

Message #1

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Life of David

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DAVID, PSALM 21, AND THANKSGIVING

PSALM 21

INTRODUCTION

My general practice on Sunday mornings during this message time has been to move back and forth between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Having just concluded a study of 1 Peter in the New Testament, I thought that we might turn to the Old Testament. In the seventeen years that I have been here, I have covered most of the major Old Testament characters. The big exception is David. I have led an adult Sunday school class about David, but I have not had a sermon series about him. So I have scheduled him next on the docket.

David's name is mentioned in the Bible more than the name of any other human, including Jesus Christ. His name appears three times more than "Abraham." It appears 200 more times than "Moses." The name "David" appears over 1000 times in the Bible.

David is a central character in the books of First and Second Samuel, First Kings, and First Chronicles. He is the author of most of the Psalms. The prophet Samuel and the apostle Peter call him a man after God's heart. The Biblical history shows that he accomplished great feats of faith. Yet he also had spectacular failures. The record of his faith, his accomplishments, and his failures leave us with valuable lessons that have as much relevance today as they did a thousand years before the time of Christ when David lived.

The depth of David's spiritual life is revealed in the Psalms. David was an emotional guy. His Psalms show the extent of his pain and suffering. They also reveal the extent of his faith, especially as is evidenced in his Psalms of praise and thanksgiving. Given the occasion of the Sunday before Thanksgiving, I decided to look at one of his Psalms of thanksgiving as an introduction to the life of David.

We humans can be fairly quick in turning to God in situations of difficulty and despair and seeming hopelessness. We can be slower to express thanksgiving to God. The classic illustration of this for us Christians is the story in Luke #17 where Jesus healed ten lepers. Only one of them came back to thank Jesus for what he had done, and this man was not Jewish. He was a Samaritan.

I.

The Psalm that I would like for us to consider this morning is Psalm 21, which is found on p. 457 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs. We are first going to look at THE CAUSE FOR THANKSGIVING. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE CAUSE FOR THANKSGIVING) The information that we have for that comes from vv. 1 & 5 and from Psalm 20.

Psalm 20 is also written by David. In it he speaks of "the day of trouble." In v. 6 he speaks of being the Lord's "anointed." David was anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the king of Israel. In the last verse the author cries out, "**O Lord, save the king!**" So it appears that King David is faced with some kind of difficult situation. Often he was having to lead his country against foreign enemies. Also v. 7 speaks about having chariots and horses. So it would seem reasonable to suspect that David's situation of need is a foreign policy crisis where his country has to go to battle against an enemy.

We don't know for sure that Psalm 21 is addressing the same situation. But there are several elements in the Psalm that would fit with a reference to deliverance from the situation described in Psalm 20. Verse 1 says, "**O Lord, in your strength the king rejoices, and in your salvation how greatly he exults!**" In v. 5 he says, "**His glory is great through your salvation...**" So clearly David has experienced some kind of victory for which he gives God credit.

We know from the Biblical record that David was a fierce and brave warrior. He was an effective leader of men. But David does not give credit to his own brilliance or his bravery or his effective leadership. He credits God for the victory and the deliverance. This is where we see the spiritual depth of this great man.

As we work our way through the life of David, we will see that he was an incredibly gifted man. He had musical talent. He was called upon to use his musical ability to soothe the previous king of the country. He wrote poetry that was turned into music. We are still studying the Psalms of David three thousand years after they were written. He was a strong and brave fighter. We know the story about how he

defeated Goliath. But he also led other men into battle and demonstrated that he had great leadership ability. He became a great statesman who united his country and expanded its territory.

But David also experienced incredible difficulties and challenges. Because of these hard experiences he came to realize and recognize that his talents and abilities were truly gifts from God. He came to realize that his accomplishments and victories were the result of God's gracious and sovereign actions in his behalf. So David learned to give thanks, as we see here, to the God who is really there.

