

What If?

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[0 : 0 0] 24 as we continue our brief series of studies in these songs of a sense psalm 124 we're up to the fifth so we're about a third of the way through of these songs so let's read together from psalm 124 actually what i was going to do i think i'll just read it this evening but i've got in my notes and a wee bracket here volunteer i was going to get you to look at this and just have a wee quick scan and go yep yep there's no big words there and then i was going to ask if somebody wanted to come up and read this and uh but i'll not pounce on you but you never know when sunday night that might happen so you might want to read it think i wouldn't mind reading this it's always the same for people to get to read but i wouldn't mind a chance to publicly read the scripture so maybe another sunday so i'll just read it this evening psalm 124 a song of a sense of david if the lord had not been on our side let israel say if the lord had not been on our side when people attacked us they would have swallowed us alive when their anger flared against us the flood would have engulfed us the torrent would have swept over us the raging waters would have swept us away praise be to the lord who has not let us be torn by their teeth we have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare the snare has been broken and we have escaped our help is in the name of the lord the maker of heaven and earth psalm 124 a psalm of rescue a psalm of deliverance and we'll look at that in a few moments or so but let's come before musicians and the technical folk turn back to psalm 124 psalm 124 the passage we read earlier just a few thoughts on this this evening please excuse my my use of illustration of football this is may and june are a crazy month for a end of season football matches and the top one if i remember is everton and the one in the top right is leeds united one survived being dropped down and the other one did drop down into a lower league feel the pain the other two are scottish i think the one on the left i've lost touch with scottish football is ross county i think they get to stay in the premiership and partick thistle uh are doom and gloom they played so many playoffs and uh they failed at the end tennis was on i think this afternoon we live in at this time where people think if only something had happened if only that ball hadn't scraped the post and gone in if only that tennis shot actually hit the line and was counted in a lot of if only's looking back and if only this had happened life would have been so much better we would have been holding the trophy and so forth or we wouldn't have been relegated a lot of if only's wonder if you sometimes live your life like that if only this had happened then this other thing wouldn't have happened and it's very easy to do that but sometimes it's nice especially as a christian to look back over your life and uh and to think if only if the lord hadn't done such and such my life would be so much different i remember as a young christian i used to while i was seeking i mentioned this this morning as a small church in blantyre i used to go to such a tiny wee mission hall of a place and i would go there myself and others would be there and i'm slinking and i would inquire about the lord well eventually got saved and then i started to go to that wee church but within a few months of that uh of my conversion i remember specifically

sitting in the church and feeling for the first time after i'd been saved that perhaps i wasn't saved and the fear and the anxiety that i went through i've never experienced anything like it since and it was almost as if the devil it's the only thing i can put it down to we do have an enemy in the devil who will seek to discourage us and uh really having an attack i was a young in the faith i didn't think the devil this is the devil i just sat there thinking maybe i wasn't saved maybe it was all a con maybe i just believed the wrong thing maybe i was gullible or i was weak for a moment and i'm sitting here and it happened from the minute the service started and it lasted until the end but not i didn't leave the building in that suddenly i had this peace that that came over me once again but i'll never forget that feeling of what it felt like not to be saved uh i used to my my one of my churches that i was in the if i was here long enough you would soon get wee phrases that i come out with and uh and there was one i used to i remember saying to them they remember it i'd hardly remember it but i remember them saying uh they quote me saying in many ways i wish you would backslide i said to them just so you could feel the joy of returning to the lord uh and there is something good but the only thing good if you backslide and you sin against the lord you come back to him when you come back to him the joy and the peace because he or she who is forgiven much loves much and i think after a period of the time you suddenly realize well am i really saved is it any big deal i was here last sunday and i'm here probably next sunday and you just you've plateaued and it's good to to ask what if what if the lord didn't do what he has done for you what if the lord didn't help you that's what we're looking at here uh we won't go back through the the labor the the background to this but as you know this is the these 15 songs they were singing them three times a year going up to jerusalem it speaks of life's experience the good times the bad times and you remember psalm 120 a new start too long have i lived here i want this new beginning a song of help next psalm 121 where does my help come from it comes from the lord then a song of worship i rejoiced when they said to us let us go to the house of the lord and then last week we looked at the song of the servant as a slave looks to the hand of his or her master so i look to you we were thinking this morning we are saints we are servants those two things are included in those last two psalms but now we see another song this is at this the psalmist david looking back and saying if the lord had not been our help if the lord was not on our side we would have perished so that's what i want us to look at in the moments that remain to us this evening what if asking yourself what if and that's the first point only have two points the first point's the longest so we'll go through this and then the next one will be fairly quick uh the psalmist is asking this and he's looking back he's looking back at the difficult times in his life and he's realizing that the cause was lost they were very difficult times he's not thinking personally he's thinking of the nation and that's why he says if the lord had not been on our side let israel say it's not just him personal it's not just a personal thing he's thinking of the nation and the threat that the nation had in its history to this point and the history is not very old during the time of david there's still a lot to come in the rest of the old testament but even at this point they recognize the hand of god and preserving them and keeping them and in this passage here we we see

