

Keep on keeping on

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: 05 July 2026

Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] So, having sung that psalm, we're now going to read it together. That's Psalm 125, as we continue in the Song of Ascents. We're on page 623, thinking about the next of these pilgrim! songs for the journey of faith. This one, in a sense, is very much a keep on, keeping on kind of a psalm. So, let's hear God's Word again. Psalm 125. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken, but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people both now and forevermore. The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil. Lord, do good to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart, but those who turn to crooked ways, the Lord will banish with the evildoers. Peace be on Israel. Amen. So, we're thinking again about visitors arriving at Jerusalem for a religious festival, but we're going to begin with a visit to another city. We're going to begin with a visit to the city of Paris. So, Paris is a beautiful city. Lots of us have probably been there on holiday. It always comes near, you know, the top of the list of the most desirable places to visit or beautiful places in the world. But, if we were to have visited Paris in 1940, we would have been struck by a very different picture. If we went to the Eiffel

Tower, we would have seen the Nazi flags flying. Walking down the Champs-Élysées, we would have seen German soldiers marching, patrolling the streets. It was occupied. So, at the same time as seeing the beauty of Paris, we'd also be aware of the brokenness of a world in which there is evil. Or, if you happen to be there like we were in the summer of 2023, you would have arrived to rioting, filling the streets.

Go to the Eiffel Tower and there were armed guards and policemen walking. There was a curfew in place because the city was deemed no longer safe. And again, beauty and brokenness. As so often happens, live side by side and visitors on those days would have something of that bittersweet feeling and a longing for better days. I introduced that because as we join the pilgrims here in Psalm 125, heading to Jerusalem, maybe around 700 BC, so a long time ago, as they were heading up for that religious festival, they would have a sense of great joy. Because when you get to Jerusalem, you get to be with God's people and you get to meet with God in his temple, the God of glory. But what often happened is they arrived in Jerusalem and they discovered, oh, now a foreign emperor rules over us. Or the discovery that some of their fellow citizens have turned from God's ways to wicked ways. And so, the worshiper would feel on that day some of the same sadness, some of the same questions of a visitor in Paris. When we come to Psalm 125, we might think of it as a yes and no Psalm. Or a keep on keeping on Psalm. So, yes, and we'll think about this,

God has made great promises. But those promises are not complete yet. So, that life comes with struggle for the people of faith. Yes, God is with and for those who trust him. But no, that doesn't mean life is easy and full of peace right now. And so, it invites us to ask the question, well, in that kind of context, why keep on keeping on? How is it that we can keep trusting and worshipping Jesus?

When the Christian life brings with it struggle and when we face sadness, or maybe it's just that we feel so separate from everybody else because our values are different. Or when we look around and other people seem to have it really easy and they seem happy and they're prospering, but they never think about God. Why would we keep on keeping on? If you've had those questions, or maybe you're here today and you feel weary in your faith, maybe if you were honest, you feel shaken in your faith.

[5:01] And I think Psalm 125 can help us because it's going to invite us ultimately to keep on trusting Jesus who promises both present safety and future peace. So, let's get into our text and let's see it.

First of all, first couple of verses, verse 1 and 2, keep on keeping on because the Lord Jesus surrounds you with the love of God. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore. The psalm begins with this truth, that God's true church is as safe as God is strong. Because we are surrounded by him. We are kept by him. We are safe in Christ Jesus.

The idea of being surrounded, and that's a source of security, that's a really powerful image. Boys and girls, think about that. Think about times when being surrounded makes you feel safe. When I was thinking about that, I was thinking maybe a parent's hug. That can be something that makes us feel safe. Or maybe we're going to a new experience. We're going to camp or we're going to a new school. Think about the difference it makes if you are surrounded by a group of friends. Or in stormy weather, the thunder and lightning this week, how much safer we feel if we are surrounded by the security of our walls in our houses. Well, that's kind of the picture of Psalm 125. As the visitors were trekking up towards Jerusalem, they would see around Jerusalem seven hills that surround it. Edinburgh has seven hills, so does Jerusalem. And that would become for them an aid to help them in their faith. So just like the mountains surround Jerusalem, so God surrounds his people with his never-ending love. And so they are being reminded, the one who created them, the one who is in covenant relationship with them, he always loves the people who trust him. And so the song begins by saying, if we trust in the Lord, if we trust in the Lord Jesus, spiritually we are unshakable. We're like

[7:32] Mount Zion that's always there because we will always know God's strong protection and God's steadfast love. That's how we can keep going, keep on keeping on in the journey of faith when we know this love.