That is also a lesson that we need to learn and be reminded of regularly. We live in the midst of a culture which would so often have us focus on our accomplishments. We are entering an election season in which candidates of all political stripes will be talking about what great and wonderful things that they have done for us and will do for us. True thanksgiving recognizes and acknowledges the gracious role God has played in our lives.

II.

Consider next THE EXPRESSION OF THANKSGIVING in vv. 1-6 of Psalm 21. (II. THE EXPRESSION OF THANKSGIVING) How does David express his thanksgiving? He does it in six ways, ways in which we can likewise thank God. **First**, in v. 1 and v. 5 he thanks God for deliverance from the difficult situation that we just considered. In the second part of v. 1 he speaks about exulting in God's salvation. In v. 5 he writes, "**His glory is great through your salvation...**" David is speaking about himself as king. He is writing in what is called the third person. He is stepping outside of the story and describing himself as another person.

The salvation he is talking about is deliverance from this difficult situation. Thanksgiving is always appropriate for these kinds of deliverances. Perhaps this situation involved a military conflict confronting David. We Christians can likewise give thanks for deliverance from situations of conflict. We can also give thanks for the eternal deliverance that we have through faith in Christ.

The **second** display of thanksgiving is in v. 2: "**You have given him his heart's desire and have not withheld the request of his lips.**" We often label this answered prayer. When God solves a problem that we speak to him about, it is always good to thank Him for it.

Thanksgiving number **three** is in v. 3: **“For you meet him with rich blessings; you set a crown of fine gold upon his head.”** We might describe this as the rewards of our work. David had certain material blessings that came to him as a result of his work of being king. Some commentators suspect that the particular situation that David had in mind in Psalms 20 and 21 was the fight that he had with the Ammonites. David sent diplomats to the king of Ammon to express condolences about the death of his father. The young king dissed David and proceeded to go to war. David and his army beat up the bad guys.

In 2 Samuel #12 v. 30 (2 SAMUEL 12:30) we are told, **“And he took the crown of their king from his head. The weight of it was a talent of gold, and it was a precious stone, and it was placed on David’s head. And he brought out the spoil of the city, a very great amount.”** Perhaps these were the rich blessings that David had in mind. They were, in a sense, the rewards of his work.

But David saw God’s involvement in this. We should always recognize God’s involvement in our work. (PROJECTOR OFF) It is God who determined that we would be born and/or live in this country. It is God who gives us the health and the brains to do what we do. It is the blessing of God that we have a retirement system in this country. It is the blessing of God that we live in this time in history where we can enjoy material things that earlier generations did not even dream about.

Blessing number **four** is found in v. 4: **“He asked life of you; you gave it to him, length of days forever and ever.”** David lived a relatively long life, especially given the life expectancy in that day. He lived to be seventy. What about the “forever and ever?” My suspicion is that the author is referring to the promise that God gave to him through the prophet Nathan. This is sometimes referred to as the Davidic Covenant. It is recorded in 2 Samuel #7. In that set of promises the Lord says that David will have an eternal house and a throne that will last forever. That promise ultimately finds its fulfillment in Jesus, his descendant.

Most of us, likewise, can be thankful for a long life. Certainly we can be thankful for the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus.

The **fifth** way in which David expresses thanksgiving is in v. 5. It is thanksgiving for God’s glory. The psalmist writes, **“His glory is great through your salvation; splendor and majesty you bestow on him.”** We get glimpses of God’s glory and majesty when we get rescued from difficult situations, when we see dramatic answers to prayer.

Blessing number **six** is found in v. 6: **“For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence.”** I would describe this as the blessing of experiencing the joy of God’s presence. In some difficult times it may seem as though God is absent. In some of David’s Psalms he encounters difficult situations where it seems like God is absent. He cries out to God, asking where He is. But eventually the Lord provides some kind of resolution, some kind of reassurance, and David is able to sense His presence and the joy that comes from that. Such it is for us.

III.

