

# Living Away from Home

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     This morning we are starting a new sermon series that will cover the Psalms of Ascents in the book of Psalms. And the Psalms of Ascents are Psalms 120 through 134.
- And we're told that these Psalms are Psalms that were sung by the children of Israel when they would make their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem from wherever they lived in the promised land.
- And this is something they would have done three times per year. The Lord commanded that they would appear in Jerusalem. And so they did it at the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles.
- And they would journey in their families and in their groups and in their tribes. And some of them for days or even weeks just in these caravans just coming.
- And they would be singing as they went along in anticipation of arriving in Jerusalem to worship.
- [ 1 : 0 7 ]     And these songs are insightful because they help us to see how they thought about God and how they thought about worship and how they thought about life in general.
- It helps us to see the kinds of things that they contemplated as they journeyed to Jerusalem. And over the course of this sermon series, we will get the opportunity to look at these themes that they thought about.
- And we will seek to learn from them in our own worship of the Lord. And so if you have not yet done so, please turn to the first Psalm of Ascent, Psalm 120.
- And please follow along as I read. In my distress, I called to the Lord and he answered me.
- Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue. What shall be given to you?
- [ 2 : 1 4 ]     And what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue? A warrior's sharp arrows with glowing coals of the broom tree.
- Woe to me that I sojourn in Meshach, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar. Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace.
- I am for peace. But when I speak, they are for war. Let's pray together. Well, thank you for your word this morning.
- We ask that you would speak to us through your word. We trust you, Lord, in your divine providence that we are hearing your word this morning where we find ourselves in life's circumstances.
- And so, Lord, I pray that you would help us to hear you speak to us, not generally, but where we find ourselves this morning. We pray that you'll be glorified in the preaching of your word this morning.
- [ 3 : 2 4 ]     As in Christ's name we pray. Amen. I think you would agree with me that one of the keys to living well is learning how to effectively respond to difficulties that come our way from time to time.

I've come to learn that there are some keys to living life well, and this is one of them. Learning how to respond to difficulties that come our way from time to time.

And I think of one particular difficulty that all of us, I believe, have experienced, especially recently in the pandemic, and that is stress.

Stress from all different directions. Worries and concerns about not being infected, and family members about work and business and so many other things.

Some have seen shorter days with work. And the result has been stress. And some people find ways of managing stress.

[ 4 : 33 ] They exercise. They find recreational things to do. They find other diversions that help them to manage this stress.

Another difficulty that we sometimes face in life is distress. Those occasions when we are hemmed in and pressed down by circumstances over which we have no control.

And I imagine that maybe for some, the stress has been distress. The stress from the pandemic has been distress. But in our broken and fallen world, there are all kinds of things that can distress us.

But we often face distress from the sinful actions of sinful people. It's one of the realities of living in a broken and a fallen world.

Sometimes the sinful action comes from people who profess Christ, belong to Christ. We sometimes sin against one another, and it brings incredible distress in our lives.

[ 5 : 44 ] But largely, the greatest distresses that we can have, I find, is because of the conduct of sinful people. And this is what the psalmist in Psalm 120 was facing.

But when we look at Psalm 120, one of the things that it's easy to overlook, but this is true about Psalm 120, the psalmist was not dealing with distress for the first time.

Notice what he says in verse 1. He says, In my distress, I called to the Lord, and he answered me. So the psalmist is talking about some past situation that the Lord had answered him in, some distressful situation that he recalls in this moment of distress that he's now facing.

He says, I called to the Lord, and he answered me. But what is clear is the psalmist is now praying about a different distress. And so I think it's fair for us to say that distress is an ongoing reality in life.

It is a part of life. And I think, truth be told, God's people face a unique kind of distress that comes to them simply because they are God's people, and in this world they are not at home.

[ 7 : 12 ] And for this reason, I think it is most appropriate that the Psalms of Ascent begin with Psalm 120, a recurring theme in the Christian life, but a recurring theme for those who are on a journey following the Lord.

