

Confident trust in God's deliverance

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: 28 June 2026

Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] If you have your Bibles, you can turn with me to Psalm 124. And we can keep our Bibles open there as we think about this Psalm, which invites us to confident trust in God's deliverance.

So let's again hear God's word together. If the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel say, if the Lord had not been on our side when people attacked us, they would have swallowed us alive when their anger flared against us.

The flood would have engulfed us. The torrent would have swept over us. The raging waters would have swept us away. Praise be to the Lord who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare. The snare has been broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Amen. Boys and girls, let me talk to you for just a moment. I want to begin with a story of something that happened to me a long, long time ago.

[1:22] So when I was in university and I was playing in one of the university sports teams, we took a trip for an away game. So we went on a minibuss and I came back on the minibuss, left the bus, started walking from home only to discover I'd left my keys on the bus and I'd left my wallet on the bus.

And this was in the olden days before mobile phones. So panic started to set in immediately. And then I prayed.

And literally, literally two minutes later, a guy from our team who lived on the other side of the city, he happened to be driving by and he stopped and he asked what the problem was.

And he just happened to know, the only person in the whole team who knew where the bus driver lived, he happened to know where he lived. And the bus driver just happened to have been a little bit lazy in returning the bus.

So he still had the bus and the keys and I could get my possessions again. And I was happy. And that was a narrow escape. Grand scheme of things, no big deal.

[2:37] But some 20 plus years later, I have never forgotten that lesson. There's a number of lessons. The lesson, God listens and God will answer our prayers.

That God cares for us in the big important stuff and in the little things of life. And that was really good for my faith. And I think as we come to Psalm 124, we can all learn those lessons whatever age we are.

I imagine all of us, maybe especially if we're a bit older, we can think about times when God intervened in our lives. God did something. God got involved.

It might have been a really big thing. It might have been a really small thing. Here's my question. As you think about ways in your past that God intervened, what do you do with those moments and those memories?

How can you make them work for your faith and for your trust? And to push it one step further, how can we make those stories work for other people's faith in God to grow too?

[3:45] What we have in Psalm 124 is a story of King David's escape. We're not told which of his many escapes it was, but we know it's a song of ascents of David.

And David is a poet and David is a singer. And so he turns one of these acts of God's rescue into a song. And then he invites everyone within Israel to listen along and to sing so that together the people of God could share his great conclusion.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. So this song is here in the Bible, and we're thinking about it this morning, so that you and I today, we might remember and rejoice in God's many rescues in our lives and ultimately the great rescue as we think about Jesus' death on the cross.

Psalm 124 is one of those Psalms that has a special place in the history of God's church. We began saying together, Psalm 124 verse 8, John Calvin in the church in Geneva, when the Reformation happened, he used that week by week as their call to worship.

Who is it that we are invited to worship together? The God who helps us, who is our maker. And he felt that the church needed a weekly reminder because in his day, the church was very much under attack.

[5:27] People very much wanted to shut down the message coming from Calvin's Geneva, the message of the Reformation. And so this Psalm became precious in that generation, and by God's grace, it may be precious to us too, as this Psalm helps us to see that God delivers his church from great dangers so that we might live with deep confidence in his redeeming love.

So we're just going to walk through the Psalm. The first thing we're going to notice in the first couple of verses is our great Redeemer. Now notice the style of these verses, and we might call it call and response.

So you have David and then a choir master beginning, if the Lord had not been on our side. And then it's as if the Psalm pauses so that David can say, sing it with me, everybody, if the Lord had not been on our side.

This is for the whole church. And what David invites the whole church to do is to look back on a great deliverance that God brought and to imagine the outcome if God had been absent.

If the Lord had not been on our side, how would things have been different? And so clearly, right from the beginning of this Psalm, for David and for the pilgrim people of God, the Lord is introduced as their only source of hope and help.

[7:05] They're not trying to reason away their rescue. Well, yeah, actually it was because we had a great military strategy. Nor is he taking credit for what properly belongs to God.

David is absolutely humble, doesn't want any attention, wants it all to belong to the Lord. And nor does he minimize the salvation the way sometimes we can do.

We can pray and then we get an answer and then we can begin to think, well, would that have happened even if I didn't pray? David doesn't go there. He recognizes God is at work.

If the Lord had not been on our side, defeat, destruction, disaster. Now, I can read for us from 2 Samuel 5, and you can turn back there, page 309, just to think about how this plays out in a real life deliverance from God.

So just to give you the background while you're turning there, David has now been set on the throne. God's chosen king has now been recognized as king over Judah and over all Israel.

[8:17] And now that he sits in that place, enemies, verse 17, they hear that David had been anointed king, and so they went up in full force to search for him.

