

About...

Psalm 20

...how and why it was written

I fell in love with Psalm 20 in the autumn of 2009, and after that setting it to music was inevitable. Different psalms stand out in different seasons and this was one I'd never really noticed much before. But it is such a helpful gift for praying blessing over individuals, groups of people, or even whole nations and people groups.

When I engaged with it I was going through a difficult time, and initially I almost felt as if the Psalmist was praying for me as I read it – I found it uplifting and compelling to think that someone could pray those things for me – biblically – that God would give me the desires of my heart, that he would remember my sacrifices for him and that people would rejoice when I saw victory.

I shared the psalm with my friend Laura, who was also having a challenging time and we were both encouraged by it – I told her that this is what I would be praying for her because it was such an amazing, and helpful framework.

A few days later I was worshipping at home, and wondered about a song based on it... I propped my little pocket NIV up on my keyboard and it just flowed out with a slightly Hebraic feel in the verses, and then this strong, catchier refrain in the chorus – which I wanted to pull out and emphasise particularly.

...how, where and when it could be used

The song, very much the psalm on which it is so closely based, can be used to help provide a framework to pray for different people and situations – individually or in a corporate setting.

It can be used to sing a blessing over someone from your congregation who is being sent out, generally to each other as a blessing/sending song, or to help people focus in intercession on a particular person, group or nation's need. (If the latter, you might want to use visuals of that situation alongside the song.)

Because of the free-form approach of the verses, and some of the modulations, some congregations might struggle with learning the verses, but the chorus is very straightforward and could be used separately, or as a unison part, when a soloist has sung the verses.

You are of course also welcome to use the recording for your own devotions, over visuals, or during prayer station activities, or in any other way that is helpful to you.

...the dedication

Laura Bardwell is a close friend of mine. We worked together at Christian aid for more than five years. During this time, and since, we have shared many things – a desire for justice; a vision of the UK church fully engaged in loving

God and the disadvantaged; addictions to words (and very many of them), cake and laughter; triumphs and frustrations; and our faith journeys.

In April 2010, Laura went out to Bangladesh with Oasis UK to pioneer a fair-trade social business making jewellery with vulnerable women in the Dupiara slum of Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka. I dedicated this song to her as she was going – it represents a heart-felt prayer and investment in this, and whatever else she goes on to do for god in the future. Every line of the psalm takes on a specific story and memory when it is sung and prayed for someone you have shared life with.

...its place on the journey to where world and worship meet

So often our songs and prayers focus on ourselves. We feel satisfied when our worship songs create a sense of resonance with our own circumstances and/or connection with God. These are good things but they are not the full picture.

If we want to look beyond ourselves – to each other, and beyond the walls of the church – we need to be intentional about that. Most of us naturally meditate on narrow parameters during standard worship songs, unless the lyrics explicitly help us worship in a larger context.

The psalms contain prayers from every type of situation, expressing every emotion, and representing every state of heart and perspective the believer experiences in different seasons and experiences. They are a great place to look for inspiration when we want to expand our focus beyond our default mode – sometimes we can feel embarrassed or simply less confident about how to worship through loving and blessing others, and building unity – and expressing this to God and each other. These are times to learn from centuries of believers who have walked the journey before us – and to learn, grow in confidence, and step out in faith, using the words they have left us.

For me, this song is another step in expanding my vocabulary so that when I come to pray I have songs that express a heart of blessing for people and nations.

It is also part of my deep desire to learn the psalms more, so I can be equipped in worship and prayer like so many before me.

...using songs to learn the psalms

Many of the psalms crop up more than we realise in the songs we sing – certain phrases and images have become part of the Christian vernacular... so you'll be aware of lots of songs that use them. You might want to do what I am doing to help myself learn the psalms better - creating playlists of various song settings of them put into order.

I'd like to particularly honour Ian White – a Scottish worship leader and singer/songwriter who wrote settings for about half the psalms over four volumes about twenty years ago. They were often playing in my house when I was growing up, and now I find myself returning to these recordings for myself. They are a beautiful gift.

If you want to think about the psalms and justice more, read our article *Psalms as our worship school*, available at www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-articles