

Living for Jesus when truth is under attack

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 May 2026

Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] And we're going to read that psalm. We've sung it, now we're going to read it. And we're going to think about living for Jesus when truth is under attack.

! But let's again hear God's Word in Psalm 120. I call on the Lord in my distress, and He answers me. Save me, Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues.

What will He do to you, and what more besides you, deceitful tongue? He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows, with burning coals of the broom bush.

Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar. Too long have I lived among those who hate peace.

I am for peace, but when they speak, they are for war. The truth is under attack.

[0:59] That was the conclusion of a group of scientists down at Portsmouth University in 2024. They were responding to misinformation about viruses and vaccines, about bad science on social media that was affecting treatment that patients were receiving.

But don't we recognize that generally the truth seems to be under attack? We are told that we live in the post-truth world.

We're constantly having to deal with AI for better and for worse. Deep fakes and fake news are now part of our everyday vocabulary.

We encounter all too often serious fraud and deception. And we know words are twisted to generate maximum coverage and maximum outrage.

We see it. More personally too, don't we recognize that words can often be used as weapons? And sometimes we are those who weaponize the words.

[2:15] We find ourselves being lied about, being lied to. Truth is manipulated so that we can be manipulated.

Our words and our values can be all too easily misrepresented. Truth can be shaded and hidden to put oneself in the best light to the detriment of others.

The experience of the people singing Psalm 120 is of a people grieved because they live in a world filled with lies and deception, with people who are choosing words of war over words of peace.

Now, I suspect we can echo some of that sentiment in our own hearts. Maybe today some of us are feeling the swords and arrows of lies and slander, perhaps even because you are a worshiper of God.

This is an experience that may run very close to home for some of us. And so the question to ask is, how do we navigate that? How do we face this as a follower of Jesus?

[3:30] And so we'll come back to that. But let me just introduce for us these songs of ascent. So what are they? What are these songs that we're going to spend time in? It's a group. It's 15 Psalms, 120 to 130.

And they were collected for a particular purpose so that worshipers making their way up, ascending to Jerusalem, they'd have songs to sing on their journey together.

And the idea of a journey is something that we see within the Psalms themselves. We're going to move from the groaning that we heard in Psalm 120 towards the rejoicing that we come to in Psalm 133 and 134.

But there's also a geographical journey. So we're starting here in Psalm 120 in a distant land. Psalm 121, we're moving towards Jerusalem.

And then Psalm 122 onwards, we're in the city. And then we're taken right to the heart of the city, to the temple, to the place where God is. So as we're thinking about this journey and these worshipers on a journey to God, Augustine, the saint of the early church, captured it memorably when he said this.

[4:41] He said, the soul, the real us, travels by its affections. If you are in love with the earth, your journey is taking you far from God.

If you are in love with God, you are claiming towards Him. So we're going to come to these Psalms and read them as Christians after the New Testament, after the coming of Jesus, and to recognize they present for us the picture of Christians as pilgrims on a journey.

Followers of Jesus on the way to, not geographical Jerusalem, but to the heavenly Jerusalem. Life with God. And to understand that the journey that we take as Christians is both towards Jesus and also with Jesus.

So let's follow the pilgrims of Psalm 120 as we recognize that in a world spoiled by lies and deception, the pilgrim walks with Jesus and waits with hope for His return.

So let's begin in the first couple of verses and to see the distress. Here are the people distressed by lies and deception. Words have that power.

[6:00] They can drive us to distress and despair. Remember that playground rhyme many of us grew up with? I think we've all come to know it's not true that sticks and stones may break our bones, but names will never hurt us.

And most often it's those names, it's those words. They're the ones that sting the most. When we come to Psalm 120, there's a really striking contrast with the Psalm that comes before.

Psalm 119 is a celebration of God's words. God's words are a source of joy and life and light.

They're good and they're trustworthy. If this is a path, it's a safe and a broad path.

But now we're being confronted by a different kind of language. For the pilgrim follower of Jesus, we may find that lies like arrows will pierce our own soul too.

And we identify with the pilgrims here and we identify with God's people in all time. If you were here last week and the week before, you'll remember this was something that was true for Nehemiah.

[7:00] He was constantly attacked by lies and slander from enemies. Maybe you know King David, most famous king in the Old Testament. He was falsely accused by the first king, Saul, and he was betrayed by the lies of his own family.

