

Reasons for Rejoicing in Culture's Chaos

Psalm 21

Studies in the Psalms #21

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WE'RE at war, brothers and sisters! I said this last week in Psalm 20 and I say it again: we're at war as citizens of Christ's kingdom in the midst of the kingdom of this world. This war is spiritual. Most likely you know Paul's words, "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds." But do you know the rest of it? Don't ever forget what Paul says we're fighting against: "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Let me give you two examples.

First, on April 23, 2015, Hillary Clinton, spoke of "reproductive health care"—a euphemism if there ever was one!—saying, "Laws have to be backed up with resources and political will. And deep-seated cultural codes, *religious beliefs* and structural biases *have to be changed.*"¹ Make no mistake about it, brothers and sisters, in the world we are entering into there is no

¹ <https://hillaryspeeches.com/2015/04/24/women-in-the-world-summit-3/>

freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, there is only the freedom to agree! More recently on May 6, 2016, Harvard Law School professor Mark Tushnet said, “The culture wars are over; they lost, we won.” Who are “they?” Conservatives and Christians. “For liberals, the question now is how to deal with the losers in the culture wars...My own judgment is that taking a hard line (‘You lost, live with it’) is better than trying to accommodate the losers.” What does that look like? He compares it to the way the world dealt with Nazi Germany and Sun-god worshipping Japan after World War II.² And these are just two examples. There is a spiritual war going on in which Satan is seeking to devour the children of God (Rev. 12). Times are tough and they’re only going to get tougher.

But I believe Psalm 21 gives us *reasons for rejoicing amid culture’s chaos*. It’s a Psalm of joy and celebration as it opens, **O LORD, in your strength *the king* rejoices, and in your salvation how greatly he exults!** and then it ends with **Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power** (vv. 1, 13). But why rejoice? Remember that Psalm 20 is a petition for King David’s success in battle and prophetically of Christ’s

² <http://balkin.blogspot.com/2016/05/abandoning-defensive-crouch-liberal.html>

success; and Psalm 21 is a thanksgiving for that success.³ Psalm 20 ended with this prayer: “O LORD, save the king!” And now Psalm 21 opens with this thanksgiving: **O LORD, in your strength the king rejoices, and in your salvation how greatly he exults!**” (v. 1) Psalm 20 prayed, “May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! ... May he grant you your heart’s desire and fulfill all your plans! And now Psalm 21 thanks God: **You have given him his heart’s desire and have not withheld the request of his lips** (v. 2). Psalm 20 prayed, “Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand.” And now Psalm 21 thanks God: **He asked life of you; you gave it to him, length of days forever and ever** (v. 4). So in what are we to rejoice? Jesus Christ.⁴

Jesus *Has* Conquered

The first *reason for rejoicing amid culture’s chaos* is that *Jesus has conquered*. **O LORD, in your strength the king rejoices, and in your salvation how greatly he exults!** (v. 1) What is this Psalm speaking on prophetically? The resurrection of Jesus Christ. Back at the end of World

³ Beza, 160.

⁴ The ancient Jewish interpreters translated its open line this way: “O Lord, in your strength the anointed [*mashiach*] king reigns.” *The Targum of Psalms*, trans. David Stec (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987), 56. See Cajetan, 160–161, and Musculus, 164.

War II there was VE-Day to celebrate victory in Europe and VJ-Day to celebrate victory in Japan. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is our V-Day! While ungodly, anti-Christ forces plot their laws and policies to change our beliefs or force us to shut up, Jesus **rejoices** and **exults** (v. 1). The writer to the Hebrews puts the words of Psalm 22:22 on Jesus lips, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise” (Heb. 2:12). If he’s rejoicing why are we so sad?

