

Psalm 121

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 121. Psalm 121.

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But let's just pause and let us pray. Father, we repeat the words of that song. And we want to turn our eyes upon the Lord Jesus.

And as we do so, may the things of this world grow strangely to us. And so, Father, would you magnify your Son? Would you exalt him through your word?

May he be felt through your spirit. And may our lives be transformed because of it. So go with us these next moments we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake.

[2 : 0 7] Amen. As mentioned last week, we're spending this fall season in a musical album. This album is comprised of 15 songs that sit in the anthology of 150 psalms in our Bibles, known as the Book of Psalms.

These are called the Psalms of Ascent. Psalm 120 through 134. They're songs for the traveler. The voyager.

The journeyman. They're historically thought to be an album for those who are making their way to the city of Jerusalem to honor religious festivities.

As it is with many contemporary albums that you might have, there are certainly more popular songs and more well-known songs in each album.

In the days when Discman ruled, if I owned a CD of a particular artist, I remember I would load the Discman. The Discman plays a CD.

[3 : 0 9] It looks like a DVD. It's a mini Frisbee for those of you who may not be familiar. But I would load the Discman and I would fast forward to my favorite track, two or seven or nine.

And on repeat, it would go. We certainly this morning come to one of the most beloved songs. Not only in this album of 15, but arguably one of the most beloved in all the Psalms.

Probably only second to Psalm 23. And I think in our time together, you'll begin to see why that is the case. I've chosen to tag this message.

He's a keeper. He's a keeper. That is the centerpiece of this Psalm. You see it in the fifth verse. The Lord is your keeper.

And when I say that, I certainly mean the plain meaning of the phrase, he's a keeper. I can also mean, I guess, the popular idiom you may hear from a parent to a child bringing home someone in whom a daughter might have romantic interest.

[4 : 1 9] And if he shines, mom or dad might say he's a keeper. I can mean it in that way as well. In both respects, the Lord is a keeper. It doesn't take much in life to realize our limitations, does it?

We all need help. It might be a child. At the start of a young age, early age, it might be a child who needs help tying shoes. It might be an adolescent asking for help with a homework problem.

It might be a university student asking for help to move in to their new dorm or building. It might be a child who needs help for someone in financial distress.

It might be a request for help for one in emotional distress. It might be the aging parent who needs help with medical care or just the widowed neighbor who needs a companion.

The reality of the human condition is this. We all need help. We all need help. We need physical help because we're limited in physical strength.

[5 : 27] We need emotional help because our hearts are restless. We need mental help because we're not all-knowing. And we certainly need spiritual help because we are inadequate in and of ourselves.

We are finite and limited. We can affirm this reality. From death, birth to death, we're all dependent creatures, dependent on help.

The Beatles knew this. Lennon and McCartney knew this when they penned their infamous song, Help. Help? I need somebody. Help? Not just anybody.

Help? You know I need someone. Help. Help. The song holds out the truthfulness of our experience. We need help. But it never offers the solution.

Where might that help come from? And this morning as we assembled, I don't know the current state of your life. I don't know the challenges that you're facing.

[6 : 29] I don't know what's burdening your heart or the angst that is weighing upon you. I don't know the difficulty that you'll walk into. But I do know this. Where you can find help.

Where you can find help. And to organize this passage this morning, I want to hold out before you two signs. We will see this morning the source of our help. The source of our help.

And we will see this morning the scope of our help. Where does our help come from? And how far does that help go? Source and scope.

The source of our help. The psalmist opens up. I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come from? And he answers himself. My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. The songwriter poses a question in his own mind.

I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? Now there's a lot of conversation in academic literature about what is actually alarming.

[7 : 34] What is the psalmist looking at? And there's two things he can actually be looking upon. As mentioned earlier, he is likely a traveler. Maybe walking through a valley.

Surrounded by ravines and hills on both sides. And he's asking the question. What's lurking in those hills? And the hills are hidden the unknown.

The possible bandits. Threats. Dangers. Impending harm. And you know this. Because Jesus tells the story of a man who traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho.