So these cruel enemies we meet over and over in the Old Testament, they come on this search and destroy mission. And so David, see his response in verse 19.

He doesn't call out the commanders of the army, figure out what's the plan. David inquired of the Lord, shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hands?

The Lord answered him, go, for I will surely deliver the Philistines. So he is dependent on God. God, I'll go if you tell me to. God, I will go if you're going to give the victory.

And look at his testimony. After he defeats the Philistines the first time, verse 20, the Lord has broken out against my enemies before me. David is taking no credit.

[9:14] All glory and honor belongs to God. Now, verse 22, notice what happens. These Philistines who oppose God and the people of God, they come back again.

And again, David's response is to pray. David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answers, don't go straight up, but circle around and attack them in front of the poplar trees.

And then this, as soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.

And that's what happens. And again, we see the battle belongs to the Lord. Story after story of the Old Testament. Think about the story of David as the little shepherd boy, the teenager who goes to fight against the Philistine champion, Goliath.

And again, David speaks with such faith that it's evident that he is coming in the name of the Lord, and it will be the Lord who will give that great victory. Or go even further back.

[10:22] Go back to the time of Noah. There's another deliverance. God saved his tiny church, just Noah and his family from the flood of judgment.

Or go to the book of Exodus and recognize God delivering his people from slavery in Egypt. Or go to the story of Esther. And think about how God raises Esther to the palace so he can rescue Israel from the threat of extinction.

Over and over, the Old Testament declares, God the Lord is his people's redeemer. And that salvation, as we see it and experience it, it should lead to praise.

And truly without God, it would be game over for God's people. And we need to recognize that's not just true of the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, think about the number of times we see the apostles, where various leaders, Jewish and Roman leaders, attack and imprison them.

[11:24] And think about Peter being rescued from prison by an angel. Think about Paul being delivered by an earthquake. Think about the reality of the mission of the church growing and growing rapidly, despite all human opposition.

Go all the way to the book of Revelation and you get this wonderful image of, yes, the church is under fire and under attack, but yes, the church is protected from Satan and from the forces of evil by the great God of heaven.

And now, think of Jesus. While he walked this earth, singing Psalm 124. And if you know anything of the life of Jesus, you will probably know that he often faced anger and hostility and attacks from other people, both words and actions, and they were attempts made on his life.

And in all of his narrow escapes, he trusted in his father to help save him through them all. And his greatest escape, his most astonishing escape, was when Jesus escaped the clutches of death, that first Easter Sunday in his resurrection victory, breaking those chains of slavery to sin and Satan for us so that we, through faith in Jesus, we could be delivered.

This is why in the church, we always think back to the gospel events. That's why we want our worship to be full of God's word and full of the gospel.

[13:10] That's why Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper and baptism, so that we can have these physical, visible reminders of God's work to rescue us through Jesus.

And every week as we gather here, we're being reminded that God, through his Son, the Lord Jesus, he has rescued, he has redeemed by his life, death, and resurrection.

We remind ourselves that he is still working for us now. He continues to rescue. He continues to redeem. He continues to be with us and for us.

And one day, he'll come back. And that rescue and that redemption will be complete. And God's people will enjoy eternal safety and security.

And we need these constant reminders because life is full of constant challenges. And that's why we should think back to our own narrow escapes.

[14:13] We should think back to those times when we did see God working for us so that we can look back with gratitude, so that we can remember personally that God's covenant love, it doesn't fail, that he does care for us.

Sometimes it's through his word. Sometimes it's the ministry of his spirit. Sometimes it's through the people of God. Sometimes it's through circumstances. But this psalm reminds us that we both praise and we pray to God who is on the throne.

God who decides the outcomes. The God of covenant who cannot and will not fail his people. And he invites each one of us to know him and to trust in his rescue.

So we have first of all our great redeemer. And then right in the middle of the psalm, David reminds us of our great dangers.

All the way from verse 3 to verse 7. But before we get into our text, let's step back in time for a moment. Edinburgh 1582. The date is September the 4th.

[15:30] John Jury was a gospel preacher who has been imprisoned and banished for faithfully proclaiming the word of God.

But now on September the 4th, 1582, he's back. And down at Netherbo, which is not too far away from here, he was met by 200 friends and supporters.

And they then walked up in procession on Sunday morning up the high street to St. Giles Cathedral. So we know where we are. We're at St. Giles Cathedral on the Royal Mile.

And by that point, the crowd had swelled to around about 2,000 people. And while enemy soldiers watched on, wondering what they should do about John, Judy, and a little bit fearful about this growing mob within the city, you know what the crowd did?

The crowd sang. Guess what? Sam. They sang Psalm 124, four-part harmony, and the testimony was that that was more terrifying than any mere mob riot the soldiers might have suspected.