quite graphic pictures painted it's quite good that david does this for us he doesn't just say it was a hard time and maybe as we look at these if you're a christian here this evening you can look back it's good to stop and to reflect was that old hymn our song goes count your many blessings name them one by one and it will surprise you what the lord has done it's only when you stop and you think uh when you actually do this how we don't do often enough i remember having to give a a personal reference to somebody in london he was a vagabond and a rogue i really struggled to think anything good to say about them but the more i actually thought and it took me maybe a good hour thinking there must be something good even if he led folk astray i would still say he was a leader uh a leader of men albeit where he shouldn't lead them but it's amazing when you just stop to think we can sometimes be such an ungrateful people and think about the times the lord has helped maybe you've come through a difficult time maybe you're still there and you feel engulfed by things here is a psalm that looks back to the rest the times when the lord has really broken into our life not just just got you a job but times when you felt the cause was lost you were down you were so down and maybe you were like that for a long time if the lord had not helped me i would have been in a in a worse position than i'm in and it's great to consciously recall that and the psalm causes us to do this so the psalmist gives us david gives us various graphic images let me just remind you of them the first one in verses two to three he pictures the nation being swallowed up like an animal an animal somebody swallowing its prey when people attacked us they would have swallowed us alive if you ever watch these nature programs i always find that those scenes quite horrific it's okay if the carcass is dead and it's been dead for quite a while but when the prey is still alive and this wee bird or whatever's been swallowed you just go wow that's a scary thought and here is this scary thought this scary image we will have been devoured swallowed alive and here is david looking back thinking of the nation the time when the whole nation could have been swallowed david knew threats he knew the threats that came from other nations the lord warned them as they uh would come out and go into the promised land and so forth he knew the philistines the philistines wasn't weren't just out to win battles they were out to swallow them to swallow them alive we often talk about uh david and goliath don't we and uh and we tell children and we sometimes even hear sermons saying here's david there's uh there's goliath and he beats goliath and we say well you have a goliath and god can help you defeat uh this goliath that's to miss the the whole point of that story here is the nation about to be swallowed up by the philistines if we defeat you you will become our servants everything that they were not to be they had to serve the true and living god the whole nation and that one if david had not defeated goliath the nation could have just disintegrated and here is david who takes the promises of god not just five stones and says god has chosen us who is this uncircumcised philistine who dares to curse the armies of god it's quite something it's more than just your own wee personal goliath here is david knows this threats to the nation what god is doing and he he sees us he knows this and throughout their history uh the the jewish nation has had to fight against being assimilated being annihilated later on would come

