

Help for the new year

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Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[0:00] Help us as we begin this new year. What's going to help you as you go through 2025?! I was interested in reading what some countries do to help them as they go into a new year.

Different weird traditions. But perhaps you take inspiration from the people of Spain and you started the year by eating 12 grapes.

They do that. They eat one for every month of the year and believe it gives them good luck. So perhaps that's going to help you this year. What about how they start the year in Denmark? By smashing plates in their homes and in front of people's doorsteps.

Apparently it will help them to be well liked. Don't know. Is that going to help you this year? Or in Brazil they start the year wearing white because that they believe will give them good peace and luck for the new year.

Is that what you're looking to, to help you this year? Or perhaps you have more conventional methods to help you. Perhaps it's taking out a gym membership or restarting that gym membership from last year.

[1:23] Perhaps it's taking a diet, some sort of diet to help you. I'm personally trying No Sugar January to see how that might help me. So perhaps that's something you're doing to help you.

Or perhaps it's turning to some sort of technology. Technology can help us in different ways. But this morning I want us to turn to the Bible.

And to seek the wisdom in God's Word. In order to find help for us as we go through this year. So those things may help us to some degree.

But what's really going to help us even more than that? Well I think this psalm is a really good place to go. It starts, doesn't it? Where does my help come from?

It asks the question that we've already asked. What's going to help us this year? Where is my help going to come from? And we're heading here because this psalm is used in a journey.

[2:29] It's, and in some respects, a new year is like beginning a journey, isn't it? Or the continuation of an old journey. And this psalm is part of a journey because it's part of the psalms of ascent.

Songs that the Israelites will have sung as they ascended to Jerusalem for worshipping God in his holy place. Particularly perhaps used at times of festivals like the Passover.

As many Israelites gathered together in Jerusalem. And this psalm would help them on their pilgrim journeys to Jerusalem. So it's a psalm for a journey.

For a journey through a new year. And we don't know what's ahead of us this year. We don't know what the journey is going to hold this year. But this psalm is going to help us to find where we can find our help.

And where we can find our keeping for the year ahead. So we see first of all in this psalm, God our help. Verses 1 and 2.

[3:37] I lift up my eyes to the mountains. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord. The maker of heaven and earth.

The writer of this psalm as he makes his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Sees mountains. And why does he particularly mention the mountains?

Well it could be that they fill him with fear. The mountains or high places were often used for worshipping gods or other idols.

They could also be seen as fearful places in terms of robbers and gangs hiding in them. Who knows what these mountains were going to bring them on the journey. But the pilgrim singing this

psalm knows that he can lift his eyes to a higher place.

He journeys with the eyes of faith. And he sees that even though there may be many dangers and toils and snares on the journey ahead. He can be reminded who has made these mountains.

[4:47] Who has put these high places together. For surely it's the Lord. The maker of heaven and earth. Whom can he look up to for help?

The one enthroned in heaven above. The mighty maker of these mountains. And so he can pray help me Lord on this journey.

Help me as I prepare to worship you in your holy place. And for us as we look at the year ahead.

Perhaps some of us are filled with some measure of fear looking at the year ahead. We don't know what's going to come. But we need to hear this psalm don't we?

We need to hear that we too can lift up our eyes. To the one who is enthroned in heaven. I'm really thankful that we live in Sussex.

[5:51] I say that because we spent some time in Norfolk over the Christmas break. And Norfolk's lovely in lots of ways. But it's so flat. There's not a hill in sight it feels.

And so when you come back home down the A23. You get to see again the hills of the South Downs. You get to look up.

I'm sorry we don't have mountains. But we do have hills. And that's good for us. And so as we go through this year. When we spend time around the South Downs.

If we see the hills as we're journeying. We can remind them. We can use them to remind us. Of how we can look up.

To the one who's made those hills. Can't we? To the Lord. The maker of heaven and earth. But perhaps you don't spend much time. Around the South Downs.

[6:51] But you do spend lots of time. In the centre of Brighton. You might find yourself looking up at other things. Those tall high rise buildings. Which seem to keep going up. Or for now at least.

We don't know what's going to happen with it. The I-360 on the C-3. Whether you see these buildings as a nuisance. Or a marvel. They do cause you to look up.

