

"Our Help Is In The Name Of The LORD" Psalm 124

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[0 : 0 0] A few years ago, I think Nora was just like a toddler, so it was a while back.! I put together a basketball team for a rec league and recruited a friend who played at the college level a few years before that.

And he said yes, he joined our team. It was incredible. The league was well below his skill level, but he wanted to hang out with his friends. And so he jumped on the team.

I mean, a few of us played high school ball, but really, we were rec league players, and he certainly was not. And when he arrived, it was very clear that we would not lose. We were blowing out teams, and because for this one individual, you can't turn off the competitive switch.

I think it was torn out years ago. The competition got fierce, and he would just torch guys. It became very clear how good he was for our team when he didn't play, I think, for two or three straight games, and we lost those games.

And then he came back, and we ended up winning the league, and we got a t-shirt as a trophy, which is like the worst possible trophy. But a championship's a championship, and we wore them with a lot of glee.

[1 : 2 8] It was an awesome year, and it was a great example of how having the right person on your team is really the difference between victory and defeat. It really is.

It's the same case in a work environment. If you have somebody who lifts everybody up, you feel like you can't lose. You feel like victory is ever close.

I bring up that story as we get into Psalm 124. We continue on in this series on the Psalms of Ascent. We come to this beautiful psalm, Psalm 124. It's a Thanksgiving psalm that David wrote as the pilgrims are, they would head up to Jerusalem, and they would sing this song, remembering their rescue from near disaster at the hands of fierce and death-obsessed enemies.

We'll see this in a bit. The Israelites had no hope of winning against their enemies. But soon as God joined their team, the equation changed.

God was on their side, fighting their battle. He would be the one who would come to their defense, and it changed everything. This psalm provides us with a comfort and reassurance that when God is on our side, whether or not we feel him, victory is ours.

[2 : 5 3] It reminds us that God truly understands our human fragility, for why would he join and fight for our battles if we could fight our own battles? He knows we are small.

He knows we are weak. He knows that we can feel overwhelmed by pressures and sicknesses and temptations, opposition. And the wonderful and comforting thing about this is that he does not scold us for these struggles.

Instead, he's assuring us in this psalm that we can look to him, for he is on our side. He is a part of our team. And like, you know, like an infinitely greater way, this is exactly the type of situation we had years ago with this basketball team.

We have the right player on the team. The championship is ours. The victory is ours. It's guaranteed. So we're going to just jump right into this psalm this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with me to Psalm 124.

We still have a couple of Bibles at the back welcome table, so feel free to get up at any time to grab one and follow along. So we'll jump right into it. And to understand this reality of having the right person on our team assuring us victory, we're going to take a look at Psalm 124, and we're going to break it up in the following way.

[4 : 07] Verses 1 to 5, we're going to look at the immensity of danger. Verses 6 to 7, the enormity of deliverance. And finally, verse 8. And this is really, I mean, again, write this on a cue card, put it on your wall, on your fridge, on your bathroom mirror, because it talks about the greatness of God.

We'll jump right into it. Verses 1 to 5. Let me read this section again. A song of ascents of David. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side.

Let Israel now say, If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when the people rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us up alive. When their anger was kindled against us, then the flood would have swept us away.

The torrent would have gone over us. Then over us would have gone the raging water. We have this picture of these pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

They are being led in song by this cantor. And you can picture him beginning the song, If it had not been the Lord who was on our side.

[5 : 17] And maybe the voices are a bit quiet. So he goes, Let Israel say, In a booming, big cantor voice. Let Israel say, If it had not been for the Lord who was on our side.

The foes of Israel, they're formidable. Their strength is significant. Their threat was very real. Utter destruction seemed guaranteed. But the Lord was on their side.

And if he had not been on our side, then certain defeat would have happened. And here David in this psalm is going to use this series of if-then statements.

You'll do that three times. If the Lord had not been on our side, then we would have been crushed by our enemies. You see this starting at verse 3, really starting at verse 2, verse 3 right at the beginning, verse 4 and verse 5.

In addition to these if-then statements, David uses five analogies. Not all five are in this first section. They continue on in verse 6 and 7.

[6 : 20] But he uses these five descriptors, or these five metaphors, rather, to describe the enemies. There's a landslide, or a giant crack of an earthquake that opens up, that swallows up the nation.

There's a raging fire. There's anger that is kindled. There's a flood that's described. Later on in verse 6, David describes a wild beast with sharp teeth that tears and rips and maims.

