

God Our Helper and Keeper

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Date: 08 August 2021

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[0 : 00] That beautiful rendition of Psalm 121 prepares our hearts very appropriately to look to God's word.

! And so if you've not yet done so please turn in your Bible to Psalm 121.! This morning we are continuing our sermon series in the Psalms of Ascent, which are Psalms 120 through 134. And last week we began with Psalm 120 and this morning we continue on with Psalm 121.

Please follow along as I read. I'm reading from the English Standard Version. I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber.

The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade on your right hand.

The sun will not strike you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil.

[1 : 35] He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time for and forevermore.

Please pray with me. Father, this is your word. You have preserved it for the good of your people.

That we might hear your voice through it. Would you speak now through your word for your glory and our good?

It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Well, as mentioned already, we are going through these Psalms of Ascent.

And last week I pointed out that we're told that these particular Psalms, Psalm 120 through 134, was sung by the children of Israel as they made their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem from wherever they lived in the promised land to worship God.

[2 : 46] And this is something they would have done three times a year at the three big feasts, Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. And they would have journeyed in families and groups, some for very long periods of time, over weeks, depending on where they lived.

And they would sing these Psalms as they progressed on their journey. As we consider Psalm 121 this morning, I think it is easy to see why this Psalm made its way into these 15 Psalms of Ascent.

I think it's easy to see how this Psalm speaks about the danger of the journey that they actually faced.

The difficulty of the journey they actually faced. The journey was a difficult one over rugged terrain. And a dangerous one in unknown territory, sometimes very near or in the territory of hostile people.

And so the Psalmist helps us to see that two particular blessings were definitely necessary for the success of this journey. The first is because this journey was difficult, because of the slippery slopes and the rugged path that they would be on, they needed help.

[4 : 17] They needed the endurance and the stamina to be able to go through this journey, their way going and their way coming back. And the second necessary blessing that we're able to see that the Psalmist highlights from the journey is that it was dangerous and therefore there was the need to be protected on this journey.

There was a need to be preserved from robbers and other dangers. Sometimes the dangers of the elements and the environment, the danger of the blazing heat of the sun coming down in the day, and sometimes the blistering cold of the night as they were out on their journey.

And as we consider this journey that God's people made from wherever they lived in the promised land, there was a strong parallel to the people of God journeying on this earth, journeying in this world that is not their home, to their final home, which the Bible says is the new Jerusalem, which is from above.

And so this morning, here's the truth that I want us to proclaim about God's care for his people, both in the Psalmist day and in our own day.

Here's the truth. In all of life's journeys, God ultimately helps his people and keeps his people. I think that's what the Psalmist highlights.

[6 : 02] That's what these pilgrims would have been meditating upon and contemplating upon as they engaged in this difficult and dangerous journey, that God is the one who would help them, and God is the one who would keep them.

They were encouraged as they went on their way to Jerusalem to worship God, and I pray this morning that we would be encouraged as we are on our way to the new Jerusalem to worship God, our Redeemer.

And so in our brief time this morning, I want us to consider these two blessings on the journey that the Psalmist highlights in Psalm 121. And the first is, God helps his people.

God helps his people. I believe that one of the very obvious lessons that we have all come to learn from the smallest present this morning to the greatest or the youngest to the oldest, I think all of us have come to realize in this life that we cannot live life successfully alone.

I mean, just the way the Lord has organized life. We think of little babies being born, and they're not born as a unit and left to themselves. They're born into a family, and without nurturing and care and help, they would be, they would not survive.

[7 : 34] We need the help of others. But even after babies grow up, like us, we recognize we can't go it alone either. We also need help.

You know, if you think of the most powerful person in the world that you think about, you know about, maybe the President of the United States comes to mind.

Or maybe Jeff Bezos, who's supposed to be the wealthiest man in the world, depending on the day of the stock market, he may come to mind. But you know, as powerful as these individuals are, they need help.

