

MY HELP COMES FROM THE LORD

Psalms 121

Introduction:

During these last few weeks leading up to Easter, I want to continue our studies from the Psalms. Over the past couple of months we have covered a wide range of subjects, picking out just a few of the psalms.

This morning I would like us to take a few minutes to look at Psalm 121. This psalm is one of a series of 15 known as the Psalms of Ascents. You will find that title on each of Psalms 120-134.

There are a variety of opinions regarding the exact nature of these Songs of Ascents. This diverse group of psalms includes both individual and corporate laments; there are songs of confidence, thanksgiving hymns, and a song celebrating Zion. There are wisdom psalms, a royal psalm, and a psalm for a liturgical occasion. Concerning the purpose and the use of these songs of ascents, the ESV Study Bible says this:

“Some traditional Jewish interpreters have suggested that these were songs sung on the steps, either in parts of the temple or coming up from a spring in Jerusalem; others have taken them as geared toward returning to Jerusalem from exile (cf. Ezra 1:3). Neither of these makes good sense of David’s authorship of Psalms 122; 124; 131; and 134. It is probably enough to take them simply as suited to the “ascent” to Jerusalem for worship, even if they were not originally composed for that purpose.”

Three times a year, everyone who was able was required to go to Jerusalem to worship at the temple for special feast days. It seems that these songs came to be used as a means of celebration as people went up to the temple to worship. If you have ever been to Jerusalem you will know what it means to “go up to Jerusalem” and to the temple mount.

The first of these Songs of Ascent, Psalm 120, is an individual lament, sung by someone far away from his home in Israel. He is longing for peace and security in his homeland. The second of these songs, Psalm 121 is a song of assurance, a song which would provide confidence for those pilgrims journeying up to Jerusalem to worship God.

This morning I want us to take a few minutes to look at this Psalm. There are 8 verses, but the psalm is divided into 4 stanzas, each one containing two verses in our Bibles. MacArthur has outlined the psalm this way:

- God, our Helper (1–2); Keeper (3–4); Protector (5–6); Preserver (7–8)

As you will notice from that outline, the theme is consistent throughout the psalm. The psalmist is aware of and testifying to the sustaining and keeping power of God. As we go through this short psalm, let’s keep in our minds the image of the journey to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.

I. God, Our Helper vv. 1-2

Read vv. 1-2 - The person on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem will lift up his eyes to the hills (possibly as a place to be feared, or else to the hills around Jerusalem, cf. 125:2), and he may wonder, From where does my help come?

Discuss the hills around Jerusalem – the elevation. For most people coming to Jerusalem, they would be coming up from Jericho. It is roughly 15 miles (24 km) from Jericho to Jerusalem with a total climb of just over 1000 meters. It was a long and arduous journey. As they looked at the hills or mountains around Jerusalem there were two things to consider. First there was the difficulty of the climb. Second there was the possibility of thieves and bandits hiding in the hills waiting for unsuspecting travelers. The question asked is basically, where will I find the help I need to finish this journey?

The answer to the question is really quite simple, yet profound. “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” As a weary traveler looking at the hills before him, the psalmist turns his eyes away from the obstacles to look upon God, the source of both strength and courage.

The one who created the heavens and the earth is certainly capable of providing the help needed by the weary traveler. But more than that, He is also more than capable of providing the help you and I need for whatever struggles and obstacles we are facing. The help we need comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth, and therefore no

other power can hinder it. The biblical authors often refer to God's creative power as an indication that He is infinitely capable to provide help to His creatures.

"Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you." (Jer. 32:17)

God is our helper. When you have no strength left for the journey, do as the psalmist did—look up, seek help from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

II. God, Our Keeper vv. 3-4

The rest of the verses in this psalm are dominated by the word "keep" – refer to the word in the following verses. But we want to focus specifically on vv. 3-4 in terms of God as our keeper – read the verses.

In Psalm 38:15-16 David said, "But for you, O LORD, do I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer. For I said, 'Only let them not rejoice over me, who boast against me when my foot slips!'"

But over in Psalm 66:8-9, the psalmist expressed his confidence in the Lord's keeping power. "Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip."

Here in Ps. 121 the psalmist expresses that same confidence – v. 3a. But, not only will He keep you secure on your feet, but we also have the assurance that his watchful care and keeping power never lapse – refer to vv. 3b-4.

[From Illy]... ALWAYS AWAKE!

The story is told of a mother and her 4-year-old daughter who were preparing to go to bed for the night. The child was fearful of the dark. Being alone on this occasion, the mother also was somewhat apprehensive. When all the lights had been turned out, the youngster noticed the moon shining brightly through the window. "Mommy," she asked, "is that God's light up there?" "Yes, it is, dear," came the reply. Soon another question followed. "Will He put it out and go to sleep too?" "Oh no, my child, He never goes to sleep." For a few moments there was silence. Then the little girl said thoughtfully, "Well, Mommy, as long as God is awake, I'm not scared." and she soon fell into a peaceful sleep.

Another person said, "I might as well leave my worries with God and go to sleep, since He's going to be up all night anyway."

We have a God who keeps watch and never dozes off, or takes a break. He never slumbers or sleeps.

III. God, Our Protector vv. 5-6

Read vv. 5-6. "The Lord watches over you..." (NIV) He is the one we can count on to watch over us and to protect us from all the harm that could come our way. We are told also in the Psalms that God gives his angels charge over us to keep and protect us. But that does not remove His hand of protection. Matthew Henry makes an interesting observation:

God himself has undertaken to be our protector: The Lord is thy keeper, #Ps 121:5. Whatever charge he gives his angels to keep his people, he has not thereby discharged himself, so that, whether every particular saint has an angel for his guardian or no, we are sure he has God himself for his guardian. It is infinite wisdom that contrives, and infinite power that works, the safety of those that have put themselves under God's protection. Those must needs be well kept that have the Lord for their keeper. If, by affliction, they be made his prisoners, yet still he is their keeper.

"The Lord is your shade on your right hand..." He is the one whose hand shades us from the dangers of life. "...the sun by day... the moon by night." Day or night He is there. The one who never slumbers or sleeps offers his unfailing protection.

So, does that mean that nothing bad can ever happen to us? No, but we can be certain of his protecting hand, regardless of what comes to us.

IV. God, Our Preserver vv. 7-8

Read vv. 7-8 – the word "evil" in the NIV is "harm." The word is used almost 700 in the OT. In the AV it is translated over 2/3 of the time as evil. The Hebrew dictionary defines it as evil, bad, harmful, even malignant.

I am reminded of the prayer the Lord Jesus taught his disciples in the NT. In that prayer he said you should pray, "Lead us not into temp-

tation, but deliver us from evil." That is exactly what the psalmist said that he does – read v. 7 again. The psalms are filled with such expressions of trust in God's preservation.

In Psalm 9:9 David wrote, "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble."

Psalm 32:7 – "You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance."

Read v. 8 – as the weary pilgrims make their way up the last miles to Jerusalem, they realize that God has kept them and protected and preserved them. It is easy to see this preservation as a parable for all of one's life.

We are dependent on God's preservation. He is the one who preserves our life from the evil one.

Conclusion:

We are not making that long and difficult walk up to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. But this psalm is about more than God's protection on that journey. It is an affirmation of God's keeping power in all of the events of life, whether good or bad, thrilling or terrifying. Even in the tragedies of life we can be assured of His guiding hand.

God is our Helper, our Keeper, our Protector and our Preserver. He is the one who never slumbers or sleeps. Leave your burdens with Him.