But how they can help us to look up even further. Even higher. To the one who is the maker of the heavens and the earth. At the reminders of how we are to depend on him.

For the journey through 2025. How we need to look to him. The God who is our help. And when we say help here.

Don't confuse it with people's help. People do help us don't they? We get help from lots of people. And that's a good thing. We can be grateful for those.

[7:55] God has put in our lives to help us in different ways. But as human beings we're limited aren't we? This is talking about the help from the maker of heaven and earth.

None greater than his help. The help of the strong mighty creator God. God's. The one who's made the heavens and the earth. Who can bring things into existence out of nothing.

No greater help than the help of the Lord's. God can't. health challenges. There's some of us that could be caring for elderly relatives. We don't know whether this year might bring bereavements to some of us. We don't know what we'll face this year.

But what we do know is that God is the maker of the heavens and the earth. What we do know is that he has set the mountains and hills in their place and he is more than able to help us with whatever we face this year.

There's a wonderful example of someone looking to the Lord for help in the Old Testament. I was drawn to this this week and in 2 Chronicles 20 we find the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, facing enemies, the threat of enemies, of Moabites coming to attack. And so he lifts up the situation to the Lord in prayer. And there's this remarkable verse in 2 Chronicles 20 verse 12 where he prays, oh God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us.

[10:07] We do not know what to do. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you. We lift up our eyes to you, the mighty maker of heaven and earth, and we ask you to help us. And sure enough, the Lord said to his people, do not be discouraged, do not be afraid, for I will be with you.

And that's what this psalmist wants to encourage us with as well. When we don't know what to do, when we're not sure what the journey ahead will hold for us, we can say our eyes are on you.

And so to have these two verses at the beginning of this psalm as our verse for the year, I hope and pray this will help us to encourage one another when we're feeling like we don't know what to do, to encourage one another to look up. Look up to the Lord. He is the maker of heavens and earth. He will help you. And as I said just a bit earlier, as a way to help us to do that, as a way to help encourage one another to look up, we've got our week of prayer coming up.

And it'd be so good to see many of us joining in with that, to help one another, to put these two verses into practice, to help us find our help from the maker of the heavens and the earth.

God is our help. But there's more in this psalm. We see that God is our keeper. God is our keeper. I know we've just got new NIVs, but I don't think the NIV translates the word watch very well, verses 3 to 8. I think it should actually be keep. And so, for example, in verse 3, I think it should read, he will not let your foot slip. He who keeps you will not slumber. Indeed, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. So God is our keeper. That's what this psalm wants to say to us this morning. Notice it changes language as well from verses 1 and 2 where it says, I and my, it starts saying your and you, speaking now of all of God's people in general, showing to the people he is their help individually, but he's also the keeper of all his people.

[12:56] And it's firstly written, of course, to the Israelites, the Old Testament Israel, God's covenant people.

People who've known his promises to their ancestors, who have been given the law and the temple and the sacrifices and the festivals. They've been given the means to ascend to Jerusalem and ascend to worship God who is seated in the highest place.

And now, for us, in 2024, we read this psalm in light of the Lord Jesus, who has come to people, Jesus himself, who would have sung and prayed these psalms.

And in Jesus, we find the true temple, the true meeting place between God and man. And the one who himself has ascended into the very throne room of God and is seated there.

And as we sing it in light of the Lord Jesus, we too know that we find a place as part of God's chosen people. And as part of God's chosen people, we too can know the keeping power of our gods.

[14:20] And so the truths of this psalm, that the Lord is our keeper, are true for us when we find that our lives are in Christ.

And what we're about to see are some wonderful things, some wonderful security that God's people can have. But if you're not yet a follower of the Lord today, if you don't trust in the Lord Jesus as your only saviour this morning, then as wonderful as these things are, they can't be true for you until you're trusting in Jesus, who can give you life and salvation, and who will keep you through all the days of your life.

So, what do we see? What wonderful truths do we see for God's people here? Well, we firstly see that God, our keeper, keeps us from stumbling.

He keeps us from stumbling. Verse 3, He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber. In Hebrew culture, apparently stability and firmness were highly valued, particularly in terms of your relationship with God's.