If you leave them to themselves, and no one helps them, no one does anything for them, they cannot be all that they claim to be.

It is because people help them, and without that help, they would all crash and burn. And so we need help from people.

[8 : 37] But again, I believe that most of us, maybe the little ones among us, have not come to realize this yet. But I think most of us have lived long enough, most of us have lived long enough, to have experienced in our lives, when there was no human flesh, there was no human being, who was either willing or able to help us.

We came to that realization, that there was no one, who could help us, for what was in front of us, what was our lot in a particular moment.

We needed not human help, we needed divine help. And the way Psalm 121 opens, it seems to indicate, that the psalmist recognizes this.

The psalmist is contemplating, and recognizing this reality, of the need for not human help, but divine help. The help that is beyond human ability, without which, we are truly helpless.

And so Psalm 121, verse 1, begins with the psalmist saying, I lift up my eyes to the hills. Many commentators believe, that the psalmist in these words, has in mind the hills of Jerusalem, Mount Zion in particular, which is the place, where God at that time, chose to make his presence, known in a special way.

[10 : 17] And it was there, that they were to go, and meet with him, and to worship him. And then he asks the question, from where does my help come? Friends, this needs, not only be the psalmist's question, it needs to be our question as well.

Where does my help come from? Where does the help, that I necessarily need, come from? The help without which, I would be unhelped. When we consider, the realities, that the psalmist, and the other pilgrims, faced, they would have left behind, lives and livelihoods, for weeks in some instances, as they'd be traveling, to Jerusalem for the feasts.

They would have left, their lands, and their crops, and their animals, and their trade shops, and whatever else they had, that represent their lives, they were to leave it. Indeed, unprotected in many ways.

They were giving up opportunities, to make money, and to create wealth. And they had to trust the Lord, in all of this. And it is really, against this backdrop, that the psalmist is, asking, where does my help come from?

Does my help come from, what I left behind? Does my help come from, my ability to, tend my, flocks, and, cultivate my crops?

[11 : 54] What he acknowledges, that his help comes, from the Lord, from Yahweh, the covenant keeping God, who made heaven, and earth. It would have been sufficient, for the psalmist to say, my help comes from the Lord.

But he goes further, and he goes further, for a particular reason. He adds the fact, that his help comes from, the Lord, who is the maker, of heaven and earth, as a reminder, that he is the all-powerful, all-sufficient God, of the universe, who helps him.

His help comes from, this one who needs no help. His help comes from, this one who is, the all-sufficient God, who created everything, that exists, out of nothing.

And this is no doubt, his confidence, to make this faithful, journey, three times a year, from wherever he lives, to Jerusalem, to worship God.

That God would help him, on that difficult, journey, as he, and the others, were making, their way. The maker, of heaven and earth, was the one, who was helping them.

[13 : 09] He was worshiping, and serving, this God. I think we all know, brothers and sisters, what the psalmist, is portraying for us, in these verses, to be true.

that we need, that we need a help, who is steadfast, we need a help, who is dependable, we need a help, who is beyond, human help. He is our divine, helper.

And as we make, our journey, from this earth, to the new Jerusalem, we need to, hold on to this conviction, that God is our helper. blessed are we, when we remember this.

Blessed are we, when we remember, that God is the one, who helps us. My help, comes from the Lord. And cursed are we, when we forget it.

Because if we're not, looking to God, as our helper, we are looking, to ourselves, and we are looking, to people, as our helper. And scripture is clear, the arm of flesh, will fail us. You know, often times, we get frustrated, with people.

[14 : 29] And you know why, we get frustrated, with people? Because we are looking, to them, when we should be, looking to God. And in truth, it's an acid test.

It's an acid test. When we are frustrated, and bent out of shape, by people, and by what they do, or do not do, in truth, what it is, is that we have our eyes, the wrong place, for where our help comes.

Our help, comes, from, the Lord. Perhaps, there's some of us, right now, and we are looking, not to the Lord, but we are looking, elsewhere.