And then finally, in verse 7, there's a description of a trap that is set. The idea behind it is that there is a hunter that is prowling to take the life of God's people.

And what you have, if you put all of these together, is this image of this larger-than-life problem that completely dwarfs Israel's ability to fight back. They are weak.

They are powerless. There is a real danger. And they lack any hope in their own strength. So here's the question.

[7 : 25] If these enemies are horrific, who are the foes of Israel? And what should be our stance before them? Before we try to answer this question, I want to just take a bit of an aside, and I think it's important for us, important aside for us to consider.

We're Western Christians, okay? We live in the West. We enjoy what we think is a normal life, but has been like an anomaly in human existence. We have unbelievable bounty.

We don't fear for our lives. We do not have enemy tribes at our doorstep threatening our existence. That's not the case for other Christians.

Christians that live in Muslim-majority countries, not all Muslim-majority countries, but many, they have to be very careful with the way they practice their faith.

They can't be open in the same way that we are. There's no madrasas renting out their gyms, so to speak, for churches like we are here.

[8 : 31] There's also our brothers and sisters that struggle under communist rule. A heavy hand of the state upon them. There's also our dear, dear brothers and sisters in the northern part of Nigeria who live under a constant fear of their churches being torched, their women and daughters being kidnapped.

It is a tough thing to be a Christian outside of the West. So we can be a bit quick when we read this to look for the metaphors, so to speak.

What are our enemies? Who are our enemies? What kind of things do we struggle with? By the way, all really important things to think about as we're considering the psalm. But let us not move towards that too quickly without first considering that we are the minority of Christians in the world and we have dear, dear brothers and sisters across the world that need our prayers and need our support who read this psalm much differently than we do.

Back to the text. That's my little aside. Pray for the persecuted church. Back to the text. So who are the enemies that we face today? They are enemies of God's people and therefore they're enemies of God himself.

There's even this little clever play on words in the original language where David, he talks about those that are against us and God who is for us. There's a little rhyming word, a bit of an alliteration where God on our side is contrasted with those that are not on our side.

[10 : 08] And what is clear is that there are two sides to this battle. Some are on God's side, they are called by him and they are calling him Lord and others are not.

So whether they seek to physically destroy God's people or simply oppose them, they are considered enemies of God. Generally speaking, they include those that practice pagan idolatry, those that are godless, polytheists, and then heretical distortions of Christianity.

It can also include powers and governments that try to oppress and oppose the worship of God's people. and the thing that we can often overlook, the sin that is left to fester within the church that destroys fellowship.

Suffice it to say that the enemies that we face are legion. They come in all sorts of different shapes and sizes both outside of the church and within the church.

But the common denominator with all of them is that they oppose Jesus as Lord and they seek to disrupt the worship that we engage in on a Sunday morning and throughout the weeks.

[11 : 29] Us and them. You know, this is something, again, generally speaking, it's not something that we, that kind of discourse we engage in here in Canada.

We won our nationhood at a negotiating table, not on a battlefield. All right? Very polite way to make a country. So we are a country that right in its DNA is generally very conciliatory.

We look for commonalities, we look for negotiations, we don't necessarily look to have an us versus them mindset. It can be off-putting for us. And this is a great advantage, by the way, I'm not trying to disparage this at all, it's a great advantage.

It's a peace loving advantage. It is recognizing that war or disagreements can lead to war and war to death. However, it becomes a liability rather than a strength when it causes us to ignore real problems and real issues.

When we fail to see that there is a threat because we can build bridges no matter what. So building bridges are good, but not when the threat is so big.

[12 : 49] Sometimes it's a very loving and godly thing to oppose people that oppose God or oppose peace or people that oppose the prosperity in kind of the biggest sense of the term of the general public.

St. Augustine, this is his kind of big thing with just war, that a war entered into justly is a loving act. something that we don't really talk about or consider or maybe we even disagree with.

I bring that up to say that sometimes it's important that we discuss us versus them. Not from this moral superiority place, but rather just to recognize that there's real good, there's real evil.

But we would be equally foolish if we forgot that ultimately our enemies are spiritual. for Israel the threat was indeed the Philistines. A lot of commentators would, even though it's not specified in Psalm 124, they connect it to 2 Samuel 5 right after David is inaugurated as king, the Philistines come to destroy Israel.