the babylonians and the assyrians and the persians and the greeks and the romans it just goes on doesn't it uh such a nation and the grief and yet the lord keeps a remnant for himself and he will not allow this to happen never will that be the case and david even at this early stage in its history is rejoicing our god loves us he loves us he cares for us if it was not for the lord not for them they were the smallest of nations god didn't say these are really impressive he chose a nation that he could love and work through and david as all the prophets would say throughout history if the lord had not been on our side now if you're a christian this evening as well you know the lord has saved you you know the lord has worked powerfully in the church a universal throughout the world since 2000 years since jesus sent the disciples out it has not been easy the romans other nations have tried to destroy them the persecution in the early church fed to the lions and so forth trying to rid the world and yet if you read the history books they say the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church the more christians were killed the more the church seemed to grow if the lord had not been on our help we would have been swallowed alive but perhaps even as a christian uh you might feel if the lord had not been on your side you would have been swallowed alive even spiritually you imagine if the lord had not come to you and shown you grace and mercy if the lord has said i'm not going to forgive john i'm not going to show john any grace uh can you imagine what that would have been like you would have been swallowed up by the lord you'd need to have been saved from his wrath as you stand before him it's appointed unto man once to die and after this to face judgment that was my favorite evangelical verse to to share with folk when i became a christian because i was aware of what i had been saved from and i used to say are you aware it's appointed unto man once to die and after this to face judgment but jesus is a savior and uh but you imagine if the lord hadn't shown you grace and mercy can you imagine if the lord didn't win the victory in the garden of gethsemane can you imagine if he hadn't gone to the cross and died as the spotless lamb of god can you imagine if you were not granted repentance and faith can you imagine if the lord did not forgive you daily forgive us our sins forgive us our trespasses would you could you imagine what it'd be like if he did not ever live to make intercession for you it's worth stopping and thinking what if i never had this we take our health for granted i think we take our spiritual health for granted as well if the lord had not been on our side we'd have been swallowed up in misery and doubt and fear our life would be so so much different death if death had not been defeated the world has no idea of the greatest victory in the whole world it's not iphones it's not great inventions it's not ai and all this stuff that there's a big threat to the world death was the greatest threat but death has been defeated 1 corinthians 15 where oh death is your is your sting the sting of death is sin the power of sin is the law but thanks be to god he gives us the victory we have hope beyond the grave and therefore the lord is with us the lord is for us that's what david basically affirms here the lord if the lord had not been on our side i remember in school two guys fighting afterwards you know usually you get the four a clock over two guys i want to fight and one guy he was a gentle giant he really was just a nice guy

and this guy was a rogue and i thought this is a real mismatch here he's going to devour him and the gentle giant just kept pushing this guy away the whole time it just almost humiliated them he defeated them so easily and i remember folk i can always remember these folks saying he's on our side and uh you want a guy like that on your side you want somebody who can give you victory who is on your side who's all powerful and almighty and that is what we have in the lord can you imagine if the lord was not on your side if he were you were still an enemy of god i'd just rejoice just just stop thinking that the lord is on your side you're on his side it's quite something that's why paul can say in romans 8 that god works all things for good for those who love him and called according to his purpose why because those he predestined he called those he called he justified those he justified he also glorified we're between justification and full glorification you're not more justified tomorrow you are justified perfectly once for all it's a great thing but your glorification is still to come you're in this chain and it's quite something and that's why he says i am convinced romans 8 that neither death nor life angels demons things present things future any powers height depth anything in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of god that is in christ jesus therefore we can say if the lord had not been on our side oh israel oh church of christ rejoice uh we would have been swallowed up so that's the first thing this sense of being swallowed secondly another picture of a flood uh the flood uh the flood there's verse four the flood would have over engulfed us sorry the torrent would have swept over us a different picture one being swallowed the other one by a flood a flood the bible when the bible talks about floods it's it's often talks about sudden change uh the mountains of palestine and the the cracks and the gullies and and when the rain comes on the hard soil it can produce a torrent very quickly and they would have known this when you hear a flood they go wow you don't get two weeks notice when a flood comes it comes very quickly i'm half expecting the news to to show this in the next few days some wee village down in the south of england that's been baking for the past while and the soils look concrete and then you get this flash flood and whoosh cars are taken down the street that is the picture a flood these are for the sudden changes in life when you're not prepared through no fault of your own boom these things happen sometimes the lord works powerfully in that way and here we see this picture of a flood engulfing helpless people just going about their business but the situation has changed and uh look look at the picture here it talks about it comes quickly first of all it's a flood it engulfs it would have engulfed it would have swept over and verse 5 it would have swept away it's very thorough isn't it over sweeping your way carrying everything cars lorries buses uh with it it's very very graphic here is a time in some ways you could say when the pilgrim when things happen suddenly unexpectedly they weren't expecting this everything was calm and then this can happen if you're a christian here you know of sudden changes death of a loved one everything seemed to be fine it could be your own health you're doing okay and suddenly you're beginning to creak and things are not so well you're not able to function in quite the same way either in body or in mind and uh it might even be your job you were doing okay suddenly you're paid off it could be security it could be a