And on the way, he's taken. Fell among robbers. The psalmist is looking. And he's fearful.

Because the hills represent harm. Perhaps this individual was sitting within the walls of Jerusalem. Prior to its fall.

[8 : 35] And if you've ever been to Jerusalem in Israel. Jerusalem is situated on a hill. But it's not the only hill in the region. It's surrounded by other hills. And you can imagine. When siege was laid upon Jerusalem.

And all the enemies surrounded about. Perhaps the psalmist remembers those days. As the enemies surrounded her on all sides. Were there enemies hidden in the hills?

One may ask. But it's also possible that as this traveler is walking towards Jerusalem. He sees there the elevated city.

The gleaming temple. There stood the place where God dwelt. And as he considers ascending toward the city. Up the southern steps.

Into the courts of the temple. He anticipates meeting with God at his dwelling place. I'm not sure what the psalmist is looking at. I'm not sure what he's afraid of.

[9 : 36] But it makes it very clear. That it goes beyond the hills. Because the psalmist is actually looking at the Lord. Whether it be the hills the source of the psalmist's harm or help.

Or the hills being a menace or a refuge. The text makes it clear that he's looking beyond them. His eyes are upon the maker of the hills. His eyes have fallen upon the one who does not dwell in the hills.

But made the heavens. His inner dialogue continues. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord. Not any Lord. He's actually the maker of heaven and earth.

He's the one in the beginning. When God created the heavens and the earth. That is the Lord that the psalmist is considering. His help is sourced from the same source as the one who made the heavens and the earth.

The Lord is the source of our help. The Lord is the source of the psalmist's help. Now just ponder for a moment here. We don't have much time.

[10 : 42] But consider the resources at the disposal of the one who made heavens and the earth. Consider with me. What restrictions might he have?

What limitations might he have? The answer is none. The maker of heavens and the earth. To borrow the phraseology of a local pastor, Charlie Dates.

He's an individual who walked out onto nothing. Spoke into nothing. And made everything. There are no limitations.

He is the source of the help. The Lord. The Lord's help is infinite. Unrestricted. And boundless. And here the psalmist Dare says that when I'm in need of help, my source will rest in the one with infinite resources, infinite capacity, infinite depth.

This is the astonishment of the Christian life, is it not? At the other end of your phone is one who has the disposal of every atom, molecule, particle in all of heaven and in all of earth to orchestrate them for you, on your behalf, to help you, to aid you, to undergird you, to protect you.

[12 : 02] When help needs to be. When help needs to be. When help needs to be had, the arsenal of heaven is available to you. When there is upheaval in your life, the psalmist summons you to look upward to the one enthroned.

When all hope is lost, there is no help to be found on earth. You have one who sits enthroned in the heavens. Yet it's so strange, is it not?

That we fall into self-reliance and self-sufficiency. When challenges arise in my own life, my first thought is, how can I help myself?

I can figure this out on my own. I can get through this if I just anchor down, stand fast, hold firm. I can manipulate this relationship to make it work.

Sadly, help is offered. But if you're like me, it's routinely deferred. His hand is a helping hand that's extended.

[13 : 11] Oftentimes, it's spurned. The singer in the opening stanza declares to his very own heart that the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, is the source of all help.

From him flows the never-ending supply of assistance. The Lord is the source of our help. Secondly, the scope of our help.

The scope of our help. Well, the natural question arises. How extensive is this help? Like, can I get it all the time, some of the time, when I'm happy, sad?

What is its scope? Well, beginning in verse 3, the psalm makes a transition. It seems like in verses 1 and 2, the psalmist says something in his mind. Where is my help going to come from?

And then beginning in verse 3, there's a reply. There's a reply. Almost as if a second voice sings back to the psalmist. The response is one that moves the psalmist to look at the Lord.

[14 : 18] What will this help look like? Help all of a sudden becomes being kept, guarded, protected, and secured. What is this coverage policy?

He's probably thinking. Is this help only extended when I'm in need? Is this a help provided when I'm attacked? Is this a help offered when I can't pay my bills? We're about to discover that this is a comprehensive coverage, so to say.