The focus of these first six verses is the past. David recognizes God’s gracious intervention in what has happened in the past, and he gives thanks for it. His remembrance of this gives him confidence for the future. Thus in vv. 7-13 we encounter THE CONFIDENCE FOR THE FUTURE. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE CONFIDENCE FOR THE FUTURE)

David writes in v. 7, **“For the king trusts in the Lord, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved.”** Thanksgiving reminds us of God’s work in the past. It gives us confidence for the future. It is helpful in reminding us of God’s steadfast love. It was this steadfast love that was central to the promises of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel #7. After God promised through Nathan that he would make David’s name great and that he would have a permanent house and an eternal throne, He said this about David’s descendant: (2 SAMUEL 7:15) **“...my steadfast love will not depart from him...”**

That is the kind of confidence that we want as we approach the future. We want to know that God will be with us and that His lovingkindness will not depart from us. The New Testament version of that promise appears in Hebrews #13. (HEBREWS 13:5) Writing to Christians, the author of Hebrews says, **“...be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”**

In vv. 8-12 of Psalm 21 it appears that the congregation is speaking. It is not clear whether the people are addressing the king or God Himself. Even if it is the king who is being addressed, it is evident that the king--- David--- is acting as the agent of God. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So the text says, beginning in v. 8, **“Your hand will find out all 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 swallow 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 man. 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.” Then in v. 13 it is obviously God who is being addressed: **“Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power.”**

David’s enemies were people who literally wanted him dead. They were foreign people like the Ammonites who brought their armies to bear against David and his forces. They wanted to destroy the Israelites. David often had internal enemies who also wanted to destroy David. Before he came to power, King Saul chased him around the country and tried to kill him. Later on, David’s son Absalom would rise up and try to kill his own father.

Sometimes we have enemies who are out to do us in. A few of us have been involved in the military where we have participated in foreign conflicts where people wanted to kill us. More often our enemies have wanted our position or our influence or our power. We are reminded in the New Testament that the biggest enemies that we Christians have are the spiritual forces of evil who work for the devil. So these forces will use our own sin nature, they will use health situations and financial situations and work situations and family situations to do us in.

The testimony of the Old Testament is that God did destroy David’s enemies. In the end, he had a long and successful reign. The promise of the New Testament is that whatever battles we Christians experience on this side of the grave, we can be confident that we will have a glorious eternity with Jesus.

IV.

We come then to THE RELEVANCE FOR OUR AMERICAN HERITAGE. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. THE RELEVANCE FOR OUR AMERICAN HERITAGE) Pastor and commentator James Montgomery Boice labels Psalm 21 “A Day of National Thanksgiving.” King David may indeed have had such a day set aside to commemorate the events described in Psalm 21. Perhaps it was in regard to a victory over the Ammonites.

Certainly a national day of thanksgiving has a rich heritage in our own country. The full story of the origin of this holiday is not taught enough in our country. We Christians especially need to know it and repeat it.

For us Americans, the celebration of Thanksgiving is always linked to the celebration of Thanksgiving by the Pilgrims that happened in the fall of 1621. This is a great legacy. For these Pilgrims were truly Christian people, and the God whom they worshipped is the same God whom we worship today.

The Pilgrims were Separatists. The Puritans were Christians who wanted to purify the Church of England, but they remained within it. The Separatists went a step further and separated from the Church of England. For that they were persecuted by the English government. A group of them fled to the Netherlands in 1607. The Separatists enjoyed religious freedom there, but war was looming between the Dutch and the Spanish. The Separatists were also struggling economically. Their leaders were concerned that their young people were being corrupted by the surrounding culture. So in 1620 a group of them were invited by the treasurer of the Virginia Company to go to that colony in the New World. After a stop in England, 102 of them left for the Americas on the Mayflower. (MAYFLOWER ROUTE) Only half of them were actually Separatists. The rest were adventurers and sailors.

