

The God Who Is My Help

Psalm 121

Introduction: 1) When Timothy, our youngest son, was 3 he was hit by a car in front of our house on a Monday night around 7:00 pm. He would spend almost a month in the hospital, and several more months in a body cast and then a leg cast. Many things rushed through my mind on that Monday night as Charlotte and I made a make-shift bed in the waiting room of the pediatric trauma unit at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, TX. The one thing that was crystal clear: we were totally and completely dependent upon the God who is our help, the God beautifully described in Psalm 121.

2) Psalms 120-134 are called “Psalms of Ascent” or degrees coming from a word that means “to go up.” They are also called the “Pilgrim Songs.”

- Ten are anonymous; four are attributed to David (122, 124, 131, 133) and one to Solomon (127).
- They formed something of a “travelers” or “pilgrims hymnal” as the Hebrew people would “go up” to Jerusalem to celebrate their three major annual feast:
 - Passover in the spring
 - Pentecost in early summer
 - Tabernacles in the fall
- Some see this as an antiphonal hymn sung back and forth due to the change in subject at verse three from the first person to the third. Others believe what we discover is an internal dialogue within a person’s soul, similar to what happens in Psalms 42 and 43.

- It is worth noting that a form of the word first translated “keep” in v. 3 appears 6 times in the psalm (3b, 4b, 5a, 7a, 7b, 8a). It appears as “preserve” in vs. 7 and 8 in the *NKJV*. It is also translated as “guard” and “protect” in other English translations.
- “Yahweh” or Jehovah is also mentioned five times. Help for God’s people does not come from Baal or any other ancient false god. Help does not come from our modern idols of money, stuff, security systems and politicians. No, the only one we can truly count on any day and any time is the Lord who:
 - 1) Is Creator of heaven and earth (vs. 1-2)
 - 2) Never sleeps or slumbers (vs. 3-4)
 - 3) Is there day and night (vs. 5-6)
 - 4) Protects us from all evil now and forever (vs. 7-8)
- Therefore, like a traveling family reunion God’s people would sing these songs together helping them focus on the Lord and all that He had done for them. But this raises a question. Why did God require them to make these long and difficult pilgrimages each year? I like very much the insights of the wonderful expositor Warren Wiersbe, “Under the leadership of Moses, the Israelites were a nomadic people for forty years. But after they settled in Canaan, the Lord required them to go to Jerusalem three times a year. This reminded them that, spiritually speaking, they were still a pilgrim people and needed to depend on the Lord. ‘For we are aliens and pilgrims before you,’ said David (1 Chron. 29:15; and see Pss. 84:5-7 and 119:19 and 54.) Too many believers today want to be “settlers,” not pilgrims and strangers (Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:11). We are happy to settle down in our comfort zones and live as though Jesus never died, Jesus is not coming again, and our lives will never end. We are guilty of what Eugene Peterson

calls “the tourist mind-set,” content to make occasional brief visits with the Lord that are leisurely and entertaining, all the while conforming to this world and enjoying it. (See *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, IVP, p.12.) Our citizenship is in heaven (Luke 10:20; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 12:22-24), and that should make a difference in our lives on earth. We need to “feel temporary” as we make this pilgrim journey called life.” (Psalms, 334).

Transition: Four truths knit our text into a marvelous tapestry concerning this God who is our help.

I. My Lord’s power is before me. 121:1-2

- “The hills:” a safe haven for robbers and petty terrorists.
 “The hills:” that which pointed to and led to Jerusalem.
 An occasion for anxiety on the one hand and anticipation on the other.
- Help is the word *ēzer* in Hebrew. The psalmist is asking where/who is the one who will keep me from stumbling along life’s journey (v.3), who will overshadow me (v.5) and be by my side (v.5), who will keep me from evil (v.7) and never leave me or forsake me (v.8)?
- Verse 2 answers his question and takes a giant leap from the hills to the one who made them, from the one who made the hills to the one who made the universe. This is an argument from the smaller to the greater. The Creator God of Genesis 1 and 2 is His power source, His help in times of trial and difficulty. *Yahweh* made heaven and earth. He made me and He cares for me. He is omnipotent in power, omnipresent in presence and omniscient in knowledge. He is great and powerful, powerful and personal.

- John 1, Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 reveal this great and awesome Creator is also our great and awesome Redeemer, King Jesus.
- There indeed is a higher throne! This indeed is my Father's world. And of the song that bears that title, I especially like verse 3.

"This is my Father's world,
 O let me ne'er forget.
 That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
 God is the ruler yet.
 This is my Father's world,
 The battle is not done.
 Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
 And earth and heaven be one."

