

Help!

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 March 2023

Preacher: Rev. Clive Jennings

[0 : 0 0] Where do you go for help? Where do you go for help? In our theme this morning, what's your first call when you need help or advice?

The best guess from commentators on this Psalm 121 is that these Psalms were collected together in conjunction with for those that pilgrimaged to Jerusalem.

For those that came in pilgrimage to go to the holy city to travel there, maybe it must have been pretty impressive as a pilgrim. You know, between the 9th and 5th century BC, approaching Jerusalem, which was an elevation of 2,575 feet.

Perhaps that was the reference of the mountain. Where do we go for help? You know, maybe for that reason, Psalm 121 is most commonly understood as a liturgy of blessing for one or about to leave on a journey.

For those who are journeying, for those who are on a journey wherever they go. A journey in life, maybe for this, a journey to Jerusalem. It gives the traveller confidence in trusting in God in what they are about to go on the journey and where they're about to arrive.

[1 : 2 5] Many Orthodox Jews will place this reading at the beginning or have this reading displayed in the delivery suite of a hospital or their room as part of that journey through labour.

To know that God is there and present. Psalm 121 invites us to consider where the source of our help comes from.

And of course, we know that God is that source of help. To speak, it is one thing. Yet, to truly trust and believe it as a follower of Jesus is another.

As many of us will discover when we face those challenges in life that we come up against. Who do we trust?

Where do we turn for help? And in Lent, as we travel the Lenten journey with Jesus, we know that in the pain and the sorrow that we do not walk alone. Jesus is always with us.

[2 : 2 6] Jesus, the maker of heaven and earth, journeys with us as our helper, comforter, guide, encourager, enabler in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And as a disciple, as a follower of Jesus, that journey often isn't easy as we all know. Where does my help come from?

Where does my help come from? You know, in the days of sunshine, in the days of storm, where does my help come from? I wish you'd known my Auntie Betty.

My Auntie Betty was amazing. She was widowed at a very young age with two teenage children. She had a sure and steady faith. And apart from a sure and steady faith, she also owned a stereogram.

Now, as many of you will remember, and certainly if you're probably under 50 years old, this might be new to you. But a thing was called a stereogram. And it came as a rather beautiful piece of furniture, wasn't it?

[3 : 30] And it had a lovely bass on it. And you could play not only the radio, but also you could play your records. As a six-year-old, one of the singles that I loved to play when we went to her house was the song that we're just about to play.

And it was taken from a Roger and Hammerstein's musical from Carousel, which you may know. And later it was adopted by Liverpool FC fans at the Cop.

And having been recorded and released on a 45 by Jerry and the Pacemakers in 1963, the song is? There you go.

The song is, the song talks of a journey. It talks of a journey when you walk through a storm, hold your head up high and don't be afraid of the dark.

At the end of the storm is a golden sky. Whoever wrote this? I was at Hammerstein, Rogers, amazing. And though your dreams be tossed and blown. And it ends with, walk on, walk on with hope in your heart.

[4 : 37] It mirrors Psalm 121. It gives us hope and encouragement that we're always there. It was very poignant then in 1989 that at the FA Cup semi-final at Hillsborough, stadium and Sheffield between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest on the 5th of April 1989, a crush of people resulted in 97 deaths and hundreds of injuries.

And when you hear this song, it still evokes that time because that was sung as a form of lament and a sort of hymn by people and still is today as the cop sings that and they remember back to them.

And it's interesting how Psalm 121 and this song comes back in times of stress and tragedy because you will remember this song was recorded by Michael Ball and Sir Tom Moore during the COVID crisis and actually went to number one.

This song isn't, my help comes from the Lord. In the midst of tragedy, where does my help come from? This song isn't a magic charm.

You don't hang it from the mirror of your car to protect you from life's bumps and scrapes. Where does my help come from? In good times and in tragedy, my help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

[6 : 10] The psalmist points to the very one who made the hills, maker of heaven and earth, the mountain's very existence, speak of the creator. Everything we look at speaks of the creator, the awesomeness of God.

He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will neither slumber nor sleep. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

God doesn't take a day off. He is with us 24-7. We know that God is with us in each and every situation because we all have storms in our lives, along with great joys.

The joy of the Lord was with us. Mountaintop highs that we've all experienced in our lives. We've also experienced the valleys.

And that assurance of those who trust in him, he will not let your foot slip into despair. His hand is with you, always reaching out.

[7 : 17] However, the psalm gets gritty. And anyone here, if you've been lucky enough never to encounter trauma in your discipleship, bless you.

Because I'm sure I speak for us all that in our discipleship, we have all experienced trauma in some way or another. And often, you know, it's in that trauma in life's discipleship that Jesus said, whoever would take up his cross and follow me.

That's part of the journey. And as we follow this Lenten journey, we reflect on how God is with us, not only in the mountaintop experiences, but in the tough times as well.

That's part of the joy of the pain. And in Lent, we encounter the cross and the cost that Jesus speaks to us about.

I'm going to keep going back to the boy, the mole, the fox and the horse, because it's one of my favourite books at the moment. If you haven't read it or haven't seen the animation, it's brilliant.

