow on him.

For you make him most blessed forever. You make him glad with the joy of your presence. For the king trusts in the Lord. And through the steadfast love of the Most High, he shall not be moved.

[15 : 14] Now, again, let's hold Psalm 20 and Psalm 21 together. How are they functioning together? When Psalm 20, it's given to the choir master so that the people would remember and trust God's promises.

Psalm 21 is given to the choir master to acknowledge that God is mighty to fulfill those promises. And as we've seen repeatedly throughout the Psalms, God's covenants with Israel, particularly his covenant with David, is the foundation of the song.

And what was the Davidic covenant all about? It was fundamentally about an eternal king through whom God would bless his people forever and ever.

2 Samuel 7, verses 12 and 13. This is part of the covenant God makes. This is God saying this to David. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, that's important.

We can't forget that. David died. He did not live forever. When you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom.

[16 : 28] He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. God's covenant faithfulness is what anchors this Psalm.

And the allusion to the covenant is unmistakable in verse 7. Just set your eyes on it again. It is through the steadfast love of the Most High. An oft-repeated reference to God's covenant faithfulness.

It's through that that the king will be established. Now, just put it all together in your mind. What's the covenant?

David, after you, I'm going to raise up your offspring and he will be a king unlike any other king. I'm going to give him a kingdom that lasts forever.

Now, David, in Psalm 20, tells Israel and leads them to trust that promise. And now, in Psalm 21, he says God will fulfill it.

[17 : 34] He's powerful to fulfill it. He will do what? He will establish his king. That's what this is about. The joy of the king and his people, it rests entirely on their faith in God's character, his steadfast love, and in his power to do what he promised he would do.

The king trusts in the Lord, therefore we should too. And here again, faith in God is fundamental to our worship.

Those who trust in his steadfast love will, with the king, exult in God's great salvation. Now, how is God's blessings of the king displayed?

How is it that the establishment of this king is described in the text? Let's just walk through it. He meets him with rich blessings. Now, that's going to stand in stark contrast to what will come next in the next section in God's enemies.

They are not met with rich blessings. They are met with destruction. But the king and his people, oh, they're met with rich blessings. God places a crown of fine gold upon his head.

[18 : 54] That's an image we're meant to see of kingship, royalty. In answer to the king's prayer, God gives him life forever and ever. Remember the covenant.

It's fulfilled. He clothes the king in glory, splendor, and majesty. He is called the most blessed forever.

And as we understand that term in the scriptures, we understand that the blessing of the king overflows into blessing for his people so that the king and its people are welcomed into the presence of God, not for judgment, but with joy and gladness, peace.

All of this blessing, according to verse 5, comes through what? God's salvation. How was God's salvation described in Psalm 20?

It was described through suffering and resurrection. The king is exalted to a glorious throne through his suffering and subsequent glory.

[20 : 03] In God's power, the king is thus established. David, looking ahead in anticipation to what God will do in the person of Christ, leads all of God's people to praise and worship the strength of God to establish his king and bring his people great salvation.

Now, we know this psalm isn't about David because David did not receive the blessings enumerated in the psalm. These are too great for David.

There is a sense in which his life foreshadowed his future son, but the king whose throne is established in this song is not David.

It is the future Messiah. It's Jesus. The one who, after wearing a crown of thorns, is crowned with glory and eternal life.

The one on whom God has bestowed splendor and majesty with a name that is above every name. The one who, according to the writer of Hebrews, after making purifications for sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited, is more excellent than theirs.

[21 : 24] What's the writer of Hebrews referencing? The exaltation of the king. All through the New Testament, the scriptures speak of the exalted king who, after suffering for our sins, is blessed forever by the Father.

Of course, one of our favorites is Philippians 2. Being found in human form, Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

What is it that Paul and the writer of Hebrews is picking up on? The king. It's king language. Through his suffering and resurrection, God exalts his king.

He places Jesus and bestows on him a glory that is above the glory of all other people. He's our king. Why are we to praise God's power?

[22 : 42] Because in the Lord's strength and through his saving work, the throne of King Jesus is established, and the blessings of King Jesus will overflow to all who trust in him.

That's why we should join the king in his praise. But there's a second part to this. In the Lord's strength, the king's enemies are defeated.

In the Lord's strength, the king's enemies are defeated. Look at verses 8 to 12. Your hand will find out all your enemies. Your right hand will find out those who hate you.

You will make them a blazing oven when you appear. The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath. Fire will consume them. You will destroy their descendants from the earth and their offspring from among the children of men, though they plan evil against you.

Though they devise mischief, they will not succeed, for you will put them to flight. You will aim at their faces with your bows. In the Lord's strength, the king's enemies are defeated.

[23 : 57] Now there's a noticeable shift in audience at this point in the psalm. Notice in verses 3 to 7, the attention is directed to the Lord himself, the Lord who establishes his king.

But in verses 8 to 12, it's directed toward the king. Now that God has established his king, he empowers him to rule his kingdom, defeating all of his enemies.

We're reminded here of the unity that exists between the Lord and his anointed king, a oneness of judgment that we saw first in Psalm 2.

Just flip over a couple of pages to Psalm 2. I want you to see and remember what it says. Psalm 2, look at verse 2.

The kings of the earth set themselves, the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, his anointed king. Verse 4, he who sits in the heavens laughs at them.

[25 : 12] The Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury, saying this, as for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.

