



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Our Ever Present God

Psalm 20

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Last Sunday I was catching a flight to Las Vegas to officiate a wedding for some former students who are now dear friends. My flight was scheduled to depart at 12:45pm from SFO and land in Vegas at 2:20pm. The rehearsal started at 3pm so I knew it would be a tight schedule to keep. Things were going well until I received an email from Southwest Airlines letting me know that my flight would be delayed. The new departure time was 2:30pm and landing in Vegas at 4pm. Well, that was bad news.

Now there is something I need to confess to you. I don't like it when my flight is late. It makes my armpits sweaty, it raises my body temperature, and for some reason it tends to stress me out! I'm sure I'm not the only person this happens to, but this is generally my experience, especially when other people are waiting for me. My first inclination was to scramble and find something different. I got online and checked some things and then something came over me. Instead of getting upset about the change I decided to trust that I would get to Vegas. I accepted that I was probably going to miss the rehearsal but maybe there was a chance I'd make it.

I figured the best thing to do was to get to the airport at the same time and see if I could catch another flight; maybe take two legs of a flight instead of a direct flight. I arrived at the airport and there was no other option. The best option was to stick with the original flight plan. I sat at the airport for four hours as I watched my flight get more and more delayed. I fought my natural bend and just trusted that Southwest would get me to my destination. During this whole time I never questioned if I wouldn't make it. I knew I'd make it to Vegas because I've flown Southwest before. They have safely flown me to many destinations. They have never failed to get me where I'm heading.

Do you have a company who you trust as much as I trust Southwest? It's a company you've been using for years and have a good rapport with them. Think about this in terms of your spiritual life. Think about how you trust God. Maybe you trust God in all situations but maybe there are some areas of your life you prefer to be in control of. My experience with Southwest is similar to our experience with God. It's not the same but the analogy helps us understand how we do or do not trust God when times become difficult. Things may not happen in the time we expect them to happen but God always comes through. Even when things might not go your way you can trust in God.

This morning I've titled the sermon *Our Ever Present God*. We're going to study Psalm 20 and talk about how we can trust God because He is faithful. The language of the Psalm is smooth and easy to understand. The penmanship is clear. There is also a natural flow. The Psalm begins with a request from David on behalf of God. Then we see a move to looking back on the faithfulness of God; because of God's past faithfulness Israel can trust God for their future no matter what is happening. Finally there is a request for God to answer the prayers based on His past reliability.

May the Lord...

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress;

may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.

May he send you help from the sanctuary

and grant you support from Zion.

May he remember all your sacrifices

and accept your burnt offerings.

May he give you the desire of your heart

and make all your plans succeed.

May we shout for joy over your victory

and lift up our banners in the name of our God.

May the Lord grant all your requests

(Psalm 20:1-5)

The first five verses make up the first section. The first five verses read very similar to a prayer. Some scholars think of it as a prayer while others look at the verbal language and have concluded that it's not a prayer. So then what is it? The first five verses appear to be more of a declaration of confidence in God or a blessing to the people. It wouldn't be abnormal for the king to bless the people of Israel; in fact, it was common for a king or priest to bless God's people.

The subscript in the Psalm tells us it's a Psalm of David. Therefore we know that David is asking God for all these things, though these verses are written in the third person. It can be a unique way to talk to God in the third person but here it works for David, especially if God's people are listening. So David is making this declaration talking about himself in the third person.

David begins by declaring that God will answer him in his distress. David knows that God will help him in times of trouble (Psalm 20:1-2). The first two verses are repetitive; David is saying the same thing in different words. May God answer you and may

God send help to protect you in times of distress are basically the same thing. The help comes from the sanctuary and from Zion. Zion is not an earthly location but the heavenly dwelling place of God.

There is a reason David is expressing this confidence in God. The king is in distress. David does something very creative here. He reminds God that his forefather Jacob was once in distress. Did you know that God changed Jacob's name to Israel? Jacob cheated his brother out of his blessing and then fled to live with his uncle. He served his uncle Laban tirelessly for many years. He endured hardship as a shepherd in the fields. He suffered loss at the hands of wild animals. One day he was fed up with how he was being treated and decided to flee to his homeland. But the situation there wasn't much better. He would be returning to his brother; the brother he stole his father's blessing from!

As he traveled home he became fearful of his brother and the possible wrath he would endure for his previous actions. The Bible tells us Jacob was in great distress as he planned to meet his brother (Genesis 32:7). Right after dividing his family, people and flocks he cries out to God for help. He cries to God in his time of distress. If you read the story you will see that God answered his prayer. The meeting with his brother Esau went so well that Jacob referred back to God answering his call later in his life (Genesis 35:3).