And Psalm 120 calls the people of God to look to God in distress on their journey in this world that is not their home.

Now, clearly, when you look at Psalm 120, it was written by an individual who was in distress from sinful persecution and the hostility of others. Some think that this psalm was written during the exile when God's people had been scattered and dispersed away from the promised land.

But whatever the context in which it was written, this psalm came to be a corporate psalm. This psalm came to be one that the people of God identified with, that they could incorporate and say, we identified with this, and this became one of the psalms that they would use as they made their journey to Jerusalem.

So as we consider Psalm 120 this morning, here's what I want us to see. God uses life's distresses to cause his people to pray to him, wait for him, and long for home.

[ 8 : 50 ] That's what he does. He uses life's distresses to cause his people to pray to him, wait for him, and long for home.

And so in essence, we see the psalmist in Psalm 120 engage in three activities. He's praying to God, he's waiting for God, and he's longing for home.

And that's what I want us to consider in our brief time this morning. And having looked at my watch, it is briefer than I thought it was. And so one of the ways you can pray for me this morning is for a miracle to get done in 15 minutes.

So here in Psalm 120, first we see the psalmist praying to God. The psalmist is in distress, but it's not ordinary distress.

It's not suck your teeth, shrug your shoulders, and move on. The kind of distress the psalmist is in is the kind of distress that drives you to your knees to pray. And we see his prayer in verse 2.

[ 10 : 10 ] Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue. His prayer is a prayer for deliverance, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue, from those who slander, and those who deceive.

And the psalmist is not offering up empty or vain words as he prays. He's praying confidently to God because remember, we've already seen in verse 1 that he recalls God's faithfulness.

He recalls it in the past. He has been in distress. He's prayed to God, and God answered him. He says, In my distress, I called to the Lord, and he answered me.

So this wasn't his first time that he was in distress. He's been there. He's done that. He's prayed to God, and God answered him. Lying lips and deceitful tongues are part of living in a fallen world, and such conduct brings great distress to people, but especially to God's people.

And the reason that lying lips and a slanderous tongue brings distress to God's people is because God's people will not return and match word for word.

[ 11 : 29 ] God's people will not stoop to that level to engage with lies in return and deceit in return. And so it can become almost unbearable when you have someone who is dealing with you in that way.

And so God's people pray. They pray to a faithful God whose ears are open to the cry of his people. But lying lips and a deceitful tongue are not the only source of distress of living in a sinful world.

Now, Dad, some of you find yourselves in distress this morning, and it's not from liars and not from deceivers. Some of you, the difficulty, the distress that you face might be longstanding relational conflict, perhaps at home or at work.

Perhaps it's ongoing financial difficulties or longstanding illness for yourself or someone you love. Maybe the distress is a wayward child, an unbelieving family member.

Whatever the distress, God's people can and should pray. They should pray to him to intervene, to deliver them, to bring them out of the source of their distress.

[ 12 : 58 ] But again, remember, it's ongoing. And so we never pray about distress to say, oh, when I get out of this, I'll never see it again. No. Distress is part of living in a sinful and a fallen world.

And so, God's people respond by praying in an ongoing way when they find themselves in distress. Where do you find yourself this morning?

Are you distressed? Is there some circumstance that is hamming you in and pressing you down and you have absolutely no control over it, no control over the severity of it, no control of the duration of it?

That's where you find yourself. And if you are, whatever the cause, I say to you, pray to God. Pray to God. If you are, thank God.

Continue to pray to God. He answers his people who call to him in their distress. But not only do we see the psalmist praying to God, we also see him waiting for God.

[ 14 : 12 ] In verse 3, the psalmist asks, what shall be given to you and what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue? The psalmist is considering the solution to his distress.

And in verse 4, he gives the answer, a warrior's sharp arrows with glowing coals of the broom tree. Now, what do those words mean?

Well, right up front, I'll tell you, they are a veiled threat. What the psalmist is saying is that he is not going to take matters into his own hands, but instead, he will wait for God to deal with them.