So they'll connect it to that, but really it's left a bit ambiguous as to the context. But nevertheless, for Israel the threat was indeed the Philistines who's also other nations as well.

[14 : 10] But more than that, the threat wasn't just the people that opposed them, but it was the evil darkness that shaped the Philistine ideology and religion. So it was a spiritual battle.

It always has been a spiritual battle against God's people. The Apostle Paul reminds us as much in his letter to the Ephesians in chapter 6. If you've been connected to church for any amount of time, this will be familiar to you.

It's right in the context of Paul talking about the armor of God and he says in verse 12 chapter 6, For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Paul is saying, listen, there are enemies, but the real enemy, they are the people that are behind the scenes, the spiritual forces that look to destroy God's people. So our struggle isn't against any specific person in our lives who, say, doesn't share our faith.

This isn't a call to pray imprecatory psalms that are psalms of condemnation and vengeance upon our neighbor who might be Sikh or is an atheist.

[15 : 30] They're nice people, but this isn't saying, like, listen, go look for enemies. This isn't a call for us to break off every tie with a family member or co-worker who is affirming.

As if we could just simply avoid such people to remove the threat when the reality is, and we'll get to this in a bit, we ourselves are enemies, or at least we were, but continue on as enemies of God in ways when we engage with sin and temptation, and we seek to disrupt the worship of God's people.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that fighting flesh and blood is not the real battlefield. Instead, the fight is supernatural. It's spiritual, rather, and our spiritual foe is much stronger than our flesh and blood foe.

So that is why Paul and David point us toward the Lord as the one who will ensure our victory over our enemies. again, if you continue reading in Ephesians chapter 6, Paul is saying, listen, put on the whole armor of God, which is to say, put your faith and trust and hope and security in God.

Don't try to fight against these spiritual forces. David here is saying essentially the same thing. this is a truth that we need to be reminded of often, for we can easily forget that as God's people and therefore either we take credit for our present fortunes or we fall into despair when the next threat arrives.

[17 : 10] We'll get into the second point, the enormity of the deliverance. So if that is the immensity of the danger that we face, let's take a look at the enormity of the deliverance, verses 6 and 7.

Blessed be the Lord who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and we have escaped.

We've already touched on these two images in the section, that of a ferocious beast looking to tear and to maim and to rip apart and also this cunning hunter that looks to trap and destroy.

Once again, the imagery is of complete helplessness. In fact, what's implied in verse 7 is that we were like a bird already in the snare of the fowler.

We were already caught before God rescued us. The image that came to mind in terms of our hopelessness was the scene in the first Jurassic Park, which really is the only Jurassic Park, where that chained up goat is lowered into the T-Rex enclosure, and that's where I'll end it.

[18 : 26] The goat stood no chance. It might have had a horn. What's it going to do? It's like us. This is the imagery that David is communicating to the people.

You had no chance. I mean, zero chance of fighting back and getting victory. So, interestingly then, and rightly, the focus is not on the frailty of God's people or even the size of the enemy, but rather on the vastness of God's deliverance.

The Lord, recalling his promises and his love as a father towards his children, he thwarts the enemy's schemes by turning the tables so that the enemy is defeated by the very plans it has cunningly devised.

So, I've mentioned 2 Samuel 5 and this is why a lot of commentators would connect it and I'll read a portion of it briefly, but in the same way that Israel's enemies overtake them like a rushing flood or like a torrent overtaking the people, see if you can pick up in 2 Samuel 5, I'm only going to read four verses here, but how the Lord then delivers God's people from the Philistines starting in verse 17.

When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David, but David heard of it and went down to the stronghold. Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the valley of Rephaim, and David inquired of the Lord, shall I go up against the Philistines?

[20 : 04] Will you give them into my hand? And the Lord said to David, go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand. And David came to Baal Perazim, and David defeated them there, and he said, quote, here it is, the Lord has broken through my enemies before me like a breaking flood.

So here's the deliverance of God on display. God's enemies are like a flood trying to sweep away God's people, and what does God do?

He breaks them like a bursting flood. God. They try to wipe out God's people, so God defeats them in the same way that they were trying to defeat his people.

And this pattern appears throughout scripture. The story of, in Judges of Gideon opposing the Midianites, the Midianites they are described as locusts covering a vast area ready to devour everything in their path, and how does God defeat them?