David uses this story to subtly remind God He has helped his people before. Not that God has to be reminded of what He's done but it shows that David knows about the faithfulness God has displayed in the past when His people are in trouble. If you are in distress today you can know that God has helped others who were also in distress. God has come to the aid of His people who have been in trouble.

David continues his declaration by asking God to remember the sacrifices he has made in the past. David is probably referring to the sacrifices that are lined out in Leviticus chapters 2 and 3. This would be animal sacrifices and grain offerings made at the Temple of the Lord. For us the sacrifice or offering is different. Unless there's something Rob hasn't told us, we don't bring animals here to give to Rob for his service to the Lord! Our offering is monetary, the sacrificial giving we offer to the Lord. David is not insinuating that God can be bought, he is simply declaring the sacrifice he has made.

There is a continuation in verse 4 from verse 3. The reason David can say this is that his heart's desire is to serve the Lord. Some translations will read: "May God give you the desires of your thinking..." In the original language the word for heart refers to the chest, breast, will or conscience. So this is a difficult one to get exactly right. For our English language the desire of the heart is more understandable than the desire of our thinking. David is known as the man after God's own heart. David has a heart that

longs for God. When we look at David's entire life we see him encouraging others to delight in the Lord (Psalm 37:4). When you are delighting in the Lord who do you think will be the main desire of your heart? God!

The plans that succeed are the plans that are laid out in a desire to bring God honor. Think about some of the plans you've made recently. Narrow that down to one plan you recently laid out. It could be a housing plan, a work plan, a family plan or a personal plan. Now try to determine to yourself if that plan was a success or a failure. You may already know the answer. Now think a little more about the plan. Was the plan a desire of your heart as you delighted yourself in the Lord or was the plan something you did on your own trying to prove to God that you could do it? Hopefully you learned from that plan and how it fits in God's plan for you.

Listen to what A.B. Simpson says about delighting in God: "There are two ways of getting out of a trial. One is simply to try to get rid of the trial, and be thankful when it is over. The other is to recognize the trial as a challenge from God to claim a larger blessing than we have ever had, and to hail it with delight as an opportunity of obtaining a larger measure of divine grace."

There is something greater going on in the Psalm that we have yet to read as God's people are encouraged to delight in Him. As we come to verse 5 and wrap up this first section there is a change that people with an eye for literature will catch quickly. The first four verses each have two stanzas per verse. The fifth verse has three stanzas; it breaks the pattern the king has been using. If you've had a suspicion that something greater is taking place you are right. Here is the point where we completely grasp that something greater is taking place.

The trouble that is looming over them is a trouble that will effect the entire community and not just the king. The distress of the king is something that will impact the wellbeing of his people. But verse five has the sense that the battle has already been won. In times of war a nation would only wave the banner after the battle had been won. The warriors would shout for joy upon defeating their enemies. They won't wave the banner today but they are trusting in that they will soon wave the banner in victory.

David makes a final statement. He has confidence that God will do all the things he has spoken of. He also has a confidence that God will grant all his requests. This encapsulates God answering him, seeing his life of dedication and knowing his heart is dedicated to the Lord. The Psalm only has hope. The hope is in God alone. It speaks in varied ways about God's faithfulness to His people.

Now this I know...

This hope and confidence in God's faithfulness suddenly turns to the certainty of how God has acted previously.

Now this I know:

The Lord gives victory to his anointed.

**He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary
with the victorious power of his right hand.**

**Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.**

**They are brought to their knees and fall,
but we rise up and stand firm (verses 6-8).**

There is a change here. David now turns to what he knows about God. David has made his declaration and now he turns to remind the people about God's past faithfulness. In these verses David shares his personal experience with God. The listeners would most likely have the same experience. David wants to remind them about God's hand on their life in this difficult time.

It seems like David is looking back to the two verses as he continues. Do you see the connection? He talks about victory coming from God. David has seen God grant him victory time and time again. David could give an account of all the times God has come to his aid. David knows that God answers from his heavenly throne room. No matter what the circumstance might be, David wanted the people to trust in God. David is now looking back on God's faithfulness to help the people see they can trust God. There is victorious power when God's hand acts on behalf of His people. The people need God's hand to act in this situation.

Psalm 20:7 is one of my favorite passages in the entire Bible. When we read it in David's words it's meaningful, but let me read it in a way that might make more sense to us: "Some trust in their education, their job, their retirement plan or the zip code they live in but we trust in the Lord our God." History tells us a battle is coming to the Israelites. We think this battle will be with the Syrians. The Syrians had battle-ready horses and chariots. The Israelites, on the other hand, had been instructed by God not to accumulate many horses (Deuteronomy 17:16).