Now, that's not so obvious in the English Standard Version, but I want you to hear it from the New International Version. This is what it says. What will he do to you? And what more besides, oh deceitful tongue?

He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows, with burning coals of the broom tree. And we're told that in that culture, the best coal that you could make was from the broom tree.

[ 15 : 22 ] So this was choice punishment that the psalmist was saying, God is going to bring to you, you liar, you deceiver, who is distressing me.

Notice the psalmist doesn't say, I'm going to do this. He says, he is going to do it. He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows and with burning coals. In other words, the psalmist is saying, I'm waiting for God.

I'm going to wait for God to deal with you. I'm not going to take matters in my own hands and try to address this, but I will patiently wait for God, wait for God in his justice to deal with injustice.

And he fully expects God to deal with the injustice that has been meted out to him. And brothers and sisters, like the psalmist, we must wait for God.

Whatever the source of our distress, we must pray to God and wait for God to answer and act rather than taking matters into our own hands. Scripture, the Old Testament in particular, is filled with examples of people who were in distress and took matters into their own hands.

[ 16 : 36 ] We think of Saul in his distress and in his impatience who could not wait for Samuel and was doomed that he acted on Samuel's behalf. We think of Abraham and Sarah and how they were in distress wanting a child and took matters into their own hands and today the result of that is still with us in this world.

Brothers and sisters, we are called to wait for God. How long do we wait? Well, we wait as long as God chooses to have us wait.

And it's not because God is punishing us. It is because God is at work in our distresses. In our distress, God not only has his eyes on the source of our distress, but he has his eyes on us and he promises us in his word in Romans 8, 28 that we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, those who are called according to his purpose.

And in all things he works. All things includes distressful things. And because God is God, he's able to work in distressful things for our good. And we're called to believe that more than we are called to understand that.

And if people are sinfully the source of our distress, we must wait for God to sharpen his arrows and to burn his coals and to bring recompense in his way and in his time.

[ 18 : 25 ] And so I want to ask you this morning, if you're in distress, how are you waiting? Are you waiting? If you're continuing to pray and to trust and wait, you're doing well.

God perfectly knows your situation and more than that, God perfectly knows you. He knows your friend. He knows what you can bear. And he is just and will not allow you to be tested above your ability to bear it.

And so the fact that the distress has come your way is proof that you can bear it as you wait for God to answer and to act.

But if you're not praying, then I know you're not waiting. Because praying helps us to wait. Praying strengthens us to wait.

And so if you're not praying, I encourage you to pray and I encourage you to wait. So in Psalm 120, we see the psalmist praying to God and waiting for God.

[ 19 : 40 ] Keep losing which pocket I have my tissue in. But the psalmist not only is praying and waiting in Psalm 120, we also see the psalmist longing for home.

And this is my third and final point. The psalmist says in verses 5 to 7, The psalmist is considering and lamenting his bigger reality.

He has a bigger reality than the personal enemies who are slandering his name and who are deceiving him. His bigger reality is where he is living.

He says he sojourns in Meshach and dwells among the tents of Kedar. Now clearly, the psalmist is not speaking in a literal sense that he lives in Meshach and Kedar because it's impossible, first of all, to live in these two places at the same time.

And especially these two places because Meshach is modern-day Turkey and Kedar is in the area of the Arabian Peninsula and geographically they are in opposite directions, very far apart from one another.

[ 21 : 24 ] But the people of Meshach and Kedar would not have been worshipping the true and living God. They live by a different set of values, a different set of rules, and that is what the psalmist is saying in verses 6 and 7.

He says, they hate peace and they are for war. So it seems more likely that what the psalmist is describing in this area which he says that he lives in, he's describing more like a Gentile influence, an area that has the character and the influence of unbelievers, perhaps literally but also figuratively.

And he says, my problem is I am for peace but they are for war, they hate peace. And it makes the psalmist realize this is not my home.

