

Sermon for January 2, 2022 – Andrew Miller

“Now this I know”

Psalm 20

Happy new year! Actually, I'd like to say more than just 'Happy new year'. I'd like to give you a godly blessing to start the new year. In fact, the more I look at today's Psalm reading, I think it's the ultimate new year greeting:

This year

The Lord answer you and protect you

The Lord help you and support you

May He remember you and accept you

May He give you the desires of your heart

and make all your plans succeed

Happy new year!

Maybe that's a good place to stop! We could just leave it there!

It's a great Psalm to start the new year, isn't it! This Psalm was written by King David (or *for* King David) about 3,000 years ago.

This is similar (on the surface at least) to another piece of literature written by Ned Washington about 80 years ago, which says (truncated):

When you wish upon a star

Makes no difference who you are

When you wish upon a star

Your dreams come true

The Disney company have built an empire upon these words.

1. There is a difference between a wish and a godly blessing

What's the difference between the words of blessing in David's Psalm and the words of wishing in Washington's song? In a word: lots! Let's look at how that is.

While there's plenty in Psalm 20 that we can apply personally, it was written as a blessing to/for a king - King David - as he was preparing to go into battle. David - the King of Israel -

was in a life and death situation, and he - or the priests on his behalf - were appealing to the Lord for David's protection, help, acceptance and victory in battle. This appeal calls for anointing over the king.

But this Psalm goes deeper still because it's also Messianic. It speaks toward a greater king - The King - who is to come in the form of man, the same Jesus we celebrated last week in the form of an infant born in a manger. When we consider the words in Psalm 20 in the light of a King, not in a manger but before an impending death on a cross, they become all the more profound and amazing.

So we have a Psalm here that works on three levels:

A level that is personal to us

A level that is for an earthly king, and

A level that is for a heavenly King.

But even so, however deep it might get, we still haven't really answered the earlier question: Whether it's for a king or for a wooden puppet, what's the difference between the blessing pronounced in Psalm 20 and the good wishes sung in 'When you wish upon a star'? Why is one to be taken seriously and the other not so? This is important because for many people outside the church (and maybe for some inside) that difference might not be very clear at all.

2. Our confidence is based on what we know to be true.

We find the answer in the very simple words of verse 6. These words appear right in the middle of the Psalm as a sort of turning point. The whole Psalm seems to pivot around these four words:

"Now, this I know".

Everything, not only in this psalm but in all Bible teaching, is based on what we *know* to be true. Ask someone how they know that their dreams will all come true by wishing on a star and they will not be able to give you an answer because there is no answer. Appealing to the Lord is a very different matter because there is an answer, and a wonderful one at that.

Let's look at this chronologically, starting with King David.

3. Our confidence is based on what God has done in the past.

David knew about the works of God as recorded in history and he knew God personally through the works of God in his own life.

Verse 6 goes on to say, “The Lord gives victory to his anointed”. David knew this to be true from history. Abraham was anointed of God and the Lord gave him a child and fathered a nation through him when all looked utterly hopeless. Not even Sarah could foresee any such victory ahead in her life even when she was told about it. But the Lord gave victory to His anointed. This we know.

There's more in verse 6: “He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand.” How do we know this is true? Moses was also anointed of God and the Lord gave him victory over Pharaoh in Egypt when everything looked hopeless. This is recorded history. Moses was able to perform many miracles and deliver the Israelites from tyranny because of “the power of God’s right hand”. This we know.

Verse 7 says, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” Joshua was anointed of God and he demonstrated this truth. The Lord gave him victory over the Canaanites not because he had superior weaponry but because he trusted in God. It's recorded history. This we know.

So David *knew* that God’s words were reliable (“Now, this I know”) based on what God had done in the past. His trust was based on the realities that had been faithfully recorded.

4. Our confidence is based on what is doing in our lives now.

But David also knew the Lord through personal experience. He wasn't just living in the past, clinging to yesterday's mercies, sustained by other people's testimonies alone. He had been chosen by the prophet Samuel despite being the youngest in his family. He had miraculously brought down Goliath in battle. He had been rescued by God on many occasions. This he knew.

So David wasn't blindly wishing here. He was faithfully trusting. As King of Israel, he knew about God, and he knew God personally. The blessing and the protection he was seeking were based on what he knew to be true.

What about Jesus?

Jesus, the King of Kings, also knew about the works of God as recorded in history. He had learned about Abraham and Moses, about David and Hezekiah, about Elijah and Elisha and the many other men and women of God throughout the ages through whom God had made Himself known.

But Jesus also knew God personally through the works of God in his own life. Like David, He was not living in the past, not clinging to yesterday's mercies, not sustained by other people's testimonies alone. He experienced the power and the manifestations of God in His own life. This is not merely because Jesus was God in the flesh. Jesus had emptied Himself of all the rights of His deity. He Himself said in John 5 that He could do nothing on His own apart from the Father. His was a life of total trust in His Father, just as ours should be.

Jesus knew God through his experiences at baptism, in performing healings, in imparting heavenly teachings, in raising the dead, in - as Jesus liked to say - bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth. For all this, Jesus was never blindly wishing. He was always faithfully trusting because of what - and Who - He knew. This He knew.

So then what about us?

