

Our help comes from The Lord

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Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] Please have a seat. And then if you turn back in your Bibles, it's page 622 to Psalm 121.

! And let's begin asking a question. This morning, do you need help? And where do you look to find that help?

Now, the fundamental encouragement of this psalm is that the Lord who made the hills is the Lord who helps his people. We read it, we sang it in verses 1 and 2.

The Lord who never sleeps is the Lord who keeps watch over his people now and forevermore. Six times that same idea, verses 3 to 8. There is a deep promise within this psalm that believers in Christ Jesus can trust God and his protection.

That there is no better salvation found anywhere else. That God is a Father who defends the faithful until the very end.

[1:20] Now, while Psalm 120 would be one of the less sung and well-loved psalms, that's not true for Psalm 121.

It's familiar to many, much loved by many. So, how do we bring out the wonders of this truth this morning? Let's think a couple of ways. Let's think about our pilgrims.

What did they see when they looked to the hills? Why do they find themselves looking to the hills?

What kind of thoughts would come into their minds as pilgrims?

And then we'll think about parallels in our journeys of faith. And what is it, as they're on that journey, what do they remind themselves about the Lord? And how can this encourage us to trust God today as our helper and keeper?

So, join with me in trying to picture these pilgrims who lift their eyes up to the hills. So, we thought about them in Psalm 120. Those groups who are really far away from Jerusalem, but it's festival time.

[2:31] And so, these small bands, family units, would cluster together and make the long trek together. The furthest away, people would go somewhere between 120 to 150 miles on foot towards Jerusalem.

When they did that, they would pass through valleys. There would be mountainous regions. There would be desert spaces. It was hard. They would do it with families. They would do it with animals. It would take, they estimate, somewhere between 7 to 10 days for the people who are furthest away to get to Jerusalem. So, picture them.

They're on the journey. And they see a mountain range up ahead. And they lift their eyes. Now, what might they be thinking? What might they see? Sometimes, we can well imagine they would anticipate danger.

What if someone from our party falls and injures themselves? Or what if we get round that corner and there happens to be bandits and robbers?

[3:33] Sometimes, the mountains spoke danger. Sometimes, the mountains would speak temptation. Because they might very well look up to a set of hills and see where false gods are worshipped.

And those worshippers claim that when you pass through that territory, you needed to worship this god in order to have protection. And so, they might be tempted to look away from the true god to trust in local gods.

So, sometimes danger. Sometimes protection. But sometimes, of course, there'd be hope. You know, that the day is drawing to a close. A mountain can represent a place of shelter.

And especially as they got near Journey's End, they would see those mountains surrounding Jerusalem. And they think, ah, we've nearly reached our goal. And, of course, that goal would take them up a mountain, up to Mount Zion, to the ultimate joy of, here we are in God's presence with

God's people and we're worshipping together.

What about when we lift our eyes to the hills? And especially, to go back to our original question, where do you and I need help today?

[4:45] What problem, what trouble looms like a mountain on your horizon? Now, there may be many. It may be danger.

We are facing a difficult diagnosis. There is a fracture in one of our relationships. We are worried about our future.

And so, we're living with anxiety. But it may be, too, that those problems represent a temptation. A temptation to trust in my wealth and my resources.

My abilities and my relationships to get me through, to get me around this problem. To rest and trust in created things rather than our creator.

When a problem looms large on our horizon, where do you and I look for hope? Is it to be found in human solutions?

[5:55] Is it to be found in something within creation? Has discouragement or distraction taken our focus away today from seeking help from the Lord?

And what Psalm 121 did for the pilgrims back then, it can still do for us today. Because it wants to draw our gaze beyond the mountains to the mountain maker.

To call us and to call us back to trust in God for salvation and protection on the road of life and faith. So, we're going to keep asking ourselves, where do we seek help? You may have seen the Disney Plus advertising campaign.

With the strap line, A Lifetime of Great Stories. I don't know if you've seen the advert. But it takes a small boy watching classic Disney movie.

[6:55] And then it follows him through various seasons of life. As a teenager, going as a student on a camping trip. Then married with kids. And all through the different phases of life, those great stories remain.

Psalm 121, I think, is loved so much because it tells us of the great story of the Christian life. That there is a God who is creator and he does save and he does keep his people.

That whatever problem, whatever situation, and through the whole journey of life and faith, God is there for his people. So, today, we can fill in the blank.

What's our problem? Think about it. Look at it. And then, look beyond it.

To the Lord, our creator. To the Lord, our covenant maker. To the Lord, our companion. The only source of ultimate help and salvation.