The Psalms love to use that image. We sing quite often Psalm 46. Psalm 46 says, God is our refuge and our strength. He's an ever-present help in a time of trouble. And even if the world turns upside down, even if everything is shaken, the Lord of hosts is with us and he is our fortress. In the book of Hebrews, in the New Testament, there is this mention of the fact that there is a day coming when God will, as it were, shake the earth in judgment. But it says in that shaking, in that judgment, those who trust Jesus, we stand firm because we are receiving an unshakable kingdom. And so we're invited to worship and to trust and to keep on keeping on as we are surrounded by the love of God in Jesus. That's the message that Psalm 125 begins with.

Alec Moutier, who writes a lot on the Psalms, he talks about, here is the softest pillow you and I could ever rest our head on. The softest pillow we could ever enjoy is the knowledge that our God, the God of the Bible is really and truly God is really and truly God. And that he really is on the throne. He really is in control. And we really are in Jesus, surrounded by his loving, everlasting arms.

[9:19] So that we can trust that nothing that happens to us ever shakes us from God's grip on us. It was true for the pilgrims and it's true for us. When things go wrong, when sadness comes, this is the foundation truth we need. In Jesus, we are surrounded by the love of God.

Now, I think we know this to be true in everyday life, that who we surround ourselves matters. There are times when we really need family to be there for us, or we really appreciate having friends who stick by us. Or maybe it's the colleagues who go the extra mile when we are under pressure, or the loving church family. In spiritual terms, have you and I surrounded ourselves with the love of Jesus? Do you trust him as Lord? Father, this Jesus who's presented to us in the Bible, who is the eternal son of God, yet in the fullness of God's time, was born in a stable and placed in a manger. The son of God who became one of us to identify with us, to walk in our shoes, to be a servant for us. Born in a manger, lived a perfect life, lived a perfect life, and then died on a cross. God the son, saving us from sin by dying in our place, both our representative and our substitute. In that great act of God's grace, having done nothing to deserve God's salvation, God freely sends his son to be our substitute.

Do we trust him as Lord? Do we trust him knowing that right now he rules as king, that he has been raised from the dead, he's returned to heaven, and one day he's coming back again?

And he will come back again to renew this world, to finally put everything right, to make everything new. So that those who trust in the Lord can enjoy life with him forever. Do we trust him as he calls us today to faith? As Christians, are we trusting in the Lord today? Are we trusting when he doesn't lead us along easy paths? Will we trust that he knows what he's doing? Can I rest even when life

seems chaotic knowing that God is on the throne? And that in the end, all things work for his glory and are good?

[12 : 11] Do I trust today that the Lord Jesus, he surrounds me in his love? Even if things don't necessarily seem that easy, when our relationships with our children or with our parents is somewhat strained, or when it feels like our boss has it in for us, or when the hard knocks of life just keep coming one after the other, when we meet with difficult news, or we're living with the weakness that comes with old age, will we trust this promise that the Lord Jesus surrounds us with God's covenant love? Promising never to leave and forsake his own, never to lose any who come to him in faith, that he will lead us to our eternal home. Do we trust in the Lord today? So we keep on keeping on because the Lord Jesus surrounds us with the love of God. Secondly, we can keep on keeping on because the

Lord Jesus is our sovereign king. Let me read verse three for us. The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil.

Let me take you back to Paris in the early 1940s for a moment. And this is something that we know from history. As they lived under Nazi occupation, some of the citizens of Paris, well they began to lose hope and they began to lose heart. And some of them decided, well it's easier for us just to side with this wicked regime in order to save ourselves. The same kind of thing happened back in 2023 as news of mob violence hit social media. More and more Parisians took to the streets and were swept along in that tide of violence. To understand the promise that we have in verse three, we need to get a sense of the weight of what the worshippers might experience arriving in Jerusalem under the rule of evil. So this time isn't tied to a specific moment in history and that's really helpful because there's lots of times in Israel's history when a worshipper might arrive in the city and find any number of problems. Sometimes it was as desperate as, wow enemies have come and the city is now lying in ruins. Sometimes they'd arrive in the city only to discover that their king, well he's now become a puppet king and he's not really in charge.

