

# God is on Our Side

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[ 0 : 00 ] Lord guides us and leads us. Would you turn with me now to the book of Psalms and Psalm 124. And for today and for this morning, I want us to read these eight verses of Psalm 124.

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side now, may Israel say, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick when the wrath was kindled against us.

Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul. Then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.

Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Today in the length and breadth of our land, at home and overseas, we have a time of remembrance and a moment to reflect.

[ 1 : 36 ] Remembrance is made of distant conflicts and others that are a bit closer. In different places and the names immediately open memories for many as well as for ourselves.

But their life was given that we might enjoy the freedom that we have right now. But in all of that remembrance, there is a degree of formality.

But for many who are actually involved, it's so personal. Old memories, painful memories come back. Cupboards are opened.

Doors are opened. Time passes and time may dull in a measure these pains, but they never totally remove these memories.

But there is that formality because there is something that we forget. At least, we don't hear that much about it.

[ 2 : 53 ] There is that spiritual dimension to our life and the present circumstances we are in that is not often heard just how much we owe to God for his help and for our deliverances.

And when that reference to God is made and is heard, it's only for a moment because it's soon forgotten. Until next time.

God has a place in our life as a nation. But so often it's according to a diary or a calendar. Easter time.

Christmas time. Remembrance. Funerals. Weddings. It's only a place.

But in between these times and these formal notions, there's a disregard, there's a discounting, there's even a dismissing of any of the claims that God has made.

[ 4 : 04 ] We close the door on anything that he has to say for our life and for our goodness. But here, in this psalm, we're reminded that ultimately our help and our deliverance comes from the Lord alone.

We are reminded of truths and experiences that sometimes all too quickly slide out of our lives. every one of us. Every one of us. even those of us who have not been involved immediately in conflict. There is that pressure upon us today to mold our thinking, our attitude to what's going on around about us.

And sometimes we can neglect to give God that place that is his and his alone. Not just simply as a one-off thing. We come together in church.

Yes, there's that formality about us that we're talking about. We come to church and we acknowledge. But what about tomorrow? And what about yesterday? We need to keep the Lord before our mind and as a constant companion.

[ 5 : 19 ] Not just for these calendar events. But every moment of every day. The people who wrote these words from Psalm 124 and several of these songs of degrees as they're mentioned in our Bibles.

They were pilgrims. They were journeying to Jerusalem. I joyed when the house of God grew up, they said to me. That's the journey they're on. But danger and threat was their constant companion and traveled with them along the way.

Today, words as well as weapons were set against them. How vital it was for them. How vital it is for now as today.

That the Lord is our helper to have us survive and to arrive safely. Because today, the Christian, we live in a hostile place.

More and more of the traditional Christian markers and standards are being dismantled and being removed. Sin has been given a recognition and a credibility. It's been acknowledged in the law of our land.

[ 6 : 34 ] And people apologize for what's happened in the past. That's what's happening with us. We join with them.

Together, we're on a difficult journey. Facing challenges. Sometimes these challenges come oh so subtly and quietly. They creep up on our life.

And they get into our life when we hardly notice it. That slow, subtle approach. There are other times when it's an open, in-your-face challenge. But that's the danger that they were in, we're in.

Left to ourselves. Left to ourselves, we would not survive.

But we take these words of the psalm. The experience they came through is ours also. If the Lord had not been on our side, what if?

[ 7 : 37 ] Where would we be? What would we be like? It was the Lord who guaranteed their survival and their arrival. And we can say the same ourselves today.

So let's come to this psalm then. Let's see something of where it's come from and who was involved in it to get lessons for ourselves today.

And the first thing I want us to do, and it's what we should do all the time, let's get the broad picture, the setting perhaps of these words to get the lesson and application for ourselves. What's the setting that might have given rise to Psalm 124?

I want to suggest two simple people that would have given these words. David, first of all. Back you go later on this afternoon to 2 Samuel chapter 5.

There is David and he's just been anointed. He's just beginning to embrace the responsibilities of being a king and a leader as God's leader to God's people.