Governor William Bradford later wrote, **“So they left that goodly and pleasant city which had been their resting place near twelve years; but they knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits.”** It was this one statement that became the basis for people many years later calling these Christians “Pilgrims.” That was never a name that they used of themselves.

On November 11, 1620, these Pilgrims arrived at Cape Cod. (PLYMOUTH) They were far away from their intended destination. They had no legal authorization to be where they were. But winter was coming, and they had to settle in. They drew up the Mayflower Compact to govern their relationships with each other. In late December they decided to set up camp in what we know as Plymouth, Massachusetts.

The Pilgrims had a very difficult winter. Their shelter was primitive. Their food was in short supply. The Indians were initially hostile. Disease began to take a toll. In January eight of them died. In February seventeen more passed away. There were more in March and April. By spring almost half of the travelers who set sail from Europe were dead. The captain of the Mayflower decided to head back home. The Pilgrims decided to stay. Things did not look good. These well-meaning people did not know how to live in this strange and hostile New World. They may well all have died off, except that God sent them a deliverer. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Tisquantum was born into the Patuxet tribe which was a part of the larger Wampanoag confederation. The Englishmen later called him Squanto. In 1605 Captain George Weymouth set out from England to

explore the possibility of establishing a settlement in New England. He ended up kidnapping five native Americans. This kidnapping, understandably, was going to cause problems in the English relationships with the Indians.

These five Indians were brought back to England and entrusted to the care of Sir Ferdinando Gorges, a chief financial backer of this project. Some historians dispute this, but this is what Sir Ferdinando wrote later in his life: “[**Captain George Weymouth, having failed at finding a Northwest Passage**], **happened into a River on the Coast of America, called Pemmaquid, from whence he brought five of the Natives, three of whose names were Manida, Sellwarroes, and Tasquatum...**” Manida and Sellwarroes were later captured by the Spanish. The two unnamed Indians were eventually returned to Maine.

If the other remaining Indian was indeed the Squanto of our story, then Squanto would have begun to learn the English language and European culture. He somehow ended up back in New England. It is certain that he was part of another group of Indians that was kidnapped by an unscrupulous English sea captain by the name of Thomas Hunt. Hunt tricked seven Patuxet Indians and twenty Indians from another tribe to come on board with him. They were imprisoned and brought to Malaga, Spain. There he tried to sell them for £20 each.

After a few of the Indians were sold, a group of Catholic friars got wind of what was going on. They showed up and forced Thomas Hunt to give up the rest of his captives, according to Sir Ferdinando Gorges, “**disappointing this unworthy fellow of the hopes of gain he conceived to make by this new and devilish project.**” The Indians were placed in the monastery of these Catholic priests. They were instructed in the Christian faith and given various jobs to do.

Pilgrim Governor Bradford says that at some point Squanto “**got away for England.**” He says that Squanto then lived in Cornhill in London with John Slaney, who was a merchant and shipbuilder and investor in the East India Company. Squanto would have further refined his English during this time, if he had indeed lived with Sir Ferdinando Gorges years earlier. He also would have been exposed to the Protestant version of Christianity.

John Slaney was also the treasurer of the Newfoundland Company which had managed to establish a colony in what we know today as Canada. He employed Squanto to go to Newfoundland as an interpreter and a native American expert.

In Newfoundland Squanto crossed paths with a Captain Thomas Dermer, who worked for the New England Company and Sir Ferdinando Gorges. Captain Dermer sent a letter to Sir Gorges saying that he had found “his Indian,” which may lend support to the idea that Squanto had earlier been in England with this Englishman.

Squanto persuaded Captain Dermer that a fortune could be made in Squanto’s home area of Massachusetts. Dermer waited to get approval for this further adventure from Sir Gorges in England. Sir Gorges later wrote that Squanto **“drew his affections wholly to follow his hopes that way.”**

So in 1619 Captain Dermer and Squanto headed down to New England to see if they could make peace with the Indians and reestablish trade with them and see what opportunities there might be there to make money. When they arrived in the area, Squanto returned to his home village and discovered that all the Patuxet were dead. The suspicion is that the Europeans had brought with them a disease for which they had no immunity. Perhaps it was smallpox. Many other Indians up and down this coast were also killed. So notice how this bad thing, this evil thing for Squanto, his kidnapping, ended up saving him from the fate of his fellow tribesmen.