We're looking, to people. We're looking, to our own ability. Looking, to our intelligence. Looking, to our jobs, our wealth, or other human resources. Other circumstances. And God can, and does use them.

He does. But he uses them, as channels. He uses them, as means, through which he, is our help. But we make, a grave mistake, whenever we see them, as our help itself.

[15 : 44] When we see them, as the source, of our help. They are the means, that God would use. But God, ultimately, is the source. And so, we are always, dealing with God. We're always, dealing with God.

And may God, give us the grace, to remove the people, to remove the means, to remove the props, that we look to, for our help. And may we see him, and may we come, to the conviction, my help comes, from the Lord.

If God, does not help me, ultimately, I, will not, be helped. And so, I pray this morning, that whatever your circumstances are, that you are ultimately, looking to God.

Yes, you do all the, normal, sensible things, that we do, as we, deal with, this life, and all that this life, brings into our, path.

But ultimately, my friends, we must look to God, as our helper, and by God's grace, I pray that all of us, are doing that.

[16 : 52] The second blessing, that the, psalmist, helps us to see, in Psalm 121, is that God, keeps his people.

The psalmist, makes this point, in several different ways, for the remainder, of this psalm. Notice, how he does it, first in verses 3 and 4.

We read, he will not let your foot be moved, he who keeps you, will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel, will neither slumber, nor sleep. The NIV, translates the first part, of verse 3, as, he will not let your foot slip.

Now, this was certainly good news, for the pilgrims, as they made their, pilgrimage, on that, very difficult, terrain, that slippery ground, where, you could easily, lose your footing.

But does it literally mean, that God, was promising them, that as they made, these annual pilgrimages, that he was going to, keep their foot, so that it would never slip, and none of them, would ever slip down?

[18 : 04] Was that what God, was promising them? I don't think so. If the promise was, that none of the pilgrims, on their journey, to Jerusalem, from wherever they lived, in the promised land, would never slip down, on that difficult terrain, I think, that would be, as great a miracle, as the children of Israel, when they were, in the wilderness, and their shoes, never wore out, and their clothing, never needed to be, sized up, or changed, or whatever else.

Their clothing lasts, for the 40 years, that they were, on that journey. That's not what the psalmist, is saying to us. The clear point, of the verse, is the rest of the psalms, the rest of the psalms, the rest of verse 3, which is, that God keeps, his people.

Now, for those of you, who are part of the Bible study, this past, Wednesday, when Dr. R.C. Sproul, dealt with parallelism, I think, we should do very well, in this psalm, in terms of making sense of it, in terms of understanding, what is the psalmist, actually saying?

One of the things, that Dr. Sproul, pointed out, is that generally, you're going to find, that one part, of the parallel, word, would explain, the other part, and that is very much, the case, in verse 3, that we're looking at.

The point, the psalmist is making, is not that God, will ensure, that the pilgrims, will never, lose, a footing, never slip down, as they traveled, to Jerusalem.

[19 : 52] That's not the point, that he was making. Instead, the point, that he is making, is in the latter part, of verse 3. He who keeps you, will not slumber.

The point is, that God guards, and keeps his people. He is watching, over their way. He is ensuring, that they complete, the journey. And he can do this, because he is the, all sufficient God.

The one who needs, no sleep. The one who doesn't, doze off into sleep. The one who doesn't slumber. He doesn't dive kunk. He's ever watchful. He's always watchful, over them.

That's the point, that the psalmist is making. That's the point, the psalmist is making. They're going to make, that journey. He's going to keep them, as they go, on that journey.

Notice in verse 4, that, the promise, that the psalmist, makes, is not just, to us individually, it's to the people of God. He says, behold, he who keeps Israel, will neither slumber, nor sleep.

[21 : 02] He keeps you, and he keeps us. And then in verse 5, he makes the point again, the Lord is your keeper, the Lord is your shade, on your right hand.

And here it is, the idea, that God is near, to his people, as the shade, of a tree, is, to give shade, from the sun, that's belting down, on them.