[ 8 : 44 ] And where were the enemy? All you've got to do is to go to 2 Samuel chapter 5, verses 17 and 18, and you read there, and the Philistines, oh, they heard about the anointing of David and they say, it's right, let's go for him.

Let's knock him out before he gets established in his ways. Let's go and fight against them and remove them from the face of the earth.

David, he was only just embracing the responsibility. He was only just getting going as king. And here he was having to fight the army of the Philistines.

And not only once, but twice in that very chapter it's said and given to us. 17 and 18, again in verse 22. Instead, they wanted just to remove them.

The hope of Israel to go from them. And we can hear these words being spoken. If not had been the Lord who was on our side, where would we now?

[ 9 : 57 ] And we can take these words to ourselves, young or old in the Christian life, but especially young in the Christian life.

Maybe you're going out on a new venture. Maybe there are fresh prospects for you as a congregation, as a people, as a family, as friends. I know not where you are or what you're in.

All I'm saying is the application is there for us all. For a short time, everything is new and everything is fresh. Is that not what happens in the Christian's life when you come to know the Lord?

And everything is new and everything is fresh. But then, then there is a mighty onslaught. Before the habits develop, before the pattern of Christian living is established, before the changes have been put into effect when you come to know the Lord, before your delight is fixed more and more upon the Lord, before any of that happens, David is king, just starting out, you setting out in the Christian path.

The enemy comes. The Philistines are arranged against David and the enemy is arranged against you. left to ourselves, we would be wiped out.

[11:27] Can you understand why David would sing these words? Can you not enter into these words yourself and put your amen to them? If the Lord had not been on my side, where would I be now?

Yes, one setting in the life, one setting in the life of David. But I want to take another biblical example which would be quite as appropriate and I want to look at the life of Hezekiah.

We all know the one thing about Hezekiah was that he was given an ultimatum by the Lord and he turned to the wall and he prayed and the Lord gave him guaranteed in the book 15 extra years. That's what we know about Hezekiah. It's given to us in Isaiah chapter 36 but it's also given to us and again when you go this afternoon to read 2 Samuel 5 go again to 2 Kings chapter 19 18 two chapters and there you have Jerusalem is under siege Assyria and Sennacherib they've gathered there and they're engaging in verbal disputes they're shouting to the people on the wall who are you trusting in?

Who is your God? Are you trusting in the Egyptians? Look at what I've done to Egypt. Are you trusting in the words of Hezekiah? Look at what he's done he's pulled down all these idols and all these other places.

[13:07] Are you going to be saved by trusting in what he says? And you can imagine how they felt in the city of Jerusalem because of all of that.

The threats that came in 2 Kings chapter 18 eventually it came to a letter that was handed to Hezekiah chapter 19 and he goes and he presents the letter before the Lord in prayer and there's an amazing deliverance comes as you go to the end of that chapter.

One day oh yes Hezekiah had the answer from the Lord yes the Assyrians had come against God's people and God was not going to let them off with it.

A hundred and eighty thousand were killed suddenly just like that. So Nacherib had to withdraw and go away from Jerusalem he went home and when he got home his sons killed him.

And again you can hear the words of Hezekiah saying it. Every time they went out and he saw all these armies surrounding the nation surrounding the walls of Jerusalem and suddenly it's all gone.

[14:26] If the Lord had not been on our side where would we be now? The Lord has done that for us. And again take a simple application to yourself.

You've gone around and you've gone through the Christian life and you've come through many experiences and you've seen yourself bottled up and boxed in just like perhaps these people were at Jerusalem.

You've been in a tight corner and your back's against the wall and you didn't know where to go like the people on the mountain they didn't know where to go. That's the way you felt. In a way that was totally surprising and totally unexpected and could never be predicted the Lord has come.

Perhaps removed the problem given you a clear way through it but one way or another you are where you are today and in your soul you can say it to God if the Lord had not been on my side where would I be now?