II. My Lord's providence is with me.

121:3-4

- There is a change from the first to the third person as the psalmist dialogues within his soul. This is healthy soul-talk!
- The four negatives that appears are crucial to the argument of these two verses.
- The God who guards His chose people Israel is the same God who now guards me on a personal, day by day basis (v.4).
- He will not allow your foot to be moved (slip, slide, stagger, be shaken) tells us there is a moment by moment watchcare over us by Jehovah. Providentially He is guarding us and guiding us. He keeps (2X). Jude picks up on this aspect of God's character applying it to security of the believer in salvation. Jude 24-25 wonderfully proclaims, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen."

- Pagan gods sleep and need rest. Not Jehovah! He does not slumber (2X) or doze off, nor does He sleep. He does not get tired, take naps, sleep, eat or have need of anything else either.
- Psalm 34:15 says, “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous (24/7 I might add!) and His ears are open to their cry.”

Illustration: Elijah on Mt. Carmel in I Kings 18:20-40.

III. My Lord’s presence is beside me.

121:5-6

- These two verses begins with two potent poetic promises that unfold like a set of stairs with each additional step providing a further word of promise and assurance.
- Wiersbe says, “Our keeper is on the throne looking down on us, but He is at our side to shield us from all harm” (336).
- “Shade” speaks of His protective presence. He overshadows us with His care. “At your right hand” speaks of His personal presence. I awaken and he is there. I lay down and He is there. All through the day and all through the night He is there.
- The sun and the moon stand for dangers that come in the day and in the night. Traveling through life, I will not fear the sunstrokes of day (literal and figurative) or the cold and darkness and terror of night.
- Right there beside me, promising never to leave me or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5), I am promised His presence day to day, month to month, year to year. No, it is minute by minute! No, it is second by second!
- Psalm 91:1-2 reminds us, “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.’”

Illustration: Charlotte, Tim and my trip to Jefferson, Texas! We only had enough money to share a one piece chicken box from the Dairy Queen on our return, but we never doubted the Lord was right there with us.

IV. My Lord's protection is around me.

121:7-8

- To be kept from all evil does not imply a trouble free life, but a well protected life (cf Ps 23:4ff). It embraces the truth of Genesis 50:20, “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.” Painful? Yes, Paralyzing? No!
- It claims Romans 8:35-39 where Paul writes, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- Going out and coming in means every aspect of life and living. It draws attention to the details of life. God is in the big things and the little things. (ex. The book of Ruth). Eugene Peterson says it so very well, “the Christian life is not a quiet escape to a garden where we can walk and talk uninterruptedly with our Lord; nor a fantasy trip to a heavenly city where we can compare blue ribbons and gold medals with others who have made it to the winners’ circle....The Christian life is going to God. In going to God Christians travel the same ground that everyone else walks on, breathe the same air, drink the same water, shop in the same stores, read the same

newspapers, are citizens under the same governments, pay the same prices for groceries and gasoline, fear the same dangers, are subject to the same pressures, get the same distresses, are buried in the same ground. The difference is that each step we walk, each breath we breathe, we know we are preserved by God, we know we are accompanied by God, we know we are ruled by God; and therefore no matter what doubts we endure or what accidents we experience, the Lord will preserve us from evil, he will keep our life.” (Boice, 1080).

Conclusion

David Livingstone, the great missionary to Africa, read Psalm 121 and 135 in worship before he left for Africa in 1840. How appropriate for all of us who rightly see ourselves as pilgrims in a world that is not our home. “I will lift up my eyes to the hills from whence comes my help.” This makes sense in light of the great redemptive storyline of the Bible. After all, it was from a hill and beyond that our salvation has come. Evidently God likes high places!

- Think of high Mt. Moriah where God provides a ram for Abraham, sparing his only son Isaac (Genesis 22), a preview of our God not sparing His Son as He paid in full the penalty of all our sins.
- Think of Moses coming down from the mountain, the hills, with God’s law, the very expression of His character (Exodus 20), a law now written on our hearts.
- Think of Jesus on the Mount, the hillside, delivering the greatest sermon ever preached (Matthew 5-7).
- Think of our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17), transfigured with the Father declaring from heaven, “this is My beloved Son, hear Him.”

- Think of Jesus on the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24, painting the prophetic portrait of the end times.
- Think of our Savior on Calvary's hill, bearing the full measure of God's wrath for sinners (Matthew 27).
- Think of our Lord's Great Commission delivered to his church, on what Matthew calls, "the mountain which Jesus had appointed them" (Matthew 28:16).
- Think of our Lord on the Mount of Olives, ascending back to heaven but leaving us a promise, "this same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11-12).
- Finally, join the apostle John on Patmos for the glorious Revelation vision. Join him at the end of the book where in 21:10-11 we read, "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

This is the God who is our help! Why would you look anywhere else?!