And so the sort of slipping or stumbling we're to think of here, is the sort of stumbling away, slipping away from being a follower of God's.

[15:57] In the New Testament, we're given warnings such as to resist the devil, who we're told is like a lion, who prowls around looking for someone to devour.

Keep watch. But this psalm places our confidence in the Lord's keeping power, to keep us from the evil one.

Verse 3, He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber. And so how do we find help to keep going, to keep following Christ?

Well, obviously we need to make efforts ourselves, but really it's by His grace, by His keeping power, that we're held on to. By His grace, by His keeping power, He'll keep us from slipping away from Him.

And if you're not so convinced yet, why not turn to John chapter 10 with me, and see just how securely God holds His people.

[17:20] John chapter 10, verse 27. The Lord Jesus, He says these words, My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hands. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all.

No one can snatch them out of my Father's hands. I and the Father are one. This is just how powerful He is to keep us.

We are held securely in His hands. That's a wonderful way to encourage us at the start of this year. We're held in the palm of His hands.

Not one of His people can be snatched away. He will keep us. And secondly, we see that He will keep us through our sleep.

[18:34] Those heading into Jerusalem, singing this psalm, might be familiar with the watchmen in cities. The ones who were trained to keep watch of a city, keep watch of any threats, which may be lurking, any enemies on the prowl to try and attack the city.

And in Isaiah, we read these words of the Lord, which aren't very complimentary to watchmen. Israel's watchmen are blind. They all lack knowledge. They all are mute dogs. They cannot bark. They lie around and dream. They love to sleep. Sleeping is not a good thing if you're a watchman. But this psalm is showing us that whether watchmen are awake or asleep, actually they've got the ultimate watchmen in heaven, haven't they?

They're gods. He is the one who will not sleep. He won't grow tired. He will keep watch over His people. He will look out and He sees the enemy prowling, the one who wants to devour God's people.

[19:54] And He will guard us and protect us and provide us all that we need as we face the temptations and attacks from the enemy. And so, we can sleep.

We can rest, knowing that He never slumbers nor sleeps. I remember some of my younger days when I would try and fight off sleep and stay awake and play a computer game through the night. But every time, eventually, the sleep would catch up with me. As it will do with all of us, even if we manage a night or two without sleep, eventually, we'll no longer be able to fight it off.

And that's a reminder to us that we are not the maker. We are not the maker of the heavens and the earth. We are in the hands of our maker. And so, we can rest.

We can sleep. Even this year when there are scary situations. Even this year when we're feeling anxieties of life.

[21:09] Even this year when our minds are racing with all the duties and responsibilities we've got to do. At the end of the day, we can rest, knowing that our God never slumbers nor sleeps, and He will keep us.

He will hold on to us. That we are held securely in the palms of His hands. And finally, not quite finally, penultimately, the Lord keeps us with shades of protection.

Shades of protection. When the sun beats down on you in the summer, which is probably quite hard to remember on a cold and wet January day, but when it does happen, we find protection, don't we? We whack on the sun cream, we pop our sun hats on and seek the shade, and if we don't, we know what the consequences are. When the moon shines, maybe some of us think about the dangers of the night, or when the full moon comes, the superstitions that come with it.

But we're told this in verse 5. The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun will not harm you by day, nor will the moon by night.

[22:36] We are told of the shades of protection that He offers to His people. But we're not to read this and think, ah, well, if the sun won't harm me, nor the moon, whatever the nighttime brings, then I'm immune to suffering.

The psalm isn't saying that. The Bible doesn't say that. Think of Jesus again, reading this psalm as He anticipated the cross.

And He would read those words, the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night, and yet He was heading towards deep suffering, deep pain, deep anguish for His people, as we'll remember as we take the bread and wine.

But on the other side of that suffering comes glory. The glory of the resurrection, the glory of heaven, the glory of being seated at His right hands, His Father's right hands.

And that's the pattern for the Christian life. We will go through trials and suffering. We will go through many dangers, toils and snares, but by His grace He will keep us.

[24:00] By His grace, it will be like the sun won't harm us or the moon by night. We will go and know deep sufferings, but the Lord will keep us.