Come to the New Testament, we meet a man called Stephen, the first person who was killed for being a follower of Jesus. And he was falsely accused of speaking against God. It's a pattern. Words are used sometimes to assault us as Christians too. And so we might find ourselves being whispered about or openly mocked.

We may find that our faith is misrepresented in our classroom and in our mainstream media. You might have already had to deal with people accusing us and people accusing God of being responsible for all the problems in the world.

You may find yourself accused of hatred and bigotry because of what you believe. And words can bring distress. Like these pilgrims, trying to live for God means living with a different set of beliefs and values.

[8:13] And that puts us in the spotlight and sometimes that puts us in the storm of attack. And this too is not new.

Remember Old Testament Noah. Faithful to God, building the ark to be spared from judgment.

Preaching that others might come and to be saved. And he's mocked.

Think about Daniel and his three friends as they determine to live for God in a foreign country.

They're thrown into a furnace. And they're thrown into a den of lions. I discovered this week that in some state schools in China, there are stories being told where Jesus and his disciples are the enemies in the story.

And they're being regarded as evil. If you know anything about the persecuted church around the world, you will know that parts of Asia, the Middle East and Africa, it says that if you call yourself a Christian, you are automatically an enemy of the state.

I call on the Lord in my distress and He answers me. Save me, Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues.

[9:26] And in all of this, we need to recognize too that Jesus, the pilgrim, went there too. As Jesus lived as the man of faith, slander and lies were hurled at Him and they stuck like tar.

You're lying about your identity. You're not the Son of God. You're not God's chosen King. You can't deal with sin. You can't forgive and save. Even as He went to the cross, He was mocked and abused and slandered.

Yet did you hear what Peter told us? Jesus committed no sin. Jesus committed no sin. And no deceit was found in His mouth.

What did Jesus do? He entrusted Himself to God, His Father who judges justly. And the journey of faith, that follows His path. Notice the wisdom of the pilgrim in verse 1.

And we need this. When we are confronted by lies, when we are confronted by deception, two related things we must do. First, we must turn to prayer. I call on the Lord in my distress.

[10 : 39] That's wisdom. To the Savior who sustained His people in the past, who has sustained us in the past. He is strong and kind and He has promised that He will do so again.

We turn in prayer to the Father of comfort. Maybe He's the only one who can comfort us in our distress. So we turn to Him. And we pray knowing the Spirit of God is within us.

And remember, the Spirit is given to His people to be our comforter. We turn to prayer. We take it to the Lord. Capital letters, Lord.

The personal, covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. We trust the one who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. As Christians, we don't get mad.

We don't get even. We go to our God. We turn to the Lord Jesus. That sympathetic high priest in heaven. We consider what is waiting for us.

[11 : 38] That the reward of knowing Jesus and being with Him, it makes all the suffering worth it. And we look to Jesus and we remember that He walked the road for us.

And now He walks the road with us. Pilgrims are often distressed by lies and deception. Secondly, and this is the middle of the psalm, we think about the promise of being delivered from lies and deception.

Delivered from lies and deception. Some of us may have seen in the news this week that in New Zealand, a surf competition had to be paused this week because a surf cameraman who was working in the water, he was attacked.

Some still unknown animal, either shark or a sea lion, locked their jaws onto his foot. I know, thankfully, jet skis came and he got the medical attention he needed.

But think about verse 2 and think about that story. Save me, Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues. There is an echo here of wild beasts that look to snap and threaten and devour.

[12 : 53] Only this time it's not a wild animal. It's enemies with their words. John Chrysostom, another church father, he said, actually, this is worse than any wild animal.

If you see a lion or a bear or a shark, well, there's trouble. But at least you know that they have ill intent. But people, Chrysostom says, well, they often conceal their nature with a veil of sweet reasonableness.

And so it's so painful as we discover someone's really nice to our face, but they're vicious behind our back.

Somebody who's really civilized and sophisticated sometimes, but become absolutely savage towards us in attacking what we believe.

From the beginning, God's people have been assaulted by the devil and his lies.

[14 : 02] Again, to think about Peter, he talked about the devil as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. We think about the words of Jesus describing the devil as the father of lies.

He's been the liar from the beginning. In the Garden of Eden, he spoke lies to Adam and Eve. God is not good. God's Word can't be trusted.