They're controlled by foreign empires. In Jerusalem, sometimes its temple was robbed. Sometimes you would walk along the streets and there would be scenes of injustice and false worship was going on right in the very place where the true God was supposed to be worshipped.

Sometimes the sector of the wicked ruled over the city. And when people are under the boot and under the thumb and under the influence of wickedness and evil, sometimes the pressure comes and the temptation comes, well I'll just follow the crowd.

[15 : 38] And if it lasts for too long, well maybe I'll just give in and I'll use my hands for evil also. That's what Psalm 125 verse 3 is saying. My favourite Japanese proverb is also the only Japanese proverb I have.

You might have heard it, the nail that sticks out will be hammered down. That's what can happen when good people live under the rule of a wicked regime.

The world will try to squeeze them into its mould. And you know for Christians, we've probably had something of that pressure and something of that experience in different ways.

We have probably lived with the pressure to take the world's view of normal to be our view of normal.

So that might be how we think about habits to do with drinking alcohol or to do with habits of spending our money. It may be that it seems normalised to us to pass on gossip or to use cruel words towards others.

[16 : 40] We might be tempted to take the world's view of sex or marriage or gender. Or it might simply be that we come to believe what the world thinks is most important.

Success and happiness and making it in the world. There are so many ways in which we can feel the pressure to take on a different set of values.

Again, we could turn to another famous psalm, Psalm 73. And we find there that the writer of the psalm, he is surrounded by people who seem to have no thought of God.

And yet life is going really well for them. They seem to have no bother. And they're always healthy. And they've always got heaps of money. And things are going brilliantly. And the psalmist is very honest.

He says, you know what? I was almost tempted to give up worshipping God. I was almost tempted to just become like them. Until I went to the temple. Until I remembered God.

[17:40] Until I remembered eternity. Jesus gave a warning to his disciples in Matthew 24. So not long before he would go to the cross. He was talking about how trouble would come for the church. And he said this. He said, because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. So as there is more and more wickedness, Jesus is saying it's harder and harder to show love for God.

And so Psalm 125 is written for the pressure cooker of faith. And what is it that we need in order to keep on keeping on?

In that kind of environment, what we need is the promise that one day deliverance will come. That one day the rule of evil will be broken. What we need is the good news of the gospel.

That God sends Jesus and he comes as the true king. And he has come to go to war and to defeat the powers of evil, sin and death. So that by faith you and I can live set free from those powers.

[18:44] Set free from that tyranny. Set free to enjoy life under the good rule of Jesus as king. And so we can keep on keeping on knowing God rules.

That God is for us. And that God is faithful to us. Even in all the pressure. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 13 there is a really important promise.

It says, And so the good news for us as Christians is that we can keep on keeping on as we trust Jesus and his promises.

And we can trust that he will not let us be tempted beyond our strength. That he will provide strength so we can stand up under tempting. And so all our hope is placed on Jesus.

Jesus was made like us in every way. Except he never sinned. The only person who never gave in to temptation. The one who is faithful all the way to the cross.

[19:59] He is the true king who loves and protects his people. And we can keep on keeping on. Because he is our strength and he gives us grace. The third thing to see as we want to learn how we keep on keeping on following Jesus.

We keep on keeping on because the Lord Jesus is our shalom. I'm cheating there for the sake of alliteration. He is our peace.

Look at verse 4 and 5. So the psalm kind of changes its tone.

The psalm closes with a prayer. It's as if the singers are now turning God's promises of safety and strength. And of a scepter that's broken and a true king reigning.

They're turning those promises into prayers. That's a great way to think about prayer. William Gurnall was a Puritan who said, Prayer is nothing but God's promises reversed.

[21:10] We read the Bible. We hear God's promises as God's people. We claim those promises and we pray them back to him with trust. And the focus of the prayer is, Lord God, save and protect your own people.

And Lord God, judge your enemies. And we need to think about why that prayer is so important.

Again, let's return to Paris. Okay, so we've been to Paris in 1940.

Let's think about Paris in 1945. What's changed in those five years? Well, the Nazis have fallen. So the banners have all been torn down.