And notice the promise, that we have, in verse 6. He promises, to the pilgrims, to those who are, on their journey, the sun will not, strike you by day, nor the moon, by night.

Meaning again, God watches over, his people, day and night, and he keeps them, from the dangers, of day and night. These were the encouraging words, of the pilgrims, as they made their journey, to Jerusalem.

That God was with them, that God was, watching over them, that God was, guarding them, that God was, keeping them. Friends, these words, should be encouraging, to us this morning.

[22 : 08] God is no less, watching over us, watching over our way, watching over our journey, than he was, over theirs. Or let us not, think for a moment, that God turns his head, and then something, happens to us.

No, his eyes are, ever upon us. He is the all-seeing God, the all-knowing God, the God who needs no sleep. And he watches over, the way, of his people.

The final two verses, of this psalm, verses 7 and 8, are what you can call, the crescendo, of the psalm. The psalmist writes, the Lord will keep you, from all evil, he will keep your life, the Lord will keep your going out, and your coming in, from this time forth, and forevermore.

The psalmist's point, is not that, God would just, keep us, in the micro way, your foot from slipping, protecting you on, on the journey, day and night.

He now makes the larger point, he simply says, God will keep your life. He will keep you from all evil, he will keep, your life.

[23 : 30] Now here again, very similar to what we saw, in verse 3, is the psalmist saying to us, that God will keep us, in such a way, that we will never, ever experience, any kind, of, ill, or evil, and this word for evil, as again, Dr. Sproul mentioned, on, Wednesday night, and, very, same word, it has a wide range, of meaning.

It means bad, and evil, and distress, and misery, and calamity, and injury. It's a wide range, of meaning. Is the psalmist saying, that God is going to keep us, from everything bad, everything evil, everything distressful, everything calamitous, everything injurious, that will never happen to us?

Well clearly, that can't be the meaning, because the witness of scripture, refutes that, and indeed, the witness of our own lives, refute that. In this fallen world, God's people are not exempt, from the effects, of the fall.

It sometimes includes, bad things, and evil things, and distressful things, and calamitous things. God's people are sometimes, victims of crime, and other bad experiences.

Sometimes we lose our jobs, sometimes we have, our businesses fail, sometimes our marriages fail, sometimes we meet with failure, and life's endeavors, we get sick, and we even die.

[25 : 04] And death is the ultimate. Death is the ultimate evil, because the Bible tells us, that death is an enemy. And that ultimate enemy, comes to all of us.

And God is so ordained, that he will not destroy, that ultimate enemy, until the day, of resurrection. And so clearly, the psalmist is not saying to us, that God will, so micromanage our lives, that as we live in this sinful world, nothing bad, will ever happen to us.

That's not what he is saying, at all. We're not immune, from all of these, challenges, and evils, and difficulties, in this world.

But the point, again, again, drawing on, what Dr. Sproul helped us to see, notice, that the latter part, of verse 8, explains, what, the psalmist, is saying to us.

He says this, God will keep your life. God will keep your life. Isn't there a difference, between asking someone, to watch something, and keep something?

[26 : 16] Something that's very precious to me, I don't want you to watch it. I want you to keep it. That's what God promises, to do with our lives.

In the midst of all the evil, in the midst of all the fallenness, around us, in the midst of all the difficulties, that we may face, in this life, God promises, that he, will keep, our lives.

And I think the better sense, is he will keep our lives, from being destroyed, by evil. He will preserve our lives. Evil may come our way, but God, will have his way.

In the end, God is going to have his way, with our lives. In the end, evil will not have, its full, way with us. It will not go, to its logical end, to destroy us.

God will preserve, our lives. That's what the psalmist, is saying to us. So we don't look to God, to keep us, from bad things, ever happening to us.

[27 : 20] Instead, we look to him, so that those bad things, don't have their way, and the final say, in our lives. He, in that sense, keeps us, from evil.