You won't really be judged for turning your back on God. Life will be better without God. The devil's lies like poison work their way into the human bloodstream.

And so pilgrims always need to pray, deliver my soul. Remember the Lord's Prayer, deliver me from evil, deliver us from the evil one. But there's a promise.

I don't know if you saw it, the promise in verse 3 and 4. It's a really necessary promise. Here it is. It's the promise that one day Satan and his lies will be fully repaid in judgment.

[15 : 07] Here's the promise. A world is coming free of lies and deception forever. When God deals with all lies and deception.

Notice in the description how the punishment fits the crime. People have been using lies and slander and deceit to attack.

Verse 4, He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows. With burning coals of the broom bush.

So, the broom bush was like a really popular charcoal because it burned hot and long. And it's a reminder that those who would wound, those who would slander, those who would turn their words

against God and His people, if they do not turn from that, then God's fierce anger burns hot and long.

It's a hard thing to think about. But do we recognize that judgment is necessary? The only way for there to be true salvation and true peace and an end to lies is if God deals decisively once and for all with those realities.

[16 : 18] Think about it in the context of a war. Imagine a city under siege. We see it on our news. The only way for that city to have true and lasting peace is for the enemy to be so decisively defeated that there is no prospect for them to attack.

God promises such a day in His Word. Again, to think about another New Testament story, some of you will know about the road to Damascus, Saul's remarkable encounter with Jesus.

He was on his way to Damascus and he was breathing out threats and murder against the people of God and the church of God. And then Jesus appeared and the glory of Jesus knocked Paul, Saul, off his horse.

And there was a conversation between Jesus and Saul, the persecutor, which ended with Jesus saying to Saul, remember, when you persecute them, you persecute a Christian, Jesus says, you persecute me.

Now, remember that. This psalm is about people turning their hatred, their lies, their slander against God's people. To stand against God's people is an injustice and an assault against them, but also against their God.

[17 : 40] It's to assault God's honor and God's holiness. And that's a really serious thing. And if we find ourselves in that situation today, there is an urgency to turn away from that because we're reminded of future judgment here.

But back to our pilgrim. Here they are. They're facing lies. They're facing slander. And so they cry out to God. And the answer is actually a glorious vision of the future where there is no more lies.

There is just truth because judgment has come and so salvation has come. Now, just for a moment, try to imagine this with me. Try to imagine new creation.

Try to imagine a redeemed world where for all eternity, in any conversation you have, you will never encounter any gossip.

There will never be any slander. You will not be called names. You will not be spoken about behind your back.

[18 : 45] There will not be any lies that cause division. And positively, every word that you hear will be truth, will be life-giving, will be full of love.

When the bullets and bombs of cruel lying words will be melted down, never to return. Don't that sound like the kind of world we all want?

It's a world that God promises through Jesus. Truthfully, it's a world that for us as Christians, we are looked to, begin to see now. And so it's always a reminder of how we use our words.

But how can we have this hopeful future? How can we live with hope when we're surrounded by lies? We look to Jesus. We see Him as the forerunner, the pilgrim who has gone before us.

In His first coming, some 2,000 or so years ago, He faced those lies, that slander, as He lived by faith. And recognize this too, that He died to pay the punishment for our lies, for our slander, and gossip, and half-truths, and broken promises.

[20 : 05] Understand that Jesus faced all the arrows of evil there on the cross and won a great and decisive victory. And the proof of that, His resurrection.

So that in Him, trust in Him today, your sins are forgiven. You have new life with God. You get a new heart. You have new power. You have a new motive to speak the truth and to seek peace.

And you're now a person with a new hope. Because there was the first coming of Jesus, but there's the promise in the Bible of a second coming. And when He comes again, He will finally, once and for all, judge all evil, the devil, and his lies.

There will be a decisive punishment and an end to that so He can establish a new and renewed and redeemed world forever. With Him and in Him, we have this promise of a new world and a new home where it's only truth and it's never lies, where it's always peace and it's never warfare.

And to have this wonderful hope in our hearts, we need to ask God to help us to cut through the lies of the devil, the lies that we encounter in this world to the truth, to Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life.

[21:19] But we need to keep going and we need to see thirdly and finally what it looks like for the pilgrim dwelling among lies and deception. After the hope and the promise of verse 4, verse 5 to 7, kind of take us back down to earth with a crash somewhat.