God one of the passages I go back to often times it's a theme that you can look up the concordance and you can find how many ways it's been repeated and used to apply to God's people with a stretched out hand and with a mighty arm God has saved his people Exodus 6 it starts there it comes through the books of Moses the way in which God demonstrates his commitment not just simply you think of a muscle bound man one of these weight lifters just look at him bulging muscles all over the place yes but it's not enough to have the muscle you've got to put it into effect and lift the bar and that's what we have we have an almighty God but that might has gone into effect to save his people with a stretched out arm applying all the might of God he saves his people where would we be if God had not done that for us we can put in our own details we can put in our own setting yes today not just ourselves individually but as a nation and as a people we can put our own details in if the

[16:57] Lord had not been with us where would we be now so there you have it the setting of this psalm perhaps the life of David the life of Hezekiah but secondly I want us to look at and listen particularly not just simply to the setting but let's listen to what he says if it had not been the Lord who was on our side now when you read that you might sometimes think well is there an element of doubt there is there a question really about the Lord being on his side was the Lord on his side or wasn't he the way in which it's put first glance first reading you might be well what exactly is he saying but the psalmist is using a methodology and a technique to emphasize something for us and he's telling us in plain uncertain terms emphasizing for him for them for us that the help came from

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Lord and he wants to state it clearly and he wants to state it plainly the people of them days the Assyrians that were the Philistines rather that were around him or the Assyrians that were around him they were exercised in war they had the craft to back it up chariots and horsemen and all the infrastructure of army and the training and the experience that came with it they were men of war but what did God's people do remember what it says in Psalm 20 better it is to trust in better it is to trust in the Lord than to make men our defenses yes that's exactly what they were doing that's exactly what this

Psalmist is saying to them and to us they trusted and they relied upon the Lord in the situation they were in they were looking to the Lord day after day and again a simple application as we move quickly on today Christian or church we're engaged in a battle with spiritual forces and sometimes there can be a temptation come to rely on what society relies on well this is the way business does it this is the way the church is going to do it this is the way somebody advances in their profile in their business this is the way somebody gets on in life well that's the way the Christian is going to do you know what I'm talking about we can sometimes drink from the cup of society today we can rely upon chariots and horse men and we sometimes forget to rely on the

Lord we need to rely and to trust in the name of our God because the name of the Lord it's a fascinating window to look into because there are so many different names given to God in our Bibles that emphasize a particular aspect of his character some of them draw attention to his might and power others draw attention to his tenderness and his gracious dealing with people and depending on what situation is before the writer and before the people that's the word of the Lord that comes to them if they're in a battle situation then the word of the Lord is his might his power if you're broken and weary and down an altogether different aspect of God's character is brought out in the name that is given to us that is most suitable to where we are so it is we fall back on the name of our God my granny taught me many things we used to go out with the cow put it behind the second fence spent my summer holidays in Habust and one thing she always told me if you're putting the cow out and you feel that you're going on to soft ground always fall back because you come off hard ground fall back on what you've done where you've come from and that's what we have to do sometimes we can be in difficult situations and sometimes when we go forward we don't understand what's happening and we don't know where we're going and sometimes what we've got to do is exactly like granny told me fall back on what you know the name of the Lord and what that tells us about his character his might his faithfulness his loving kindness they are then on a journey as we are on a journey under the open heavens as family groups young and old strong and weak they all faced a need as we face a need but the encouragement coming to them and coming down to us despite the dangers of the earth despite a little nation in the vastness of the heavens and that's why the last verse is given to us we're so small who bothers about us think of the vastness of the heavens we're so small and insignificant but that's what the psalmist is saying no you're not God is your helper no matter how insignificant you might think yourself to be the dangers of the earth or the vault of heaven the Lord is over these areas equally and he is able to help them as he is able to help us so there we have it the setting the saying one last thought think of the scale of the danger they faced the sudden severity the full destruction that they faced he likens it to two animals let me give it to you very briefly like this one bite and they're gone the anaconda snake in South