He will keep hold of us. He will make sure our feet don't slip. As we face those trials and sufferings, we know from the Bible that God has great purposes in them, to refine our faith like gold in the fire. Though it's painful, God uses them to help us and grow us, to help us see how we need to depend on Him, the maker of heaven and earth.

And in them, we know we're following the pattern of our Savior, suffering and glory to come. And these words in Revelation seem particularly relevant as we read, The sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night.

We read of the Lord's people, Never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them or any scorching heat. That's the future we have to look forward to.

[25:15] For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherds, and He will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

That's the amazing, eternal security that all of us trusting in Christ for salvation this morning know. And finally, this time it is finally, He will keep us in our coming and going.

Read that there in verse 7 and 8, 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.

Our mighty Maker, who never slumbers nor sleeps, who by His grace will keep us in the way we should go, He watches over all our comings and goings.

As the pilgrims made their way into Jerusalem, with whatever they faced on the journey, they knew they were safely held in the palms of God's hands, that He saw all their comings and goings.

[26:28] As Jesus, in His comings and goings to the cross, He could take comfort knowing that His Father knew and saw all that was going on.

and we too, as we embark on this journey of this new year that the Lord is giving to us, whatever it may bring, through the days of joy and the dark nights of trial, we know our good Heavenly Father, who is the Maker of the heavens and the earth, that He is with us by His grace.

He is our help and by His grace He will keep us. I read the words of a poem the other day and just will quote to you the beginning of it as a way to wrap up.

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.

And he replied, Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God that shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.

[27:54] So I went forth and finding the hand of God, God trod gladly into the night and He led me towards the hills and the breaking of the day in the lone east.

We're going to sing our next song. We're going to sing of the Lord and His keeping power. When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast.

When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast. I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path, for my love is often cold.

He must hold me fast. During the singing of this song, the children will come back in. Anya, would you be able to go and fetch them? Is that okay? Thank you. And surely as part of God's keeping of us, He gives us this as a means of His grace to help us to keep going in following Him, to be reminded of what we so quickly forget, the price that the Lord Jesus has paid for us.

Do come on in, children. It's good to have you back with us as we share in this meal together. Come and find your seats. I'm going to read just a few verses from John chapter 10.

[29:24] We turned there earlier for some other verses, but maybe you'd like to turn there again with me to John chapter 10 to read verses 14 to 18, just to help us to set our minds on what the Lord Jesus has done for us.

Hear these words again of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am the good shepherds. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold.

I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherds. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accords. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.

[30:37] This command I received from my Father. As we turn to the bread and wine and remember the Lord Jesus dying in our place on the cross.

Perhaps it may enter our minds or other people's minds. Was this just a tragic accident? Just unfortunate circumstances?

Well, the Lord Jesus says no. Verse 18. No one takes it, my life, from me, but I lay it down of my own accords.

I have authority to lay it down. I have authority to take it up again. This command I receive from my Father. As we remember Him dying in our place on the cross, we see one who willingly and gladly gave up His life for us.

And it is for us, He says, this is for my sheep. For us, who He saw as like lost sheep, straying, wandering, without a shepherd.

[31:57] He saw us and wanted to have mercy on us. And in His death on the cross, on our behalf, He did that in order to bring us safely into His sheepfold.

And so we can rejoice as we solemnly remember what the Lord Jesus has done for us. So with that in mind, we go through our communion service together.

Firstly, with this reminder that the Lord's Supper is a meal for sinners who are trusting in Jesus as their only Savior. If that's not you, you are welcome here to observe what's going on.

But please just let the bread and wine pass you by as we believe it wouldn't be right for you to take this meal. In taking this bread and wine, we show our unity together in Christ.

Therefore, we ask that you only take the Lord's Supper if you're in good standing with this church or with your own local church. It is normal for people who are walking in fellowship with Christ and His church to clearly mark their entrance into spiritual life by means of the sign of baptism.

[33:29] And so if you're saying you're a Christian this morning and you'll gladly take the bread and wine, we'd love for you to consider taking that step of baptism in obedience to Christ.

please talk to myself or Phil later on if this raises any issues for you. The Apostle Paul wrote these words, For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

So then whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord's. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

A moment just to do that quietly now before we join together in a prayer of confession.