Here is the pilgrim. He's prayed in distress and he's been given a hopeful answer for the future, but in the present still loaded with groaning and with woe and the longing for home which makes the distance a source of grief.

Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar. Too long have I lived among those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when they speak they are for war.

I wonder, do you know homesickness? Have you ever felt homesick? I remember as a student, actually both at the beginning of my student days and the end of my student days, having those pangs of wanting to be home.

There are times when it is hard going to be far from friends and family and what is familiar. As these pilgrims begin their ascent, as they begin the long road to Jerusalem, they are living as exiles and they have that sense of homesickness.

[22:36] So they speak of woe. They lament the misery of their exile. They long for Jerusalem. That's their spiritual home. That's where they can share faith together and they can share worship together.

But these places, Meshach and Kedar, they're like way out here in the frontiers, in the badlands. It's places of darkness and aggression where people are hostile to God. And so they find themselves saying, too long have I lived there.

It's the lament of a foreigner. I want to be home among my own people, my own values, my own culture. Sometimes I think if we're honest as Christians, living in this world can weight us down. maybe it's because we're surrounded by blasphemy where Jesus and His Word and His name has been so cheapened, where we live every day with a disrespect for God and His church.

Or maybe it's because we feel surrounded by lies and anger and rumor where the truth is tossed aside. It can be hard to live when there is a spirit of lies and warfare, when people's beliefs, when people's values, when people themselves are being attacked can feel like a war zone.

[23:56] And so the psalm ends with a sense of grief and groaning and longing. It literally begins, I, peace, but they, war.

The pilgrim worships the God of peace and longs for peace but he feels beaten down by lies and longs to be home with God and the people of peace.

In here, by God's design, there ought to be peace. We meet with the God of peace and we are to pursue peace.

And we think about that in all our conversations and as we worship. But what about Monday when we're the only Christian in our classroom or our workplace or in our family?

What about the next time we read our social media feed and someone else is looking to tear down our Christian faith? What about if our family and our friends, they don't accept Jesus as truth and don't accept us because we do?

[25:02] Do we find ourselves groaning? Here's what I want us to finish. How can we dwell well if we feel that we're living in our Meshach and Kedar places?

Two things. One way. Commit to saying even when it's hard, I am for peace. Commit to pursuing the truth even when it's costly.

Stay on the path that Jesus has placed us on. Commit to being a peacemaker in relationships. Pour water, not oil, on flames even if our instinct tells us otherwise.

Practice the truth in every part of life. Let God's Word sink so deeply into our hearts and our minds that it shapes all of our interactions. Ask yourself, think about what are my patterns of speech and conversation in my family or in my friendship group.

Can my colleagues spot there is something different about me because of the way that I choose to speak? How would Jesus assess my social media feed?

[26:19] Aim for peace within the church. Come back this evening, John 17, we're thinking about Jesus praying, Jesus praying for unity.

It matters to Jesus, it needs to matter to us. We need for Beclu to be a safe place. It's only a safe place for people if we choose to practice truth and to pursue peace with love.

As the Bible teaches us, we are to aim for peace with everyone. Romans 12, if it is possible on your part, live at peace with everyone. Some people may be for war.

For the Christian, we need to get our responses right and pursue peace. So we commit to saying, I am for peace. That's one way to dwell well as we groan. The second way, dwell well by looking to Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Remember this, Jesus sang Psalm 120. Jesus made lots of visits to Jerusalem for festivals. He would have joined his voice with others.

[27 : 30] He knew what it was to be a pilgrim who was grieved as he heard false teaching about God, as he faced lies and slanders. Jesus, too, felt that sense of homesickness for heaven while he lived as an exile on this earth.

Now, wonderfully, Jesus has returned to the glory of heaven where he rules in victory. He is the Prince of Peace. And for us, we look to him grateful for what he has done, that he has gone under the sword of God's judgment, that we might have the peace of God.

He has made peace by his blood shed on the cross, and right now he is preparing a home for his people, a wonderful kingdom of eternal truth and peace and love.

So, may God use this psalm to help us to dwell well even as we groan, as we find the truth is under attack.

Let's pray together briefly. God, our Father, thank you for this psalm, because we recognize it's tough honesty. We know lies, deception, slander are all around us.