It covers you at all times, at all places, in all circumstances. You might think he's like State Farm, like a good neighbor State Farm is there. He's actually better than State Farm.

The catchy slogan gets to this need. We need someone who is there. And in the Lord, you will find someone who is always there. He's one who will secure your path, according to verse 3.

He is a keeper that never sleeps. He does not sleep. He will not sleep. He cannot sleep. This certainly affirms his immortality.

[15 : 20] There is none who can survive without sleep for an extended period of time. Our bodies will simply shut down if we deprive ourselves of what is necessary. The very quality, immediate, that very quality of the fact that he neither slumbers nor sleeps separates him from us.

You see, what this illustrates for you and I is the Lord's protection and security are operative around the clock. There are no operating hours for the Lord.

He does not clock in and clock out. He does not have set office hours that you must arrange your schedule to meet. He is the great physician with unending hours.

He is the watchman on the wall who never dozes off or needs a shift change. He is the vigilant soul keeper for his people, all his people.

The declaration of this passage is the Lord is there and he will be there whenever you need him. He is the father who never tires of his children.

[16 : 28] Just pause with me for a little bit. And I understand my children are here. They need to hear this. In my parental frailty and imperfections, there are days when fatherhood exhausts me.

I cannot handle another request. I cannot take another petition. My limits have been reached and bedtime cannot come soon enough. But it's not so with God.

He is untiring of his care for you and I. Do you get that? You cannot weary him enough with your needs.

You cannot over petition his ear with your requests. You cannot frustrate him with your continual request for help. Our persistent neediness is met by his tireless watchfulness.

Why? Because he's a keeper. The Lord is our keeper. The psalmist continues and he builds upon the Lord's continual watchfulness. He's not only going to be watchful so that your foot doesn't slip, but he accompanies the traveler through all of life.

[17 : 44] The Lord is so close that he is the biting shadow on your right hand. You want to know how close he is? His shadow casts itself upon your right side all the time.

His very presence will guard you during the day and protect you during the night. In May midday or in dark night.

His ever accompanying presence would serve as a shelter for the sojourner. One commentator puts it this way. The Lord's presence offers complete protection over the known and the unknown.

Perils of day and night. The stanza is singing that when the sun rages, when the storm comes, your shelter will hold.

Our constant exposure to danger is met by his enduring shelter. Why? He's a keeper.

[18 : 48] If there was any doubt for the singing psalmist, verse 7 and 8 is to reiterate a totality and the scope of his help.

How far will he go to help you? Well, Christ repeated in verses 7 and 8, he will keep you. He will keep you.

He will keep you. You know, this takes us into the future. The coverage on this policy has no term. It's not like the life insurance I took out, I forgot how many years ago, that expires, probably just before I die.

But this policy is enduring. It's lasting. It's ongoing.

Look at it. It covers all evil. What? All your life. What? Not only today, tomorrow, next year, or next decade.

[19 : 53] Not only the foreseeable future, but also the unforeseeable future. It covers your departures. It covers all your entrances.

It's astounding. Because one day, you'll be abandoned by loved ones in death.

Life will strip you of those guardians who have walked with you when you bury a spouse, a mentor. But there, according to this psalm, your garrison and your fortress remains.

The Lord will keep you. Our fear of insecurity and uncertainty is met by his assurance of enduring preservation. Why? Because he is a keeper.

The psalm can be summarized in this way. The Lord, with all power, protects you at all times, or all harm, at all times, in all places. The Lord, with all power, can protect you from all harm, at all times, and in all places.

[20 : 56] Perhaps that's why this psalm is so loved. But as we wrap up, can I tell you what gets me about this psalm? Because the movement of the psalm catches you by surprise.

Verse 1 and 2, I envision this young journeyman about to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He has no clue what awaits him on this few-day journey.

He knows this, that when he looks for help, his help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth. Yet the response in verses 3 to 8 is so bizarre. Why? Because it moves the psalm.