And again, the point could not be clearer, than in verse 8. The psalmist says, the Lord will keep, your going out, and your coming in, from now, and forevermore.

You go out, you're going to come in. Doesn't matter what you face. You come in, you're going to go out, doesn't matter what you face. God is going to keep us. That we know.

We don't know, what calamities, and difficulties, and challenges, will befall us, as we go in, and come out, as we journey, in this life. We don't know that, but we do know this. God is going, to keep us.

God is going, to preserve us. He will preserve us, in the very shadow of death. We will experience, grief, and loss, and pain, and sorrow.

[28 : 22] But the Lord keeps us. And he will not, allow us to, utterly fall prey, to the fallenness, and the brokenness, of this life. He keeps us, in all of life.

He keeps us, in our going out, and in our coming in, now, and forevermore. This is a beautiful psalm.

But this psalm, reminds us, that this is not, the way things, were supposed to be.

Here we see, the, children of Israel, making this, pilgrimage, this annual pilgrimage, three times a year, to go to this place, Mount Zion, that they would, worship God.

without some, what God intended. Back in Genesis, God, showed his design, when he, created Adam, and Eve, and he, was in fellowship, with them.

[29 : 24] And they were able, to commune with him. But because of their rebellion, they were, put out of the garden, and they were, separated from God, from the one, that they could, commune with, 24-7.

They were now, separated from God. But God, in his mercy, began to, unfold his plan, of redemption. And part of that, plan of redemption, is in the whole, sacrificial system, the, the temple system.

And, and we are seeing, a part of it, being worked out, even now, as they are, making their way back, into the presence, of God.

Going to Mount Zion, where they would, experience his presence. And they would, worship him. We see, because of the fall, all the evil, and all of the, fallenness, and the people of God, are exposed to, and this again, was not, the original design.

And you know what? All of this, is predictive of Christ. All of this, is predictive of, why Christ needed to come, and why God, was sending, the Lord Jesus Christ. So that we can be, reconciled to him.

[30 : 32] So that we can be, one with him, again. So that he would, bring us to God. So that he would, remove the curse. The curse, that was the source, of all the evil, and all the sin, that we experience, in this life.

Through Christ, it will ultimately, be, removed. Friends, we are on our way, to the new Jerusalem. We are on our way, on the journey, that God has ordained, that he would redeem us, and bring us to himself, and he will make, all things new.

This is what John, the revelator writes, in Revelation 22, verses 1 through 5. Then the angel, showed me the river, of the water of life, brightest crystal, flowing from the throne, of God, and of the Lamb.

Through the middle, of the street, of the city, also on either side, of the river, the tree of life, with its twelve kinds, of fruit, yielding, its fruit, each month.

The leaves of the tree, were for the healing, of the nations. No longer, will there be, anything accursed, but the throne of God, and of the Lamb, will be in it, and his servants, will worship him.

[31 : 51] They will see his face, and his name, will be on their foreheads. Night, and night will be no more, and there will be no, light of lamp, or sun.

They will need no light, of lamp, or sun, for the Lord, will be their light, and they, will reign, forever, and ever.

Friends, this is, where, God, is taking us, and bringing us. And Psalm, 121, hints to that, predicts that, points to that, where we will no longer, have this, mediated, enjoyment, of God's presence, but we will be, in the presence, of God himself, because he will bring us, to himself, in the new Jerusalem, where we will never, ever, know sin, and separation, from God.

And may all, who love the Lord, say, oh Lord, hasten the day. Let's pray. Father, thank you this morning, that on this, journey, that we are on, to the new Jerusalem, that is from above, that you have promised, that you're the one, who will help your people, and you're the one, who will keep your people.

God, I pray that you, would cause us, to grow, in our conviction, of this truth, as we live, in this world. And may we look, to you, and to you alone.

[33 : 35] And now, as we leave today, may, the God of peace, himself, sanctify you, completely, and may your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be presented, blameless, at the coming, of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory, forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.