Well, the same is true of us. We are not anointed kings, as David was in an earthly sense or as Jesus was (and is) in a heavenly sense. But when we are in Christ, we share in the victory that our King Jesus won. This is what we just read in 1 Corinthians 15. We who are in Christ and inheriting the kingdom of God are given victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

These are not just sweet-sounding words. They are not the wishes of a Disney story. Just like David and Jesus, we can know this as truth through the works of God in history and through the works of God experienced in our own lives. In fact, in some ways, we have it much better than David, if not Jesus, too. We have the same recorded history of Abraham

and Moses to rely on but can add to that the recorded histories of all the other prophets and leaders, as well as the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the falling of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the miracles and expansion of the early church. We have a very rich and reliable history of God's work - the acts of His apostles, the coming of His Kingdom to earth - so that we can *know* the truth of God's word.

We also have the testimonies of many in the church in the 2000 years since then - testimonies of God answering and protecting, rescuing and supporting, making plans succeed and bringing victory in situations that looked utterly hopeless.

Beyond this, we have the manifestations and experiences of the Holy Spirit in our own lives, so that we can further know God and His word. This is probably a good place to share a testimony or two.

When I was 22, an abseiling accident left me with chronic sciatic pain. I hobbled around in agony for three years. It was horrible. I saw countless doctors, physios, chiropractors, acupuncturists - anybody who could at least try to help. In the meantime, I took painkillers every day. When I was 24, my work sent me to Tokyo for 6 months. I started to attend a Japanese church there even though I could barely understand a word they were saying. One day a visiting preacher from the US came and although I could barely understand his drawl, I could follow the basic gist of what he was saying. He was also a healer of the most charismatic kind, giving me the impression that he was a total and utter charlatan. They had a healing rally on the Saturday night, and I was embarrassed by the whole thing. I thought it was a circus and it confirmed to me that this American preacher was nothing but a fraud. He was calling people out the front for this illness or that injury and people were going out and falling down, and I was just waiting for the jugglers and the clowns to come out and start performing. At one point he called for someone with nosebleeds to come out. This was only translated as a 'nose problem' and I heard the person behind me say 'Yeah I'm a bit sinussy' and out they went. So you've got people going out for the wrong reasons and then there were people like me who were in genuine pain who were not called out at all! Not happy! I thought it was all a shameful sham.

Despite my disappointment with it all, I went back to church the next morning where the same preacher was plying his trade, only this time he said that anybody at all who wanted healing should just come out. So I went out but - you must understand - not to be healed. I just wanted to show this guy up. I wanted a showdown. I wasn't going down unless he tackled me to the ground. (I was young and stupid/stupider back then.) Anyway, he comes to me and asks me what's wrong and I start to tell him but he's not even listening! He just tells me that I'm healed in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and then he pushes me over! A couple of people caught me, and they lay me on the ground so I'm lying there like an idiot wondering what I'm supposed to do next. Eventually the people

next to me get up so I get up and go back to my seat wondering 'what on earth was that?' It was the most disappointing experience of my life - except for one thing: I never had pain again in my back.

So I've experienced God taking an irreverent, foolish, doubting, grotty sinner and healing him, and I add that to the truths written in the Bible about the love and power and joy and victory of the Lord and this I *know*: it's true.

One more quickly. This is a DMI testimony.

In 1994, when the genocide occurred in Rwanda, Marie Claire was a 15 year-old girl. She lost her father, a sister, a half-sister, a half-brother, nineteen uncles and aunts and two grandparents in the killings. Several attempts were made on her own life but she somehow survived. School was suspended. Life seemed to have no purpose and to hold only pain and suffering.

During this time, Marie Claire, who is Deaf, found a book in the street. In the genocide, she tells me, there were books in the street everywhere. She found one with pictures that intrigued her. She began to 'read' it and couldn't stop. She couldn't really understand it but, without knowing why, she couldn't stop looking through it. She kept it.

Six years later, a signing evangelist came to her house and explained the pictures in that book. The pictures told the story of Adam and Moses and David and Jesus, and the evangelist told her how the story all came together so that she would know what God has done for her. Marie Claire believed and gave her life to Jesus that day. In the years that followed, God transformed her life. She received emotional and spiritual healing from the genocide, she was given a purpose and opportunity way beyond what anyone could have expected. And she would go on to become an evangelist herself with DMI, and is now one of our pastors and a builder of churches. God continues to reveal Himself to her and to transform lives through her. Marie Claire outreaches primarily to deaf Muslim women but there are many others that she reaches with the gospel, too.

Marie Clare can do this because of "Now, this she knows". She knows what God has done in the past through King Jesus and she is experiencing the work of God in her life now because of King Jesus.

5. We can be confident of what God will do in the future.

Let me finish with this.

God has an impeccable track record of providing victory.

- He did this for the ancient Israelites who were commanded not only to record in written form but to set memorial stones to remember all God's victories
- He did this for King David who recorded many victories, including over Goliath, over King Saul, over his own sinfulness
- He did this for King Jesus who claimed victory over demons, victory over sickness, victory over opposition, victory over natural elements, victory over death
- And He also did this for us who share in the victory of Jesus our King.

So, we can be confident of what God will do in the future. With confidence we bless each other. We don't wish the best for one another like others might who have no other hope. We bless each other in full confidence of victory, however remote it might seem at any given time, because of what - and Who - we *know*.

So, this year,

*May the Lord answer you when you are in distress;
may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.*

2

*May he send you help from the sanctuary
and grant you support from Zion.*

3

*May he remember all your sacrifices
and accept your offerings.*

4

*May he give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed.*

5

*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.*

Pray.