[8:05] So, let's get into our text. Our help, we are told, comes from the Lord, the creator. And that's there in verse 2. The question is asked in verse 1. Where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Sometimes we share the Apostles' Creed in church. It sounds a lot like that, doesn't it? The almighty maker of heaven and earth. Now, when the Bible says that God is creator, we need to recognize all that that involves.

It's not saying God is like the blind watchmaker who kind of winds up the world at the beginning and then just lets it run. God makes and God makes. God makes and God maintains.

God controls and God directs everything towards his goals. Alec Motier puts it this way. God exercises full, detailed, executive management of the world he created.

We're talking of the God who numbers the stars and calls them each by name. Who numbers the sparrows and makes sure they have food. Whose care of us, whose knowledge of us is so great that even the hairs on our heads are numbered.

[9:21] So when the pilgrim says, I lift my eyes, there is hope and confidence when their gaze turns to the Lord of these hills.

Because he is mighty and he is his people's helper. You have probably had the experience of mountains and mountain ranges making us feel somewhat small.

Perhaps if you're a walker or a hiker, you're at the bottom and the summit is all the way up there. You think, how am I ever going to get up there? Or maybe you've got to the top and then you're looking over a vast mountain range.

And again, it can leave you feeling so small. We can seem so fragile and fleeting compared to those ancient, massive hills. Isaiah, in chapter 40 of his prophecy, gives us a different perspective. Speaking of this God, the mighty maker of heaven and earth, he says, God weighs the mountains and the hills on his scales and balances. We weigh flour and we weigh sugar.

[10:35] Our God, he weighs Everest in Kathmandu. He is infinitely greater there from all eternity. And we need to remember that in those moments when our problems can feel like mountains to us.

When we are battling with anxiety and loneliness and struggles with our health or when we are struggling against sin. All of those things that can make us seem so small and discouraged and can draw our eyes and our hearts and our minds inward and away from our God and his loving care.

We need to look up. And we need to look beyond to the mighty maker of the mountains. To the Lord Jesus, the maker of heaven and earth who walked on those mountains.

Who climbed Mount Calvary. Who faced God's holy wrath because of our sin to show us God's great love. Ultimately, the Lord Jesus, he is the help you and I need.

We look away from our troubles and our temptations to Calvary Hill. To Christ crucified as our only help. We trust that he is the one who will keep us until we reach heavenly Zion.

[11:58] Until we are home with God. So our help comes from the Lord, our creator. But the song isn't finished there. Secondly, verses 3 and 4.

Our help comes from the Lord, the covenant redeemer. Now, I know some of you this week will have spared a thought for poor Billy Gilmore.

Now, some of you might not know who Billy Gilmore is. Well, 24 hours before he was due to fly with the rest of the Scotland squad to the World Cup. In the middle of a friendly, he picked up an injury. And now he's missing out. So his dream from childhood has turned to agony and despair. It can happen.

Listen now to verses 3 and 4 of Psalm 121. This is speaking of the Lord. He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

[12:57] With the Lord as our covenant redeemer, this never happens. He ensures that none of his people are lost. That no dreams turn to despair with this God.

He keeps his people safe. No hazard and no slip will stop us from reaching God's intended goal for his church. Life with God in the heavenly city.

Now, it's important when we come to a text like this to recognize this is not saying, believe in Jesus and a comfortable life is coming.

Trust in Jesus and you'll be immune from life's troubles. Don't say that at all. You can go to a passage like Luke 21. In Luke 21, we hear Jesus say to his disciples, you'll be betrayed, you'll be hated, you'll be persecuted, but not a hair of your head will perish.

Or we can turn to the prayer of Jesus we've been looking at for the last few weeks in the evening. Jesus prays, my prayer is not that you take them out of the world. My prayer is that you keep them safe in the power of your name.

[14:05] My prayer is that you protect them. Jesus knows in this world we will have trouble, but we're invited to take heart because he has overcome the world. And this God cannot and will not lose any of his own.

Jesus cannot and will not lose any of those he came to save. Trouble comes, but it does not overcome.

In our church, we have a missionary partner who's serving in Colombia, Manuel Reanu. Many of us know him and have been praying for him because Manuel, a few weeks ago now, had a very nasty slip where he fractured his skull and one of his vertebrae.

And through this prolonged period of medical procedures and tests and struggles with health, Manuel has been testifying to God's goodness, to God's miraculous providence, to God's care over him through his spirit and through his people such that he can say, this has become a blessing to me.