[20 : 14] relationship that suddenly breaks down could be something to do with your family all things that you don't envisage coming or they happen quicker than you anticipated and they've caught you unawares here is those times and the psalmist said if the lord had not been on our side these things could have destroyed us the psalmist is confident in the lord even during the dark days the days of violence and oppression and the days of sudden and dramatic change another picture is a verse 6 about an animal grinding its prey this is not so much being swallowed up this has been chewed alive verse 6 let us be we would be torn by their teeth it's quite graphic isn't this is like daniel in the lion's den if the lord had not been on daniel's side he would have been torn alive uh this lion grinding his teeth on his bones and you remember king darius says has the god you be you whom you serve continually been able to rescue you and david uh daniel replies my god sent his angel and has shut the mouth of the lions they have not hurt me note that my god my god has done this for me and there are times when when this this can very much we're serving the lord while we're being obedient we're expecting blessing but something difficult comes and we feel we're being chewed up and about to be spat back out it can be very difficult and david daniel felt this and david knew times like that as well times when difficulties arise and yet the lord's timing is perfect the other picture is of a bird entrapped in a snare look at verse 7 we have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare the snare has been broken and we have escaped this is basically and that's painting another picture for us not just a wave coming and engulfing us it's probably something that that's caught us uh unaware we've been dozing we've been careless perhaps and you're walking along and there's a big trap there and you're looking at the birds and bees and stuff like this and suddenly this thing snaps at your feet that's what happens to a bird doesn't it's minding its own business it thinks everything is okay it's careless for a bit and suddenly it's caught in a snare and that is the picture here something to entrap us something that that causes us to stop flourishing with the lord and this can easily happen was the writer to hebrews saying verse 12 therefore since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses abraham and isaac and jacob and others let us throw everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us you get into this mess you you've been careless something's happened and sin has easily entangled us it is quite something and this can easily happen we can be careless we can neglect our daily readings our prayer or walk with the lord our heart begins to grow cold we just go through the motions and then suddenly disaster comes and we really struggle but we praise the lord that he is gracious he does not deal with us according to our sin he is merciful and even when we are foolish i'm amazed as a pastor sometimes i've i've spoken to folk and think you're reaping what you're sowing sunshine you what were you expecting if you choose to go down that route you're going to get your fingers burned and yet most of those times the lord has been gracious to them he's provided a way of escape scriptures tell us that he he doesn't want us to be tempted beyond that which we can endure