He causes them to consume each other. Or think about how Haman, and I think I might have mentioned this last week or the week before, Haman, evil Haman, he sought to destroy the Jews in the book of Esther, so he erects this massive gallows to hang them, and what happens to him?

[21 : 25] He gets hanged on his own gallows. Time and again, scripture shows us that this is how God delivers his people.

So it is no surprise then for the ultimate enemy, Christ Jesus defeats death through death. He robs hell of its ultimate power so that for those that are in Christ, confessing their faith and trust and hope in Jesus, the only death we will experience is physical, not spiritual, because Christ takes away the power of death by dying and rising again.

He defeats death by death. death. And even at the end of the age, and this really, like all of the Psalms of Ascent, they look much past the salvation of the current moment, but to the ultimate salvation of the age to come.

And even at the end of the age, this cosmic conflict will conclude with Satan being cast into eternal torment. it's a very fitting punishment for the accuser of God's people who seek to torment God's people.

He will be tormented in the same way that he seeks to torment us. So here's the thing, we don't give God the game plan for victory. We simply align our lives to trust him to win.

[22 : 44] Trusting in him means not building contingency plans just in case he doesn't come through. Alright? That is not trusting in God. That's hedging our bets. That might be a very good thing for other times and in other situations but not as we engage in a life of faith with Almighty God.

It means trusting him wholeheartedly for the victory and friends, he will win. Why? Because he has won in the past and he is unchanging. We can trust that God will deliver us because he has been, because it has been the pattern of his interaction with his people throughout all of redemptive history.

He is unchanging and therefore we can rely on our ultimate teammate, so to speak, to come through when the game is on the line. And the stakes are very high and they are extremely high.

And this is not because he is slightly stronger than those who oppose us, but because he is infinitely greater and strong. And this leads us to our third and final point, the greatness of God.

Look with me at verse 8. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. The cry even to this day of the Jewish people, but all throughout the Old Testament as well, was something called the Shema or the listen.

[24 : 05] We say it every Sunday. The Lord our God, the Lord is one. It is this declaration of who God is. this is like in verse 8, this is kind of in this category of affirming who God is and what he is capable of and his posture towards us.

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. In our fight against evil, whether it is inside the church or outside the church, we must trust in the maker, not in created things.

The invisible help from the Lord is more reliable and powerful than the most advanced equipment or ideas that claim to solve our deepest human problems. And again, this is something we embrace by faith.

Okay? The invisible hand of God is certainly there. We do not see it. And the whole kind of MO of the enemy is to convince us either that there is no invisible hand at work in our lives or that the hand is weak and frail.

And we can have at it ourselves. When we deny or forget that God is the creator of everything, we inevitably, what do we do?

[25 : 20] We inevitably try to build our own paradise, fix our own problems, achieve our own heavens by creating something that is not good or beautiful. It only is twisted and ugly.

About a month ago, Peter Thiel, if you've heard this name, he's like an early venture capitalist. I think he might have been the first outside investor in Facebook. And I think he founded PayPal, a few other things.

Like he's a bit of a big deal when it comes to venture capitalism. And he's become a bit of like a futurist, so to speak. And he was interviewed by a columnist, a man named Ross Douthit, to discuss technology, medicine, AI, post-modernity.

It was like this long, sprawling, a bit kind of unhinged conversation. Very interesting, but like all over the place. And eventually, the topic of immortality was talked about.

But not from a biblical point of view, but from a naturalistic, evolutionary, and technological perspective, completely devoid from God. Even though the conversation kind of swirled around Jesus and God, it was very much an anti-God conversation.

[26 : 41] And really, the conversation was about, can we, as human beings, do we have the ability to eliminate all disease and even death itself so that we would live forever?

Can we achieve this by our own ingenuity? I tried to pick the pertinent bits. Again, it's like this sprawling conversation, conversation, but here, this is a little excerpt from the discussion.

By the way, Douthit is a very committed, pretty conservative Roman Catholic. Thiel is not. Douthit begins, I think you would prefer the human race to endure, right?

Pause. Douthit, you're hesitating. Thiel, well, I don't know, I would, I would, and he's mumbling at this point. Douthit, he goes, this is a long hesitation. Thiel goes, there's so many questions implicit in this.

Douthit, should the human race survive? And he's really pressing him if you listen to the audio. Should the human race survive? Yes. Okay. And then Thiel here, but I would like us to radically solve these problems.

[27 : 48] This is them just talking about Alzheimer's and dementia, but a bigger conversation. So, but I also would like us to radically solve these problems.