This is not where I belong. I do not not just feel at home, I am not at home. These people hate peace, they love war, they're not my people.

Living among them I'm not at home. If this psalm was written in the time of the exile as some say that it was, then it's easy to see how this would stir up the desire to be back in the promised land among those who like the psalmist are for peace.

[ 22 : 59 ] And so the psalmist laments, woe is me. And so it's easy to see how this psalm came to be among the psalms of ascends, the corporate psalms of God's people on their journey to Jerusalem.

it expresses the reality of all the people of God who lived away from Jerusalem in order to make these annual pilgrimages there.

and they identified with this reality in a very corporate way. And as you can imagine as they sang this psalm and considered the fact that they were headed to Jerusalem, it no doubt made them long for Jerusalem.

They wanted to be there, not where they were living. Because that's where home was. But they didn't live where home was. They lived away from Jerusalem among people who were hostile towards them.

And so it made them long for home. It made them long for a place of rest and peace away from people who hate peace and who love war.

[ 24 : 14 ] Away from people who lie and who deceive and who oppress and who persecute the righteous. But even though the children of Israel as they sang this psalm, even though they did not realize it, as the people of God, they were longing for their ultimate home.

More than longing for Jerusalem on earth, they were longing for Jerusalem in heaven. They were longing to be with God and ultimately that longing to be with God was really a longing to be with Christ.

This is a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, no, the psalmist would not have contemplated these things about Christ and about longing to be with God in New Jerusalem.

The children of Israel would not have contemplated it, but this is what is underneath this longing in their hearts that they thought would be fulfilled them as well.

Ultimately, they were longing to be at home with God. And the only way to be at home with God is through the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the hope that he alone can bring and the hope that he alone has brought through his cross, through his death, his burial, his resurrection.

[ 25 : 48 ] and he has ascended on high and he has promised to return to bring his people home. Listen to the apostle John's description of the home that God has promised to all of his people over the ages who long for it and look for it.

In Revelation 21 verses 1 through 4 John writes that I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more and I saw the holy city new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling the dwelling place of God is with man and he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God he will wipe away!

every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away all of the distresses friends will one day pass away when the Lord does this John also writes in Revelation 22 verses 14 and 15 blessed are those who wash their robes so that they may have the right to the tree of life that they may enter the city by the gates outside of the dogs and the sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood in these words the apostle John tells us about a separation God's people will be at home in the city on the inside of the city those who are not will be on the outside and they will make their home in hell every person living and who has ever lived will be at home in one of these places and in truth we are all journeying home we are on a journey to home in one of these two places home with God in heaven and the new earth home in hell with the devil and his angel and I asked you this morning friend where are you headed which home are you going to if you do not know

Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord the home you're headed to is hell separation from God eternally and torment eternally with Satan and his fallen angels and so this morning I call you to repent I call you to turn to Christ and in so doing the new heaven and the new earth will be your home brothers and sisters we will not be at home until that day that the Lord finally brings us home in the new heaven and the new earth that he has promised to all those who love him and so as God's people who live in this fallen world that is not our home we are sojourners like the psalmist and like the children of

Israel who sang this psalm as they journeyed to this temporary reprieve this earthly Jerusalem may we in all of our distresses that may come our way may we pray to God may we wait for God and may we long for home may we long for the day where the Lord will return and we remove everything that brings distress and we will be at home with him eternally in the new heaven and in the new earth and may all who love God's appearing say amen amen let's pray together Lord we thank you this morning that this world is not our home we thank you Lord that in your sovereign design you have ordained it that life in this world will cause us to long for home when we are distressed by sinful people and sinful actions when we are distressed by the fallenness of this world oh Lord may we pray for deliverance and ultimately

[ 30 : 59 ] Lord not just deliverance from these earthly enemies that we have but deliverance out of this world deliverance to be with you eternally and teach us to wait remembering that even in our distresses you are at work for our good Lord may we long for home until the day that you bring us home and now the Lord bless you and keep you the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you may the Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace amen amen up