The horses would entice the people to trust their capability and not trust in the Lord. Think about this. If you were to enter battle would you prefer to be on your feet or on a horse? It's really a no-brainer question. You would want to be on a horse that is fitted with protective armor. The horse would give you a significant advantage. You could strike your enemy from above and not run out of breath as quickly. The horses and chariots would create a loud noise as they approach their enemies creating a fear in them. Once the chariot was on the battlefield it was fitted with a scythe that would literally cut foot soldiers down as it drove through the enemy.

Listen to what the great pastor Charles Spurgeon said about this verse: "Chariots and horses make an imposing show, and with their rattling, and dust, and fine caparisons, make so great a figure that vain man is much taken with them; yet the discerning

eye of faith sees more in an invisible God than in all these. The most dreaded war-engine of David's day was the war-chariot, armed with scythes, which mowed down men like grass: this was the boast and glory of the neighboring nations; but the saints considered the name of Jehovah to be a far better defense."

Israel is reminded that they need to trust in God to win this battle. The Israelites might have been flooded with memories of God acting on their behalf before. Maybe they thought about the time God used Gideon and 300 men to destroy an entire army (Judges 7:22). They might have thought about the time God sent hail stones on their enemies in battle (Joshua 10:11). There was also the time that God sent His army to destroy the Philistines with marching in the tree tops (2 Samuel 5:24).

God has proved Himself faithful in helping His people in the past. David exhorts the people to once again trust in God's faithfulness. Those who trust in horses will be brought to their knees. Those who trust in horses and the false gods of the Ancient Near East will fall under the power of the Lord. But the Israelites will rise up and stand firm. They will once again see the faithfulness of God in their life and taste the sweet victory of the Lord.

Can we be honest? It's easy to talk about trusting God when sitting in church. It's easy to hear about the faithfulness of God. It can be tough to apply this to our lives when things seem to go awry. There are times I have a tough time trusting in God. When this happens I look back to His past faithfulness. Many of you know our family is moving. I've accepted a call to serve at a church in Ventura. We're moving in two and a half weeks and we still haven't signed a lease for a place. In all honesty it scares me. But I can look back on the faithfulness of God and trust Him for my future. So can you. This is what David is encouraging us to do to: Trust God! He is faithful.

Our God Will Answer

Lord, give victory to the king!

Answer us when we call!

This Psalm concludes in verse 9. David knew that God wouldn't leave His people hanging. David has seen the faithfulness of God displayed in his entire life. Once again he longs to see God give victory to His people. David requests for God to answer. The answer would be God's aid in battling the Syrians. Many of you have seen the same thing, just not in the situation of a national war. You've seen the faithfulness of God displayed in your life and therefore you too can trust Him. David knew that he must lead the Israelites to God before he led them to the battlefield. It was in all of their best interest to place their hope in God before marching to the battlefield. David trusted God to bring Israel through this national crisis.

How joyful Israel must have been to have the piety of David as he led. In all his positive attributes David still failed as a leader. David was a flawed human being just like us. But let me tell you about a leader who **didn't** fail God's people. When we read this Psalm with New Testament eyes it points us to the sacrifice Jesus Christ made on the cross. Christ experienced distress in the Garden of Gethsemane as He prepared for the cross.

As you read the Gospels you see that Jesus desired to avoid the cross but He knew it was the only hope you had. If Christ had avoided the cross salvation would be unavailable for you and me. Jesus was like a lamb lead to the slaughter. Jesus Christ made a sacrifice just like David had made but Jesus' sacrifice was His own body. He made this sacrifice because you are the desire of His heart. You are the object of His affection. As Christ hung on that cross He thought about you. Since this sacrifice was made you can shout for victory and rejoice. You can wave your banner because Christ is victorious over death. He conquered death. He choose to trust Himself to God and has risen to the right hand of the Father.

In this selfless action of Jesus, God answered our deepest desire so we could be in relationship with Him. Those who place their trust in Christ will experience the final victory over death. Those

who place their trust in Christ will rise up and stand firm in the end! If you are a Christ-follower take comfort in what Christ has done for you. Trust God! He is faithful in your life. If you have yet to place your trust in Christ there is no better time than now.

As you look to the future of what God wants to do with this church return to this Psalm. When you are in times of distress, like I was last week at the airport, return to trusting in God's faithfulness. Do this because there is excitement in the future of what God is doing here.

I'm excited about the future of New North! Continue to stand firm in the call God has given you individually to impact this area for Christ. Remember the faithfulness of God in your personal life. Think about all the ways He has provided for you. After you've done that think about God's faithfulness in the life of this church community. God has grown this body numerically, spiritually and in strength. You have so many reasons to trust God because He has been so faithful to you!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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