[16:45] The reality that we find in the Bible, the reality we meet in life and in the Christian life, is that life is full of hazard and difficulty and sometimes menace.

We've been thinking about on Sunday evenings that Jesus prepared his disciples for that as he sent them for mission. He'd say, listen, they hated me, they're going to hate you too.

I'm going to send you out like a sheep among wolves. So we shouldn't be surprised. And Psalm 124 stands as a reminder in song that we should be alert, that we should know the situation, we should know the times that we live in, that spiritually we're in a war zone, but also that we should know the solution and the security that comes from our great God.

So Psalm 124, as David composes it, and then as we sing it, it doesn't hide the dangers from us. It doesn't suggest that following God in the way of faith, that following Jesus is easy and leads to peace and comfort and everyone welcoming us and say, this is wonderful.

Rather, he gives very graphic, mental pictures to capture our imagination and to work on our hearts to recognize that, yes, these things may come, but there is a God who delivers and who gives the final outcome.

[18:14] If the Lord had not been on our side, truly the church would be done for. Look at the four pictures. Boys and girls, look at these pictures.

You'll recognize some of these. The first one we find in verse 3. If the Lord had not been on our side when people attacked us, they would have swallowed us alive.

Now, when I read that, I was thinking of some kind of lurking predator. I was imagining a snake curled up in a dark corner waiting for the unsuspecting mouse.

And then, when the strike comes, the mouse is swallowed whole. And the idea of Psalm 124 is that by ourselves, we are outmatched by our spiritual enemies if the Lord had not been on our side.

Picture two. If the Lord had not been on our side, verse 4, the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away.

[19:29] Picture a raging flood. Maybe some of us, we still remember those Christmas day images of the tsunami that struck back in 2004.

Maybe we've seen firsthand the power of a river as it bursts its banks and swept through a city or a town. And again, the idea here is that if the Lord had not been on the side of his people, they and we would be overwhelmed and overcome.

come. Picture number three is of a savage beast. Verse six, praise be to the Lord who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

Now, I'm going to confess the first time I read that my mind went to our little dog. Because you know with dogs when they have dog toys, their instinct is to get it in their mouth and shake it all about as if they're being truly ferocious.

That's their instinct. But that wouldn't be particularly terrifying. Instead, perhaps, we can think of an orca. Imagine an orca. You know those horrible scenes where you see an orca playing with a seal.

[20:48] It's managed to grab one and it flings it up in the air and it's just playing with it. Or maybe think of a lion. And now that it's tracked down a gazelle and it's struck. And it's ready to savage.

The idea again is that we would have been trapped if the Lord had not been on our side. But look at how verse 6 begins. Praise be to the Lord who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

And then the last picture is the picture of the captured bird. We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare. The snare has been broken and we have escaped.

So the unsuspecting bird walking through the woods all of a sudden triggers the trap and maybe the net falls or maybe the noose tightens around its leg.

And the inevitable is that the hunter is going to come and that bird is heading for the cooking pot.

And again it's the idea of being helpless and hopeless if the Lord was not on the side of his people.

[21:58] But what does it say? The snare has been broken and we have escaped and that breaking and that escaping and that rescue doesn't come from the birds.

It doesn't come from the people of God. It comes from the rescuer. It's a wonderful reality that in the darkest of dangers God ensures that his church is protected.

You might ask David, why are you telling us this four times over? We got it with the first image. Well maybe it's because there are so many dangers and so many threats.

And maybe it's a reminder that there is a great need always for the people of God to be alert. Remember Peter's warning. you have an enemy, the devil, and he prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

So we need to look and be alert. But it's also a reminder that we need to live our days looking with faith to God, his people's great deliverer and rescuer.

[23 : 18] Martin Luther was another reformer. He was another who loved this psalm. He often felt that the world was against him. He often felt spiritual oppression as he sought to communicate the truths of the gospel.

And that led him to compose a version of Psalm 124. We sometimes sing it, a mighty fortress is our God. And just to say at a practical level, whether we're thinking of Martin Luther composing a hymn or whether we're thinking about the people of God singing as they recognize a great deliverance. I wonder if we understand in our day to day the wisdom and the goodness of answering our fears with songs of faith. It does our hearts good to sing, to remind ourselves of what we know to be true in God's word.

This remains the hope for the church in every age, including ours. we have a Lord God who delivers. Christopher Ash, he has a nice little sentence, he says, the life of faith consists of many narrow escapes, all of them undergirded by one very big escape.

The point is this, our faith is in the Lord God, the one who sent his own son to be our true king and to be our savior.

[24 : 49] To acknowledge that by nature, because of our sin, because of our rebellion, because of our pride, we should be swallowed up and we should be swept away, we should be savaged because what we deserve is God's judgment.