He will not let your foot slip. This section of Psalm 121 tells us something about God's work. God is a tireless worker.

[15:35] 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, no days off, no sleep. God is caring for his people. I wonder if we ever stop and think about that.

Sometimes we think a lot about the work that we do for God and that matters and it matters to God. But have you ever stopped to think about the truth that God works for us?

Isaiah 64, verse 4, God works for those who wait for him. I love 2 Chronicles 16, verse 9.

Tells us just how eager God is to work for us. Says, The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth.

That means the eyes of the Lord run to and fro this church this morning to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless towards him.

[16 : 36] God is eager to use his power and his wisdom and his goodness and his love to watch over and to keep his own.

Now, how do we know that to be true? Well, here's one way we can certainly know. Because God sent us his son.

And God's son, the Lord Jesus, he came to work on our behalf. Remember those words that Jesus spoke of himself? He didn't come to be served, but to serve.

And to give his life as a ransom for many. The gospel message, the good news of the Bible is not, If I work hard enough, perhaps God will accept me.

The good news of the Bible is that Jesus works for his followers. Jesus works for our salvation.

There is help available from your creator and your covenant redeemer.

[17 : 43] Now, why am I using the language of covenant and covenant redeemer? Take a look with me at verse 4. Indeed, he who watches over Israel when either slumber nor sleep.

Now, that's significant because verse 1 and 2 is the language of my. Verses 5 to 8, the Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade. But here, there's this thought of Israel.

So now we're thinking about God's covenant commitment. His choosing and saving of a particular people, Israel.

Let's go back to the point of this pilgrimage journey that the worshippers are on. Why are they heading to this festival to worship? They're worshipping to remember the God who has kept his covenant, who has acted in power to save his people.

It's all there in the book of Exodus, second book of the Bible. This God who saves by his power to rescue them from slavery in Egypt. And he does that in response both to his people's need and because he has made a promise.

[18 : 49] And he will keep his promise. And he saves them so that he can meet with his people. That he can bring them ultimately into the promised land to share life with him.

And so they go three times a year to remember God's covenant love and faithfulness. And vital to that whole process of salvation was a Passover lamb.

Was sacrifice. Was blood. Judgment falls on the lamb and it passes over the offering, the worshipper.

Vital to the new covenant, as we will remind ourselves later in our service, is Jesus, our Passover lamb. The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The lamb of God who establishes the new covenant through his broken body. And his shed blood.

And just like those pilgrims back in the day, we must believe this and we must remember it.

[20 : 00] Here's one really important reason to gather Sunday by Sunday. Here's why we share the Lord's Supper. To remind ourselves of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

Because we are prone to forget. Psalm 121 reminds us God is up and working for us. All day and all night for those who wait for him.

Those who trust in his son Jesus. Now you will know by experience, I am sure, that despite trying to be faithful, yes, we often stagger.

Often due to our own sin and weakness. We might well fall at times due to troubles and circumstances. But God has promised to watch us and keep us.

So that in the end, we will stand before him. It's important to recognize that to know this protection and to know this promise, we first need to know him as our God.

[21 : 10] We need to know Jesus personally as Lord and Savior. We need to recognize our guilt and our sin. We need to acknowledge our need of him and his mercy, his help and his keeping.

You need to ask him to forgive you and to give you new life. And when you do, as a member of God's church and God's family, we are protected, eternally protected by a never-sleeping, always-keeping Savior.

So our help comes from the Lord, the Creator, the Covenant Redeemer. Thirdly, our help comes from the Lord, our companion. Look with me at verses 5 and 6.

The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night. Now, the movement here is really important.

We've been thinking about the church. Israel represents the church. Now, it zooms right in to the level of the individual. The person trusting in Christ can say, The Lord watches over me.

[22:20] The Lord is my shade. And there's a poetic image there that runs throughout the Bible. The Lord is our shade. And the image there has ideas of shelter and protection.

Think of a canopy roof. And you're eating outside. The canopy roof, sometimes, sometimes, it shelters us from the sun.

Other times, most of the time, it shelters us from the rain when it comes. So a shade gives shelter and protection.

And the Bible is full of different sheltering images. A traveling foreigner finds shade and shelter through hospitality. A husband offers shelter and protection to his wife through sacrificial love and humble leadership.

A judge in a town offers shelter to citizens by guaranteeing justice for all. We began our service with Psalm 91.

[23:28] God offers shelter and protection like a mother bird. Inviting us to find shelter under his wings. Maybe you remember that Jesus looked over Jerusalem and wept.

How I longed to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you were not willing. Jesus offers protection, but some people say no.