[ 24 : 10 ] America the anaconda snake can take and swallow a dog the great white shark has 300 teeth razor sharp in rows of three in his jaw he can snap off a leg and he can kill a seal a frog shoots out its tongue grabs and back in in less than a second it's got no teeth to bite it swallows it whole a frog a frog blinks when it's swallowing because it's using its eyes to press its foot down its throat as quick as that as sharp as big as that animals that can devour just in a moment that's the kind of illustrations that the psalmist is giving to us of the threat that they faced the threat that you and I face so quick and it could all be over we're exposed we're frail we're vulnerable or again he talks about a flash flood they're walking along remember they're on a journey they see a dry river bed a good place to go with the wind going over the top of them they're dry they're secluded and they go into it and they camp there for the night but there's a threat because way up on the hill there's a thunderstorm going and before long that dry bed is now a roaring torrent in a minute it can be just washing them away destruction total wipe out we've all seen the pictures of that huge wave in

Portugal that bowled over that surfer when that surfer is bowled over it's called indeed a wipe out and that's what was going to threaten them when the water came down that burn just simply to wipe them out that's the scale of threat that they were aware of and exposed to but again it doesn't make any difference how big the enemy is against it doesn't make any difference how intense the attack is they still sing this psalm if the Lord had not been on our side where would we be in the face of all of these threats a benchmark for their spiritual journey a benchmark for our journey and it's not just simply one date in the calendar it's not just simply one day in a formal process and procession good as that is it's got to be a lot more as a nation and as peoples we've got to have the constant experience and utter dependence on the

Lord always if the Lord had not been on our side where would we be now let's engage in that process briefly as we apply it each one of us let's say this to our soul I remember when I remember when I was in bad company I remember when I was possessed with ambition I remember when I was over confident in my own abilities wisdom or character I remember when I started to debate with temptations and I thought I could overcome them myself

I remember when I was openly disobedient I remember when it echoes with every one of us we didn't see the footprint of God's grace we didn't hear his gentle voice speaking to us but he was there and he brought us out and he brought us through and now we can look back and we can say if the Lord had not been with us where would we be now one last reference before we close we mentioned Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19 18 and 19 I want to go to this same man Hezekiah but I want to go to 2

Chronicles chapter 32 2 Chronicles and chapter 32 again it gives us a rehearsing of the same history that we had there of Hezekiah we're told in chapter 24 of chapter 32 those days Hezekiah was sick to death he prayed to the Lord and the Lord rendered him a benefit and he was such like but then he goes on to speak about what happened to Hezekiah come down to verse 30 let me read it this same Hezekiah also stopped the upper water course and Hezekiah prospered in all his works and we come to verse 31 how be it in the business of the ambassadors of the princess of Babylon who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land God left him to try him that he might know all that was in his heart now that's an astonishing and an amazing thing to read [ 30 : 50 ] Hezekiah had that amazing experience of giving 15 years on the book they were secure and they were certain for him his reputation spread and everybody sent delegations to find out what's happened in Israel what's happened to this king Hezekiah and many many visitors came amongst them were these Babylonians but when the Babylonians came something happened to Hezekiah God withdrew just to see how he would jump God withdrew just to see what he would do next how would he behave in the light of the blessings God had given to him what would he say how would he react God didn't abandon him just withdrew what would he do next is that not appropriate for ourselves as a nation as well as individuals God has been good to us and we can say if the

Lord had not been with us where would we be now yes the Lord has been good to us very well what do we do next do we stick by or do we let things drift and God is on the sideline of our life as a nation and God is on the sideline of our life as individuals and God is aware and we are aware of the blessings we've had in the past it doesn't matter how far back you fill in the details yourself but just so far back the Lord has been good to you and to me and he comes to a point where he stands back and he's watching just what we do next we can say it the Lord has been good to us in the face of a mighty enemy in the face of temptations pressures call them what you will what does it mean effect of all these things on us do we hold fast or are we letting things drift let us pray password and people can say yes but yes if they have made one amazing crash and can relax and stay here