But by God's grace, he sends his son and Jesus faces down death in our place as our representative and Jesus defeats the power of death.

He robs it of its power and victory. He secures deliverance for all who trust in him. And that great event, the great event of the gospel, God's salvation of us through Jesus, that becomes the solid rock foundation that we build on.

That's our source of safety and security when the storms come. And that's our security when the storm of God's final judgment comes.

We will stand when we stand on the truths of Jesus and his word. So that trusting in the Lord Jesus, just like the singers of Psalm 124 back then, we can look any trouble, any danger square in the eye and say, since God is for us, who can be against us?

[26 : 26] In all of these things, we are more than conquerors through Jesus who loved us. we can say with faith, I am convinced that nothing in all creation, no opposition, no trauma, no disappointment, no sin, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

The great answer to our great danger is our great redeemer. And that takes us finally to verse 8 and our great confidence. It closes with this wonderful statement of faith.

Our help collectively as the church, our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Now, we've already met this statement of faith on the pilgrim journey.

Psalm 121 verse 2, my help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. And here again, David invites us to look back after a danger has passed with a real sense of gratitude.

He leads the people of God into confident trust as they sing. After all, the one who is on the side of his church and his people, the one who provides help, is none other than our almighty maker, the creator of heaven and earth.

[27 : 52] He made all things and right now he sustains all things and even now he is directing all things to his intended purpose and outcome and we can trust him.

Notice our help is in the name of the Lord, all block capitals. We'll keep saying this, that is the personal covenant name of God. And just as in the ancient Near East when a great king entered into a covenant treaty with a lesser nation, there was an agreement on both sides.

So the great king would say to the lesser king, you are to show me loyalty and honour and if you do, I will offer you protection and security.

Maybe we think of it a little bit like the allies in World War I. You know when Austria decided they were going to wage war on Serbia, the allies stood with Serbia.

The great king will stand for the lesser in time of war. God says I will stand for my people in all dangers. And so confident faith begins here.

[29:04] As we understand our maker is our father in heaven, is the one who has entered into covenant with us, he will defend us, he cannot break his promises. Our confidence is in Jesus who said I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

God's people in all times, including our time, can confidently say our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

The psalm says to us, yes, there will be suffering. And yes, there will even be martyrs. Think Nigeria, think Yemen, think North Korea.

God's people but for the church, for the church as a whole, for the church for eternity, it will survive, it will grow and in the end we will be delivered and glorified.

And so David presents for us the wisdom and humility of faith as he gratefully looks away from himself to look to his great God in utter dependence, to rejoice totally in his redemption, inviting us to be honest enough to say, if Jesus was not my Lord and my Savior, there is no way I could follow God, there is no way I could be good enough for God, there is no way I could hope to stand before his judgment seat and be welcomed into his kingdom.

[30:42] freedom. So as we close, can you and I, can we sing this song? Can we sing it personally?

Can we look back and say, God has worked for me. God has delivered me when I was helpless and hopeless. He delivered me there at the cross and he continues to be for me today.

If so, then be glad. Sing for joy and give him glory and share those stories to encourage one another to keep walking with Jesus.

But if this isn't your personal experience, then the word of God would say, this then is your greatest need. that you would ask Jesus to deliver you from your sin, to be your savior.

And there is the promise in the Bible that if we ask him with faith, if we turn from sin to trust in him, then he will do it. Well, may Psalm 124 be precious to us as we think about this rhythm that every week we would be learning to look back with thankfulness and joy.

[32:11] God sent Jesus for me to face the attacks of the evil one for me, to be overwhelmed under the flood of God's judgment in my place, to be in the teeth of lions on the cross for me, to enter into death, to secure my salvation.

may we find ourselves looking back to that great rescue as we also look forward to final rescue, to Jesus returning to make everything new, to bring perfect justice and security and joy so we might live today with confident trust, not in ourselves, not in our strategies, not in our successes, but looking to Jesus saying our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Let's pray together briefly. Lord, we thank you that the Bible is so full of rescue and redemption stories.

it's so full of encouragements as we see your people in need, crying out to you and you being patient and kind and faithful and answering and delivering in power so that your people might live with security and in praise of your name.

And Lord, we thank you that all of those small acts of deliverance point us to the ultimate salvation, the ultimate rescue of the Lord Jesus through his death and resurrection.

[33:58] May we find ourselves often returning back to the truths of the gospel, to give us hope in your covenant love and to recognize our help that comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

May you help us to live today with confident trust as we look forward to that coming deliverance when Jesus returns. help us, give us confidence and hope, not in ourselves, but in Jesus.

We pray in his name. Amen.