The Psalm reminds us that God invites us to run to him to find refuge and protection. So he's like a shade for us. But the poetry also works this way.

The Lord is your shadow. Meaning that he comes so near to us. He draws so close to us.

It's as if his shadow falls on our path. Remember as children playing that game when you're walking down the road and the sun's at your back and the shadows lengthen and you try and stand on or step on the shadow of the person that you're with.

[24:39] Or again, when the sun is behind you and you have that sense of someone on the path behind you because all of a sudden you see that long shadow appear. For the Christian, the Lord God comes that near to do us good.

The shadow of the Almighty Maker falls on our path. And because that's true, we will never be lost. We can never come to ultimate harm when the Lord is by our side.

Your God is your companion, is the message of Psalm 121. Jesus is your friend who sticks closer than any brother.

Jesus is the good shepherd who walks beside us through those dark valleys until we come to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

With Jesus as your Lord and your Savior and your friend, you will be, you are shaded from all harm. And do you know how we can say that?

[25:50] Because we see what happens at the cross. There on the cross, we have the Son of God, the perfect sinless Son of God, bearing the blazing heat of God's judgment on our behalf.

So that in Him, by faith in Him, we are sheltered and saved. It falls on Him, so it will never fall on you.

So as we come to the last two verses, which really serve as a summary, we discover that the help that comes from the Lord, well, it's comprehensive.

This conclusion wants to leave us in no doubt that for the Christian, my help comes from the Lord. Bold, underline all caps. The Lord will keep you from all harm.

He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore. The level of His care. It is not some basic third-party policy.

[26:57] It is fully comprehensive. Did you hear the language? Look at verse 7 again. Kept from all harm. No small print. Kept at all times.

All your comings and all your goings. And kept for all time. Now and forever. As we're reminded that God's great design is to preserve those who trust in Jesus until we get to heaven to be with Jesus. So Alamy puts it this way. The pilgrim path is a sheltered area and the pilgrim is a protected species.

I like that. A protected species. Some of you will know that one of our vet students, Samuel from Singapore, he's off to Indonesia for a month to get involved in a conservation project trying to figure out how to help the orangutans because of deforestation.

So in that project, government money and funding and scientists and conservation experts and local people on the ground, they're all working together, pooling these resources to see if they can protect the monkeys from a dwindling forest.

[28:16] The message that Psalm 121 leaves us with is this. Christians are protected.

Not by a government, not by a think tank, but by the Lord, our creator. The Lord, our covenant keeper.

The Lord, our companion. And he keeps us from those infinite resources at his disposal. So our question as we close is this.

Today, as we think about the troubles that we face, can you say, my help, it comes from the Lord. I know him and I trust him. He is my savior. He is my friend. That yes, sometimes the path is hard, but I believe he will keep me now and forever more.

[29:24] As we close, as we lift our eyes from Psalm 121, let me take you back just for a moment, back to Revelation 7.

That wonderful passage that we read where this song, this prayer is finally and perfectly answered. Because Revelation 7 gives us this glorious future that is promised for God's kept and protected people.

And what was the image? What did we have? We had this huge, multinational, multi-ethnic church, all worshipping the Lord together.

There is the Lamb at the center of the throne. And what is said of that great crowd, they have been taken out of great tribulation. They have passed through all the troubles of life.

And there they are. And in Christ, there we will be before the throne of God. And he who sits on the throne he will shelter them with his presence.

[30:28] No more the scorching heat. Because the Lamb on the throne, he is their shepherd. And God himself, this God, will wipe away every tear.

let's pray and give thanks to God for his help. Lord, our God, we thank you that this psalm is such a powerful reminder.

Its repetition says to us that you are our creator. We haven't abandoned us to ourselves. You don't sit back at a distance and watch things unfold.

But rather, you are the God who has made covenant commitments. And you will keep and honor those. And you have done it in sending your son, the Lord Jesus.

We thank you that he entered into this world. He sang this psalm, trusting in you, his father. And now, we trust him.

[31:32] We trust in his perfect life, his sacrificial death, and the glory of his resurrection. We take heart in the promise that he will return and make everything new, that he will take his people to be with him forever, that there is a day coming when our life will be perfect in Christ, that for all eternity we will gladly and joyfully worship, safe, kept, and protected from all harm by the God who wipes away every tear, the God who is pleased to draw near.

And so we ask that you would draw near to us today in whatever our trouble is. Help us to lift our eyes beyond it to the God who made the hills, to the God who walked these hills, and to the God who in Christ suffered and died to save us.

And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.