

Psalm 121

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Preacher: Jon Bickley

[0:00] If you'd like to turn there, it's page 622 in the Church Bibles. Excuse me, I'll just adjust this.

Does that sound okay? Okay, Psalm 121.

I will lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. 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. 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. 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.

[1:14] Okay, I'll just pray before we look at this. Dear Heavenly Father, we just thank you that we are gathered here this evening. And we just pray you would help us to understand your word.

Pray you would open it to us and bless us. And lift our hearts to worship and praise you for the amazing things that you've done and the things that you've promised to us, Lord.

So I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So Psalm 121 is what is known as one of the songs of ascent.

And so between Psalms 120 to 134, this collection of Psalms are called the songs of ascent. And they were sung by pilgrims who would have been on their way to Jerusalem to worship at the different feasts.

And some people have said that where it says, I lift up my eyes to the hills, that people would have been looking to Jerusalem. As they journey there for the feasts, they would look to Jerusalem and remember that God is their help.

[2:28] So it's about a pilgrimage for people heading to the center of worship to worship God and a reliance that they need God's help, they need God to keep them safe and they need God to protect them because of the various dangers around them.

So there's some big promises in this chapter. There's a promise that help comes from the maker of the heaven and earth.

A promise that he will not let your foot slip. And this is unconditional. It just says that, that God will not let your foot slip. A promise that God won't slumber, he won't sleep.

That he will watch over through the day and through the night. And that he will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life. So these are big promises and I think, and personally for me and I think for a lot of people, the bigger the promise, the more difficult it is to believe.

It's a lot easier to accept that God would be there to help us most of the time. And then occasions we doubt that God is going to be there for us, although we may say that we believe he's there, we don't act that way.

[3:59] And so it's a big promise to believe, to always trust that God is going to be there watching over us and protecting us. And two things in particular in this chapter from verses three, he will not let your foot slip.

And verse seven, he will keep you from all harm. They're particularly difficult to believe when we actually look at our lives and we see the pain that we have from the harm and the evil that's around us, which affects our lives, and also from our own sin and the way that our sinful hearts actually draw us from God and disturb our relationships with each other.

And so I wanted to look briefly at what the psalm is actually saying here and to really understand how the Lord will keep us from all harm and keep us from slipping when we do see these struggles in our life.

So as I was studying this, I looked, the phrase he uses in verse three, he will not let your foot slip, is only used in a few places in the Bible.

One of those is Psalm 66. So I just wanted to read that section of verses in Psalm 66. And there are some parallels between that and Psalm 121 that we're reading.

[5:37] So Psalm 66 from verse eight, praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard.

He has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping. So there in verse nine, we have two of the same or very similar phrases that he uses in, the psalmist uses in chapter 121.

So verse three, he will not let your foot slip. And verse seven, he will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life. So verse nine in chapter 66 says, he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping.

And it goes on to say, for you, O God, tested us. You refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads. We went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.

And so in chapter 66, the contrast of God being the one who upholds us and preserves our lives is put against a God who has put trials and tests into our lives.

[6:56] And so I think when we read the same things in 121, what it's teaching us is that God will keep us in the difficulties.

He will protect us in those struggles and he will deliver us through them. But it's not a promise that God will keep us from pain. God isn't saying that he will, that we will never suffer.

And we know that from other places in the Bible where we see that Paul talks about the sufferings that he had through following Christ. And so, while God is our guardian and our protector, excuse me, then there is definitely a sense where he protects us in the struggles in life.

And so in other translations of the Bible and the ESV which I was preparing from, it says in verse 7, the Lord will keep you from all evil. And I think the sense there is that while we experience the evil around us, we experience the evil from other people in the way that they affect our lives in negative ways and our indwelling sin in our own heart, if we have our trust in God, then God ultimately delivers us from this and he won't let us fall ultimately to sin and he will keep our lives.

We've been redeemed from the consequences of sin, from the wages of sin which are death. And as well as this, there's, I don't want to diminish from the promises in this chapter, there's lots of amazing things that we can get from this.

[8:58] But I want to look at this chapter through through Christ as we should look at scripture through its fulfillment in Christ and how it relates to the gospel.

And it says in verse 1, I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. And I was thinking about this and talking to Lindsay about this earlier.

And these pilgrims are on their way to Jerusalem. They're on their way to worship and they look to the hills and remind themselves that their help comes from God. And we look to God as our help but the hill of Jerusalem is where Christ was crucified outside the city on the hill.

The Lord of heaven and earth, the maker of heaven and earth was on the hill and he died and was nailed to the cross. And that's where our help comes from in the forgiveness of sins that was accomplished on the cross.

and it says he won't let my foot be moved and the reason that is true is because excuse me Christ took the stumbling that we should have faced where we should have succumbed to the wages of sin.

[10:29] Christ took that for us and it says in verse 4 it says he watches over us he won't slumber and the assurance of that is that God was always in fellowship with Jesus.

Jesus always prayed to the Father and looked to him and relied on him and as we follow Jesus we should have the same faith and hope in the Father that he did.

God is the one that keeps and he keeps us because Jesus was forsaken and so I can be kept from evil because Jesus took that for us and the Lord will keep my life because Jesus Christ gave up his life and so we should read this knowing that we can believe all these amazing promises these promises are so reassuring if we actually believe them and put our hope in them and they are unconditional to people who follow Christ that that put their trust in him and their faith in him we can believe these because Christ has made it possible for these things to be true we can look to the cross we can look to Jesus the maker of the heaven and earth where our help will come from and he will keep us from sin and deliver us to our eternity with him the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore

Amen thank you very much indeed John so in a minute we're going to sing two more songs and Anya and Ben are going to lead us in that but perhaps one or two people would like to respond in prayer to the word that we've heard we thank you for those wonderful promises about the Lord's keeping ending Thank you.