Squanto connected with a nearby tribe, part of the larger Wampanoag Confederation, which had not been totally wiped out. He met with their chief, Massasoit. Massasoit took him in to their tribal area. Meanwhile, Massasoit had met with and traded with these Englishmen in Plymouth a couple of times. On March 22, 1621, Squanto went to meet the Pilgrims.

Keep in mind that the Pilgrims were in tough shape. They had lost almost half of their numbers. They were struggling to exist in this new country. They were people of faith who were crying out to God for help, and Squanto arrived. This strange looking Native American began to speak to them in English. There were a few Indian guides who knew a little bit of English who helped English ship captains. But Squanto was probably the most fluent English speaker among the Native Americans in all of North America. Now here he was right where these Pilgrims had landed.

But not only did the Pilgrims discover that Squanto spoke English well, they also discovered that he identified himself as a follower of Jesus Christ. Can you imagine the impact that this meeting had on this desperate group of Christians? Was this all a big coincidence, or was this the working of a sovereign and gracious God who was answering the prayers of His people?

Squanto came to live with the Pilgrims. He helped to arrange a peace treaty and a military alliance between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag Indians that lasted fifty years. He showed the Pilgrims how to live in the New World. Governor Bradford later wrote, **“But Squanto continued with them, and was their interpreter, and was a special instrument sent of God for their good, beyond their expectation. He directed them how to set their corn, where to take fish, and to procure other commodities, and was also their pilot to bring them to unknown places for their profit, and never left them till he died.”**

Squanto also participated in their worship services and was treated as a fellow Christian. In the fall of 1621 he helped the Pilgrims organize a thanksgiving celebration. According to one of the participants, **“Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent foure men on fowling, that so we might after a more special manner rejoyce together, after we had gathered the fruit of our labours; they foure in one day killed as much fowle, as with a little help beside, served the Company almost a weeke, at which time amongst other Recreations, we exercised our Armes, many of the Indians coming amongst us and amongst the rest their greatest King Massasoyt, with some ninetie men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five Deere, which they brought to the Plantation and bestowed on our Governour, and upon the Captaine, and others.”** Thus took place the first American Thanksgiving celebration, the forerunner of the holiday that we will celebrate this week.

The next year Squanto contracted a fatal illness. As he lay dying, Governor Bradford wrote that their Indian friend **“desir[ed] the Governor to pray for him, that he might go to the Englishmen’s God in heaven.”** Squanto gave all of his earthly possessions to the Pilgrims **“as remembrances of his love.”**

I have special appreciation and thanksgiving for God’s provision of Squanto because he helped save ancestors of my wife. Suzy’s grandmother, Don’s mom, did genealogical research years ago. She showed us the books and charts she had researched and claimed that she could trace her ancestry back to a woman by the name of Mary Allerton, who was born on the Mayflower as it crossed the Atlantic Ocean. The General Society of Mayflower Descendants says that there are ten million living Americans who are descendants of the people who crossed the Atlantic in that small boat.

Romans #8 v. 28 (PROJECTOR ON--- ROMANS 8:28) declares, **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”** The Pilgrims recognized that truth, especially in God’s provision of a deliverer for them. Many of us have recognized that truth through our own experiences as well. Even in the midst of the difficulties of life we who have trusted in Jesus as our Savior can be confident that God is working out His perfect plan, just as He was for David, and that in the end we will have much reason to be thankful.

Let's conclude this part of the service by having you lead out in short prayers of thanksgiving. Let's pray and have many of you just give short prayers for whatever you are thankful for.