And so it's always, I don't know, yeah, a transhumanism. The ideal was this radical transformation where your human natural body gets transformed into an immortal body.

Just prior to this, we were talking about uploading our mind into computers and it was a bit bananas. Anyways, this guy's a futurist. It's worth a listen if you have an hour to just blow and kind of let your mind get fried a little bit.

But it struck me that there's no denying that there's real problems at hand, that there's real enemies that we're facing.

Death is one of them. But what happens when God is no longer the creator of heaven and earth and our help is not in him? I mean, we're still going to try to solve these problems.

[28 : 51] They're still problems. They don't cease to be problems. But we're going to try to solve them by our own ingenuity. And I mean, the best that we have here, this futurist, is talking about some kind of weird form of a cyborg and uploading our minds to a mainframe and transcending what it means to be human.

The whole idea of transhumanism. This is what dystopian movies and horror movies are made of. This is the plot line of some really crazy dystopian novels.

The point is this. There is no good, viable second place when it comes to solving the real enemies in our lives.

There's just nothing. There is no other pool of free agents where if God is unavailable, we can just pick somebody that's not quite God but he's alright or she's alright to get on our squad and fight our battles.

There is no second place. There is no alternative. There is no contingency. We try to solve these problems by ourselves, we will create a hellscape, not a heaven.

[30 : 10] The alternative perspective is that God is the creator of everything. And because he created from nothing and did not need to create, he created out of eternal love within the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And he loves his creation and the thing is you seek to protect and nurture and grow and provide for the things you love. That's just what you do with things you love and people you love.

Therefore we can never separate God's creative power from his power to save. This is what David and Israel are confessing here in verse 8. And all of verse 124 and really the entirety of the Bible and salvation and redemption.

It is all for nothing if verse 8 does not exist. Such a confession removes any false pride and hope and self-congratulations.

And this is for our benefit. It forces us to admit that the ultimate power in the universe is not us but is God but also that he is on our side working and willing to grant us salvation from death and the ability to live the life of faith he has called us to live.

[31 : 20] Nothing is beyond the reach of the one who created heaven and earth. So as we wrap this up we have to ask the question are we on Christ's side?

Throughout the Bible there is lots of verses that talk about assurance of salvation but there's also many other verses that say listen work out your salvation with fear and trembling which is to say do not take for granted that just because you go to church and you go through motions and we all go through motions at times and we do the religious things that you are saved.

Have you as a former enemy or a current one have you laid down your weapons and surrendered? Have you seen the gospel as a beautiful beautiful gift?

not as a threat but rather do you cry out to Christ himself for mercy and when you do that it's not as though he will stroke his chin and ponder is he worthy is he not worthy?

That's not the way the economics of salvation works. Instead if we put our faith in him and cry out to mercy he will give us mercy. He will extend mercy.

[32 : 36] How do we know this? How can we be sure? The beautiful truth of the gospel is that we can truly switch sides in this cosmic war because Jesus, God the son of God, came down, took on human flesh, still remaining fully God and joined team humanity.

He took on human flesh in the incarnation and he fought our battle and suffered in our place. So we can be sure that when we lay down our weapons we will not be utterly crushed but instead we will be elevated.

We will be saved. We will be able to sing Psalm 124 as if it is our psalm for it truly is our psalm. And then with the church triumphant and the church militant we can pray this psalm but we also can come to verses passages like the one in Romans 8 and we can see the beauty and the truth of it and declare it with such vigor and trust.

And I'll close with just that Romans chapter 8 verse 31 to 39. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

[34 : 12] It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that he was raised. Who is at the right hand of God. Who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ.

Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine, nakedness, danger or sword. As it is written for your sake we are being killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Verse 37. No in all these things we are more than conquerors. Because of ourselves? No through him who loved us.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, angels or rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen? Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that we are on the victorious side. And this isn't because of our doing, our occurring favor, our merit, nothing.

[35 : 18] It is you in your goodness and kindness giving us this unbelievable gift of victory. Lord, we thank you that your son took on human flesh yet remained God.

How he fights, that he fought our battle, and he continues to intercede for us. Lord, we thank you that this is our reality as your children. Lord, when the next round of enemies or temptations or difficulties come, Lord, help us to pray Psalm 124, thankfully knowing that what you have done in the past, you will do in the future.

And let us, Lord, put our hope in you, the creator of heaven and earth. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.