The flags are all gone. The troops are no longer in the streets. The city now enjoys peace. Yes, there is rebuilding. But there is the joy of peace that is broken out because warfare is over.

Because enemies have been defeated. And the closing prayer of Psalm 125 follows some of that same trajectory. That ultimately, there's good news for the people of God in the hope that God will deal with all that opposes, all that is wicked, so that those who trust in him can live with peace and safety.

[22:27] And so that's why verse 4 is, in a sense, a prayer for protection. Do good to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart. Now, notice this isn't saying, do good to those who are perfectly good, those who are perfectly upright, those who never fail.

The idea is, Lord, protect and do good to those who are trusting in you. Those who, by God's grace, want to follow the ways of Jesus. It's a prayer that God would be for his people as he has promised, to show goodness and love as he has promised.

But there's also the prayer for purifying and protection. In verse 5, those who turn to crooked ways, the Lord will banish with the evildoers. And do we see that reality?

A city can only have peace and justice and love once those who oppose those things are removed. So the good news of the Bible always includes salvation for God's people and for God dealing with what is wicked.

Banish the evildoers so that God and his people can dwell in peace. And as we pray this psalm and as we sing this psalm, we're reminding ourselves that God is caring for his church in the present and God will care for his church in the future.

[23:53] That right now, the church in the world, the church is always this mixed group. There are some people with faith and there's some people who don't have faith and the same is true in the world. There are those who have faith and there are those who don't have faith.

And there's always a sense of tension there and there's always a sense of pressure and opposition on those who do trust in the Lord. But there is this hope and this prayer that one day Jesus will return.

And there'll be that final decisive judgment on those who steadfastly oppose Jesus. And there will be a decisive moment of salvation for those who trusted in Jesus.

And on that day, peace will be on Israel. Peace will be for the people of God. True shalom, true flourishing and wholeness in life will belong to God's people forever.

And that's why God sent his son to answer the longing we often have in our hearts for peace.

Sometimes it's because we want peace in our conscience because we know all's not well between us and God.

[25:02] Sometimes it's peace because just life seems so mixed up. That's why Jesus has given the title in the Bible, Prince of Peace. That's why when Jesus came, he said to his disciples, peace, I leave with you.

My peace, I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. This is a peace that lasts. This is a peace that passes understanding that goes deep down into our hearts. And this is why Jesus came to die.

It's the message of Ephesians 2. Jesus died to secure our peace. So we read Paul say, he himself, Jesus himself, he is our peace. He has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

And in this one body, Jesus' body, to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility. Jesus promises an end to hostility and the breaking out of peace.

And the peace that Jesus offers is peace with God. And the way that Jesus brings peace is by taking the sin, our sin, that creates a barrier that makes us enemies of God.

[26:12] He deals with that. He pays the price in full there on the cross for us. So that trusting in him, we are reconciled. We enjoy peace with God.

We have the promise of eternal life, an eternal life that will be marked by, perfect peace. And so Psalm 125 says to us, keep on keeping on because that peace is real and that peace is coming and that peace is for those who trust in the Lord.

Maybe we're here today and we feel the weight of the world on our shoulders today. Maybe we're weary in the walk of faith today. Maybe we wonder, is it worth it? Will we make it? Or maybe we're here looking to find out about Christianity and what it offers.

Maybe as you hear this message, you think, wow, peace is something I really need in my life. And the good news is that Jesus invites each and every one of us to come to him and to find peace in him and from him.

To find that safety that brings peace when we are surrounded by the loving arms of the Lord Jesus. Find peace under the rule of Jesus, the King who will never fail his people, who never breaks any of his promises.

[27:31] Find peace from the one who offers his shalom now and forever. Let's pray in his name now. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you came into this world that you might bring the peace of God into hearts and lives.

We recognize that because of our own sin and selfishness and pride and greed, often we see warfare and fighting and wickedness and division.

But we thank you that Jesus came to die on the cross to set us free to enjoy your peace. And so we pray that we would receive that peace and we would receive that rest and security that he offers.

And we ask that you'd help us also to be peacemakers in our families and our friendship groups where we work and where we live. And help us to live with hope in this promise of your peace that will last forever in the new Jerusalem.

when Jesus comes back to make everything new. And so we pray these things in his name. Amen.