but provides a way of escape and we come back to him and we know what could have what we have been saved from i wonder if you rejoice like the psalmist here we've escaped we've escaped to life what we could have gone down because of our foolishness we became entrapped with various things i always remember one of the deacons it caught me by surprise in a praying meeting but we're just sharing christians don't often confess things we pray for others we say pray for them pray for them i'm okay jack so to hear a deacon turn around and say i wonder if you can pray for me i have a problem with gambling and i knew his family and they were the loveliest family and the wee kids and suddenly i pictured this guy standing in the bookmakers pouring his money away and i just i went wow it was so honest of him to say this but he asked for prayer as far as i know he's doing fine now he's doing really well he's a great godly man but i didn't know that side of him i'd know this wee thing that had ensnared him and and if he hadn't been prayed for or the lord hadn't intervened who knows what he would have done to himself and his family and his local church we can easily be ensnared we need to take hebrews 12 seriously the sin that so easily ensnares us and yet if the lord had not been our help who knows when we get to glory whether lord will not say you remember all these times well i sent an angel this happened and that happened and things never turned out the way that we thought so anyway here's here's the psalmist he's escaped the nation is still flourishing uh he if it wasn't for the lord he would have been swallowed up he would have been submerged he'd have been torn apart he would have been trapped it's very graphic isn't it the pictures so how does he finish he doesn't just say if the lord hadn't been on our side the next thing is you praise the lord you really praise the lord and that's the second thing he's aware of the times the many times he's looked back and thought wow if it wasn't for the lord my life the nation would have been destroyed devoured so it says here if the lord had not been on our side then we would have perished but the lord was on our side therefore i will praise him we shouldn't need to say this but that's the natural response we we praise him one of the commentators says this sometimes there is little genuine thanksgiving to god expressed by christian people it is not heard in our everyday speech very often i wonder if we if we give out more requests than we actually praise the lord we're always quick to say pray for me pray for me pray for me pray for me but a bit like the the lepers that were cleansed were there not 10 of them what happened to the other nine you've come back to give thanks and sometimes as christians and i know my own heart sometimes if i'm in a particularly difficult situation and if it's gone on and on my prayer life begins to soar just you pray like mad lord help me help me help me and you're praying and you're praying and you're praying and it goes on for weeks and end and then when you get the answer and and it's it goes away this thing is resolved sometimes it's more relief than praise you're just glad it's finished you're glad you're getting some respite this is good and it's that you it's almost been like rescued by the fireman from from the thing where you're sitting there going well i could have been toast in there uh but to stop and to praise and to thanks is doesn't always come easy we may say lord thank you and that's it we spent two months praying in two minutes praising and i find that a challenge sometimes do do i serve the lord and just look for relief rather than for praise sometimes we we really need praise evenings for folk to come up

isn't it but i've it's been a while since i've been in a church i've come from a church it didn't really pray an awful lot this church prays like mad you're praying junkies uh it's great you just pray and you pray and you pray but when you really need i remember all these things for the past six months we prayed for i'm going to invite jenny up she's going to tell us how the lord worked or we just know lord we thank you for a b c d you could fill this church every night of the week with answers to prayers and that's what the psalmist does if the lord had not been on our side it would have been a mess my life would have been a mess the church would be a mess the world would be a mess if not for the lord therefore i will praise him it really is quite something isn't it and uh and perhaps we do need to concentrate more in being thankful i've not been here i think i came here in january do you would you normally have a harvest service here you do have a harvest harvest services are great and whether it's just you bring fruit or whatever you know that the fruit is you're not just thanking the lord for fruit and veg you're thanking him for everything it's quite symbolic but it's a great thing to do when the church is a thanksgiving service i think we need probably more than just waiting once a year or at the beginning of the year to thank him for the last but peppered throughout the year times where we just praise the lord for tangible things physical things where the lord has helped us that's quite something and uh and that's what the psalmist does here this is a good psalm and with us i'm close it's just a nice nice psalm i like it because it's real i like things that are real where the tire hits the road and we serve a god the people in the estate here maybe members of your family have no idea how god has been good to them but we know and if we don't praise the very stones themselves would cry out here is a quote talking about this psalm there is no literature or talking about the psalms in general there is no literature in all the world that is more true to life and more honest than the psalms and here we have our warts and all kind of psalm every skeptical thought every disappointing venture every pain every despair that we can face is lived through and integrated into a personal saving relationship with god a relationship that also has in it acts of praise blessing peace security trust and love good poetry survives not when it is pretty or beautiful or nice but when it is true accurate and honest i like those that type of poetry poetry where the tires hit the road and it's real and it's honest a faith that's been tried people say that you never really know your bible until it becomes part of your experience and that is so true i say that as a pastor as a preacher i've preached in some psalms that i thought i knew until years later when the lord puts you through it and you think i've preached in it i need to preach it to myself and uh and when the bible becomes part of your experience god is part of your experience and you can praise and thank him if the lord had not been on our side then all these things would have happened but the lord is with us he loves us and cares for us we're going to stand and we're going to sing our closing song