At the resurrection God the Father gave Jesus **his heart’s desire** and **the request of his lips** (v. 2). He sent the Holy Spirit to pour on Jesus **rich blessings** and to **set a crown of fine gold upon his head** (v. 3). Jesus **asked life of** God the Father and the Father **gave it to him, length of days forever and ever** (v. 4). That’s referring to the Lord’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 that he would have a son who would sit on his throne forever. And because he is alive forever on that throne **his glory is great through** God the Father’s **salvation; splendor and majesty you bestow on him** (v. 5). And then we read, **For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence** (v. 6). As David prayed prophetically of Christ’s resurrection in Psalm 16, “in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (v. 11).

“Yes, I know Jesus rose again Pastor, but things are getting so bad.” We have to remember that at the cross and empty tomb Jesus stepped on the head of the serpent, Satan. He is a defeated foe. But like a dying animal that struggles to stay alive, taking last gasps to give it a burst of energy, over the course of human history Satan has gasped and when he does, he wreaks havoc on the church. Rejoice that while the elites are fighting their battle because Jesus has already conquered and won the war!

Jesus is Conquering

This brings us to verse 7. Commentators are not quite sure if it belongs to verses 1–6 because it sort of stands alone. It’s connected, of course, but it stands as a separate thought. And so the second *reason for rejoicing amid culture’s chaos* is that *Jesus is conquering: **For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved*** (v. 7).

But the Pew Research Center has been studying the trends across the world of religious hostility and persecution by governments and societies and it isn’t pretty.⁵ It’s estimated that 8,000 Christians are martyred each year. That’s one death per hour, per day, every year. But we need to rejoice

⁵ <http://www.pewforum.org/2016/06/23/trends-in-global-restrictions-on-religion/>

because while we see with our eyes and hear with our ears of the chaos of our culture as well as the hostility and persecution and martyrdom across the world, verse 7 is saying that **through the steadfast love of the Most High** that raised Jesus he **shall not be moved**. He is on the throne; he is in complete control. Rejoice! This reminds us of Psalm 2, where “the nations rage...the peoples plot in vain...the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed” (vv. 1–2), but “He who sits in the heavens laughs” (v. 4). He is conquering souls through the power of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the Gospel. As one of our hymns says, “May thy gospel’s joyful sound conquer sinners, comfort saints.” Like I said last week, this is our gospel optimism! We don’t trust in the power of politics but we trust in our resurrected Lord. What’s going to change our society is not another election cycle that will result in changing laws but the power of God changing hearts. Rejoice that Jesus is conquering.

Jesus *Shall Conquer*

There’s a third and final *reason for rejoicing amid culture’s chaos* here in Psalm 21: *Jesus shall conquer*. I mentioned last Sunday that image many of us still remember from the First Gulf War. Once we launched our bombers and send in our troops, the war was over. But there was Iraq’s military

Information Minister on television saying they were repelling American forces whose tombs would be in the desert. Can you imagine denying you've been conquered and denying you were being conquered? That's what unbelief does. Christ conquered the tomb. "No he didn't." Christ is conquering as he has been for 2,000 years saving souls, building his church, protecting his church. "No he's not." This is what Paul meant in Romans 1 when he said ungodly people suppress the truth so that they can go on living their ungodly lives.

But they will acknowledge one day when he comes to conquer once and for all. Verses 8–12 describe it in graphic terms. Listen to the terror of that day: **Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you** (v. 8). Listen to the judgment of that day: **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** (v. 9). Paul expressed this in 2 Thessalonians 1 like this:

God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might. (vv. 6–9)

Listen to the finality of that day: **You will destroy their descendants from the earth, and their offspring from among the children of man** (v. 10).

Listen to the follow of fighting back on that day: **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** (vv. 11–12).

The world wants us to be so afraid that we shut up. But I will rejoice aloud in my resurrected King who has conquered! The world wants us to change our beliefs. But I will rejoice in the immovable truth that my resurrected King is conquering. The world wants us to go away so that they can usher in their pipe dream Utopia. But I will rejoice in his new heavens and new earth when he comes again to conquer once and for all. Will you rejoice with me? Let us pray...