[8 : 25] But there's a wonderful line, and it said, what is the bravest thing you have ever said? Asked the boy. And the horse replies, help.

Sometimes it's the bravest thing that we can do to say to the Lord, I am at a loss here, Lord. Come and help. Will you be with me in this?

Would you come in the power of your Holy Spirit? Would I know your presence and your peace in extra measure in the middle of this? Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord.

And we cry out to him. Lord, meet us where we are. I recall as a young parent, our son Mark had to go in for a routine scan.

Now, if your experience is anything like mine, with a four-year-old that doesn't stop running around, and a scan just doesn't go together, so, of course, there had to be an anaesthetic that was involved.

[9 : 34] I met Mandy. I left... This was pre-mobile phones by the time. This was pre-mobile phones. Shares you how old I am. And so I left Mandy and Mark at the children's hospital, and off I went with Dawn.

We went for a walk around the city centre, did what we needed to do, thinking, obviously, that Mark, you know, whatever. We went back to the ward, and as I arrived on the ward, I was greeted by a nurse.

And the nurse looked at me and I said, Mark, he's just had a scan. He's back. And she said, I am so sorry. Your son is in intensive care.

And I looked at her and said, no, I think you've got the wrong name. I think our son's just here for a scan. And she said, your son is in intensive care.

I'll take you to be with your wife. You know those moments as well as I do where you look into the eyes of your loved ones. We went down these corridors, all over these corridors, and then I met Mandy at the entrance of intensive care.

[10 : 37] And when you look into the eyes of your loved ones, you just know, don't you? It's not looking good. We were ushered into a room to see your child with tubes coming out of what appeared to be every body orifice, machines beeping, lots of stuff.

This wasn't the son that I'd left an hour and a half before. Where does my help come from? The Lord will keep you from all harm.

He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and your going both now and forevermore. Don't call me super spiritual because at times like this, you throw yourself into the hands of God.

Where do I go for help? My help is in the name of the Lord. I cried out to the Lord. Lord, help. In fact, my words were, Lord, help, but please not this way.

Not this way for him. The Lord had clearly watched over him. But I knew at that point, and this is where the psalm gets gritty, I knew if at that time Mark was going to die, that the Lord had watched over his life, he had watched his coming in and he would watch over his going out.

[11 : 58] The Lord was with him. It was a good four years that we had had. I shouted out to the Lord and suddenly as I prayed, as I cried out, literally I did cry out to the place, where does my help come from?

Machines started beeping and alarms started going. People arrived in. I thought, this is it. Two hours later, my son was running around the recovery ward like there was no tomorrow.

What had happened is they'd taken the tube out too quickly and they'd had to resuscitate him. Yeah, he was fine except for a bit of a sore throat, but he was back to his normal self.

That's not always the way for all of us when we've walked through. But at that point of need, where does your help come from? We cry out to the Lord in the confidence that he will see not only our coming in, but our going out.

And he will be with us in the depths of life, in the mountains, and also in our bereavement. Lord, where are you?

[13 : 15] Lord, I know that you are there in every part of our life. This psalm, I would encourage you to take and to pray through. But this morning, I thought what we'd do is where and when have you called for help from the Lord?

There's a little sheet that we've had. And in Lent, I think it's really important to bring these things to the cross, to be a tangible sign of where are we in our discipleship?

And Psalm 21 focuses, Psalm 121 focuses us on where are we? Where do we trust? Where and when have you called for help from the Lord? Where and when have you sensed his power and presence of the Holy Spirit as comforter and friend in those mountaintop and in the depths of life?

Maybe you are there now. Bless you. Wherever you acknowledge that help, maybe time and time again, it passes us by, but we have to say, Lord, thank you because I know that you've been there.

Lord, help. Or maybe your cry today is just, Lord, help. Maybe the Lord has laid on your heart a world situation for somewhere in the world where we cry out, Lord, help.

[14 : 38] Because we know that you're there. Maybe it's your thanks for saying, Lord, you were there, you are always there when I cried for help. Help in answered and as yet unanswered prayer as well.

It's not wrong to cry. And Jesus said and reinforced the power and presence that would be given to each and every one of us because I will not leave you or forsake you.

Next Saturday, those on offer will be exploring the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. And as we move in our discipleship, I would hold, please, let's hold to that confidence that this season brings.

I'm going to invite you now as the worship band comes back up. We're going to sing some worship songs, but during that time, I'd invite you to come and you've been given a piece of paper.

If you haven't, that's fine. There's plenty here. But it's got help and the cross written on it. And maybe there is something that is on your heart this morning, something that you are giving thanks for, for an answered prayer where you have known God's help in your life.

[15 : 56] As Margaret said earlier, you know, you walk into places and you know that God brings people around you as an answer to prayer. Maybe your cry this morning is for yourself. Maybe for somebody who you know, a place in the world, a situation, something that you are praying about.

We're going to bring those and join this time and there is no rush and we will come and we will pin them to the place where it needs to be. We will bring them to the cross because that is the place of hope, salvation and our future.

that is the same for the first time I have admitted below the cross. We have wandering with overflow because that is a noticing but we haven't been through this, the Performance of the Addiction that really govern and thirdly is is the only work for things