What does he mean? He looks at his enemies and he says, my king will take care of you. Verse 9, speaking to the king, the Lord says, you shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Verse 12, kiss the son, he says to the enemies, lest he be angry and you perish in the way for his wrath is quickly kindled.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him instead. And we get to Psalm 21 and what is it that we find? David's drawing on that same idea. Now that the Lord has established his king, he will empower his king to judge the earth.

Christopher Ashe said, just as opposition to the Messiah is opposition to God, so judgment by the Messiah is the judgment of God.

[26 : 20] There is a oneness showing forth here between the Lord and his anointed. What is it speaking of? This final, decisive day of judgment is the focus here.

It's not judgment in general. It's the final judgment that's in view. Just as those who trust the Lord receive eternal life through his king, those who set themselves against the Lord receive eternal punishment through the king.

There's an allusion here to the second coming of Christ. It's in verse 9. When he appears, David says, the king will consume all of God's enemies in the fullness of God's wrath.

We have this language echoed in 2 Thessalonians. Chapter 1, verses 7 and 10. Paul says, the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven.

In other words, when he appears, he will be revealed from heaven. with his mighty angels in a flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

[27 : 49] They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might when he comes on that day.

The parallels there are striking, aren't they? Psalm 21, 2 Thessalonians 1, what are they speaking of? That final day of judgment. The king will return. And when he returns, he will return in a consuming fire, pouring forth vengeance and the wrath of God on all who are against God and do not obey the gospel of Jesus.

And what will their suffering be? Eternal destruction. Whereas in the first part of the psalm, the king and his people are glad and rejoice in the presence of God.

In the second part of the psalm, those who do not belong to the king by faith are facing the wrath of God. They are expelled from the presence of God, according to Paul.

Three truths are then expressed in this section about Christ's judgment of his enemies. First, we see that the enemies of Christ will not escape.

[29 : 10] They will not escape. Look at verse 8. Speaking to the king now, your hand will find out all your enemies. Your right hand will find out those who hate you.

No matter how hard they try, the unbelieving will not be able to hide on the day of God's wrath. And that's not just a matter of physical location.

Hiding from the physical presence of the king as if they could run into the caves and cry for the rocks to fall over them and hide them from the king, as the New Testament tells us they will do.

It won't work. He'll find them out. But that's not all this means. This is also a matter of the heart. God's enemies will not be able to fool him in the day of judgment.

In the strength of the Lord, nothing is hidden from his sight, including the true nature of your heart. He will find it out.

[30 : 19] No one else may find it out on the day of judgment. He will find it out. That's why the warning is so striking by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

Many will say to me on that day, on that final day, Lord, Lord, have we not done many wonderful things in your name? And I will say to them, depart from me, you workers of iniquity.

I never knew you. They will not escape, neither physically nor spiritually. He knows your heart.

Don't think you can fool him. You can't. Second, they will not survive. They will not survive. Verse 10, you will destroy their descendants from the earth and their offspring from among the children of men.

This is not so much a reference to physical children, but to those who share their spiritual identity as enemies of the king, the unbelieving, the nations and the kings of Psalm 2 that set themselves in rebellion against God and his anointed and against his gospel.

[31 : 34] No one will slip through the cracks, in other words. No one will be forgotten in the judgment, in the strength of the Lord. Third, all unbelievers will be destroyed.

Third, they will not succeed. They will not succeed. Verses 11 and 12, though they plan evil against you, though they devise mischief, they will not succeed.

Instead, you will put them to flight. You will aim at their faces with your bows. Here we're reminded that God's enemies are truly guilty.

They plan evil. They devise mischief. What does that look like? Sometimes it's blatant and obvious. Other times, it really just boils down to a rejection of God and his gospel.

They are set against God and his king, caught in their own foolish rebellion. And even as this deception is exposed to them and they understand the reality of the judgment and their guilt before God, we know what they will do is harden their hearts even further and they will rage against the king.

[32 : 54] But they will not succeed in the strength of the Lord. Jesus will win victory over every enemy.

Now this section, it's sobering, serves as a warning for everyone to examine their hearts to see if they are on the Lord's side.

And it would be unfaithful for us not to take a moment and just pause and consider that question. Are you on the Lord's side? Do you belong to the king or are you set against him?

But then we must remember that these statements are made in the context of celebration. What is the tone that was set for us in verse 1?

Joy, exaltation, the expression of elation. And that includes this section. What is it calling us to do? With King Jesus, all of his people are being called to rejoice in the fact that God will be victorious over every enemy.

[34 : 09] Which on one hand is difficult for us to do because we recognize that some of those enemies are people we love. We're reminded even then is the heart of God.

He does not delight in the destruction of the wicked even though it is right. And yet, we can still rejoice that God is victorious.

That none of our enemies or Jesus' enemies will remain. His kingdom will be a perfect kingdom. No rebellion.

No sin. No hardness of heart. all joy and joy in the strength of the Lord who through his king defeats all his enemies.

Then we get to the final verse. It wraps all up for us in 13. Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength. We now are included.

[35 : 15] First person plural. We will sing and praise your power. Isn't that what the psalm is teaching us to do?

All who follow Jesus are called to join him in his praise. With our king, we rejoice in God's strength to fulfill his promises and we exult in the salvation of Christ which he has won for his people.

for all who will trust in him and therefore by faith let us sing and praise the glorious power of our mighty God for the Lord himself is our salvation.