

If the Lord had not been on my side....

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[0 : 00] I wonder how you would fill this sentence in.! If the Lord had not been on my side...! Probably wouldn't be in here praising the risen King.

Giving Him the praise and glory as we have already done this evening. If the Lord had not been on our side, where would we be?

Well, that's what David ponders on in this little psalm. If the Lord had not been on Israel's side, then where would they be?

Well, David says they would be, in verse 3, swallowed alive by their enemies. We would have been engulfed, verse 4, by the floodwaters.

By the flood of, I think we're to imagine, by the flood of an army or something like that. I want us to turn briefly to Exodus 15, to another song that is sung by God's people.

[1 : 26] That helps us to see, if the Lord had not been on their side, then where would they have been? But because He is, they have a song of praise to sing.

A song which comes directly after that escape from Egypt. Exodus 15. Exodus 15. I'll read a few bits of it.

Firstly, verses 1 and 2. Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. Both horse and rider, He has hurled into the sea.

If it wasn't for the Lord being on their side, perhaps Pharaoh and his army would have caught those people. If the Lord had not been on their side, perhaps they would even be in the sea themselves. And then verse 7 to 11 helps us to see some of this a little bit more. In the greatness of your majesty, you threw down those who opposed you.

[2 : 31] You unleashed your burning anger. It consumed them like stubble. By the blast of your nostrils, the waters piled up. The surging waters stood up like a wall. The deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.

The enemy boasted, I will pursue you. I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils. I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.

That's what the enemy was like. Full of boasting and pride. But the Lord was on their side. Verse 10. But you blew with your breath and the sea covered them.

They sank like lead in the mighty waters. And so who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

They have much to praise their great rescuing God for. If the Lord had not been on their side, they would not be able to sing this.

[3 : 40] If the Lord had not been on, I should say, David's side. David, who wrote this psalm that we're looking at, Psalm 124. Then where would he be?

Well, another psalm which he wrote in the midst of being amongst his enemies, Psalm 56. Just a couple of verses from this psalm.

We're told in the title, it's for the director of music to the tune, A Dove on Distant Oaks, a psalm of David, a miktam, when the Philistines had seized him in Gath.

The Philistines had him. But what can David say of the Lord? Verse 10. In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord whose word I praise, in God I trust, and I'm not afraid.

What can man do to me? If the Lord had not been on his side, where would he be? He wouldn't be able to have such confidence in the face of his enemies.

[4 : 57] So, David praises the Lord back in Psalm 124. Praise be to the Lord who has not let us been torn by their teeth.

Praise be to the Lord for the floodwaters have not engulfed us. We have not been swallowed alive by our enemies. I read an extraordinary testimony this week of a nine-year-old girl in Bangladesh

who's suffering extreme persecution and said she's only survived because of her faith in Jesus' love.

Apparently, she walks a mile to get to school every day and when she gets there, no one will sit near her in classes or play with her because her teachers tell people she's a Christian and she's bad.

And when she walks to church, people throw stones at her and yet she says she can forgive them and pray for them. And here's her words. She says, Jesus loves me.

I'm very valuable to Jesus. It's only because of Jesus' love that I've survived until now. Despite all the persecution, his love has guided me this far and I know I'm on the right path through his love.

[6 : 24] The Lord was not on her side. How would she cope with that? But the Lord is on her side and is helping her and is keeping her and as we heard this morning, he will not let our foot slip.

And so, we, David, that girl in Bangladesh, we can join in, praise to the Lord, verse 6, because he has not let us be torn by their teeth.

He's not let us be torn apart. As this psalm was used, it's part of the psalms of ascent again, like we were written this morning, a psalm on the pilgrimage journey to Jerusalem.

They're reminded again how they've got through, how they've known the Lord's goodness and the Lord's help for them, how they have so much to worship him, that the Lord has not let them be torn by the teeth of their enemies.

And in that, as one commentator says, we're to imagine, it's as if we were a rabbit and the enemy was a lion. That's probably how they may have felt at times.

[7 : 46] No chance if you're a little rabbit faced with a big, roaring lion, and yet, praise God, for he's not let them be torn apart. We've got different imagery there in verse 6.

Sorry, verse 7. This time of a bird. We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare. The snare has been broken and we have escaped.

This time of a bird. We're to imagine a frail and defenseless bird caught in a trap. And yet, we can rejoice for we've escaped.

If the Lord had not been on our side, we'd be dead meat. That's true for the Lord's people here and that's true for us today.

As we read this psalm, post cross and resurrection, we can see ourselves in verse 7. Ones like that frail and defenseless birds. With the temptations and sin, which seem to promise so much joy and satisfaction to us, and yet we come to find they just hold us in sin snare.

[8 : 57] That the promise, joy and satisfaction is either fleeting or just completely empty. We're caught in a trap that we can't escape from until we discover that the Lord Jesus has come to release us from the snares of sin.

I think Romans 8, the first few verses of Romans 8, describe this really well. It would be great to just turn there briefly and read them. Romans 8, imagining that before this, we were caught in that foulest snare and now...

We'll worry about that later. And now, as the Lord's rescued people, we can sing, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Because through Christ Jesus, the law and the Spirit who gives life has set you free. Free from that snare, free from the law of sin and death.

For what the law was powerless to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering for us.

[10 : 28] And so He condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us. We do not live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

And so reading that, we can say, if the Lord had not been on our side, we would have been trapped under the tyranny of sin. If the Lord had not been on our side, we would have been condemned to death.

But the Lord is on our side. He has given us the Lord Jesus, who has become that sin offering for us. The Lord is on our side, and so the righteous requirements of the law have been met for us.

And so we have much to praise God for. That's why we can start the new year with a prayer and praise service like this. That's why we can lift up prayers and songs of thanks like David does in our psalm.

Praising the Lord who's on our side, who's not yet let us be swallowed up by the surging of the sea. Praising the one who's not let us be torn apart by sin, who has rescued us from the fowler's

snare.

[11 : 43] And so back in Psalm 124 again, in the final verse, we read this. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

And that reminds us of what we've read in the psalm this morning. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. And Psalm 121 this morning, we heard this.

I lift my eyes to the mountains. Where does my help come from? It comes, my help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

And if he had not been on our side, then where would we be? But now, as the redeemed people of God, we can look to him for the help that we need to live day by day.

And that's something to rejoice in, isn't it? Why don't we, perhaps two or three of us, just...