Try to follow with me. It moves. You would think verses 3 and 8 would be all about help. How is God going to help me? But the response, the lyrical response in verses 3 to 8 is not how God will help.

It's how God will keep. Now think with me for a moment. Help is something I initiate. I may wear a sign upon my head.

[22 : 00] Help wanted. Help needed. Real bad. It's a request. Help is an initiative I take. But the weight of the psalm doesn't rest on our request for help.

The emphasis, the burden, the weight of the psalm rests in the fact that God keeps. Now let me just finish up with this.

It's an initiative God takes. It's a commitment that God makes. It's an assertion to the weak and the weary. It's the divine promise to the frail and the feeble.

The young traveler is told that as you seek help, as you walk out there looking for help, the response is you will find that as you move along, the Lord has been keeping you.

He's actually been keeping you far more than you've been asking him. He is securing you before you offer any supplication. As you and I seek help from all these inferior sources.

[23 : 09] There he is. Actively guarding, guiding, protecting, holding, securing, keeping.

He's actually keeping before we're asking. It's astounding. It is so astounding. You know why? Consider what about your life you want to keep.

What do you seek to keep? What do you spend all your efforts guarding? What do you want to protect fervently?

What will you go to the furthest extent to secure? What can you not lose? For most of us, it's probably not a material object.

It's likely. It might be personal reputation for some of us. It's probably a relationship for most of us. I will go to immeasurable lengths to keep, protect, guard, and secure this individual from pain, harm, destruction, heartbreak.

[24 : 16] A parent for a child. A spouse for their loved one. A beloved friend. But here's the resounding truth. We protect. We keep what is precious to us.

And here the psalmist says, do you want to know what is precious to God? Do you know what God will fight for and keep and defend?

It's you. It's me. Before I even say help. There he is, protecting what is precious to him.

The Lord keeps what is invaluable. He protects what is precious to him. Namely, his beloved bride, the church. This countless crowd comprised of all those for whom he died.

He secures the saint. He keeps what is precious to him. He keeps you. But this psalm is a little bit disjointed.

[25 : 20] It's astounding news. But the human experience is actually far from the reality of this psalm, isn't it? Many times my foot has slipped.

As we speak, there's probably a host of migrant travelers that are being struck by the scorching sun and will die under moonlight.

Evil besieges us, inflicting unspeakable suffering. Departures have not always led to returns. How can this possibly be true? Well, let me tell you how.

Because I've looked upon the hill. I've looked upon the hill. Not the hill in Jerusalem where the temple sat, but the hill outside Jerusalem where a cross was fixed.

I looked upon that hill where the body of the Son of God was suspended. It was upon that hill the Bible declares he secured his saints.

[26 : 26] It's upon that hill that his keeping is put on display. As Jesus was fastened upon that cross, he was kept, preserved by his very own Father.

As the sun beat upon his exposed body, as the cold tomb chilled his corpse under the moonlight, the garrison of God would preserve his only begotten Son.

As the sun slept those two nights in the tomb, the Father sustained. As evil mustered together all its forces and appeared triumphant, the host of heaven waited patiently, just two nights, for the Son of God to rise victoriously.

If he did that for his beloved Son, he will do that for us. On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, an emblem of suffering and shame.

And I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain.

[27 : 39] And he rose triumphant. And he secured for himself a people for his own possession. So Christ Church Chicago, as you lift up your eyes to the hills and you ask, where does your help come from?

Our help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber.

He who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. The Lord is your keeper. He is the shade at your right hand. The sun will not strike you by day nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil. The Lord will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in both now and forevermore.

Father, we turn to you. What a word. Magnificent. Outlandish.

[28 : 53] Astonishing. That for your people. You are not only our help. But you are our keeper. And so for the downcast and the disheartened.

For the doubter and the disbeliever. Lord, would you work in all of us? Because I think at all times. And many times in our life.

We don't believe you can help us. And so Lord, would you prove once again. As you've proven in the cross of the Lord Jesus.

That you are our helper. You are our keeper. Both now and forevermore. We ask these things. In Jesus name.

Amen.