

THE LORD, OUR HELPER

Psalm 121

Intro: Tonight I want to consider with you that wonderful Psalm 121.

Anyone who has read through the Psalms, has surely been impressed with this great Psalm. I believe it is generally agreed among expositors that the first line of the Psalm is a statement: “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.” And then follows a question: “From whence cometh my help?” And then the answer follows in verse 2: “My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” And then the Psalmist went on to tell how constant and all-inclusive that help is. This is a claim which every child of God has a right to. These words can be our words.

You will notice that this Psalm is the second of what are called, *the Songs of Degrees*, or *Songs of Ascents*. Psalm 120 is the first one, and Psalm 134 is the last one. So there are fifteen in all. There have been many different ideas as to the meaning of the Psalms, but it seems very likely that these were the songs which were sung by the Jewish people as they made their way up to the Temple on their feast days.

All, with the exception of Psalm 132, are very short. Four are ascribed to David, and one to Solomon. So it is apparent that they were not all written at the same time, nor by the same person. They all, in various ways, point to the Lord Who in all years has been the help of His people, a very sufficient help.

Psalm 123 beings in a way very similar to Psalm 121, although Psalm 121 has already declared that the help of the Lord’s people comes from the Lord. And so in Psalm 123 that is recognized immediately. And it shows how intently the people looked to the Lord for His help and His mercy. Psalm 124 commemorates the fact that if the Lord had not helped His people, had been on their side, their case would have been hopeless. Psalm 125 tells us how trusting in the Lord makes the people of God mountain-like, and in this respect they become like the Lord Himself who surrounds His people like mountains are all around Jerusalem. Psalm 126 celebrates how amazing and how happy an occasion it was when the Lord delivered His people from captivity. And Psalm 127 makes it clear that neither the house (which could mean either the Temple or their own homes) could have been built without the Lord’s help, and the same is true of the city. I personally am inclined to think that “the house” has to do with the home since both Psalm 127 and Psalm 128 mention children. I

could point out other ways in which these Psalms are related to each other. But the main emphasis seems to be that without the Lord they would have nothing, could do nothing, and would be entirely at the mercy of their enemies. It is a great series of Psalms to encourage trusting in the Lord. He is the Helper of His people, a Helper that never has failed them, and never will! They probably were designed by the Holy Spirit to be read together at one time.

If there is one of these which sounds the keynote for all of these fifteen Psalms, it must be Psalm 121, and it is the Psalm that we will be looking into tonight.

I. WHO WILL BE THE PSALMIST'S HELPER (Psa. 121:1-2).

One of the realities of life is that everyone needs a helper. We start out in life dependent upon our parents to take care of us, but even as we get past the stage where we need their daily care, we still need helpers. And so we are looking for helpers. Only a fool will think that he can get through life without someone to help. No one can "go it alone." But where will we find the help that we need. This is what the Psalmist was considering, and remember, this was sung by all of the people who made their way to the Temple on the Feast Days.

Some believe that the first line of verse 1 may also be a question. The Psalmist is musing about where he should put his trust. "*Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills? From whence cometh my help?*"

These are questions everyone has to ask and answer because we are all looking some place, or to some one for our help. Jeremiah answered the first question in his day when he wrote,

Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel (Jer. 3:23).

The hills remind us of the natural terrain where people fled to hide from their enemies; however, not always successfully. That in itself would give the Psalmist cause to pause and wonder.

But there could also be the thought in these questions that men and nations might be a source of help. In prophetic Scripture, "mountains" often represent nations. So the Psalmist could have been thinking about the help that nations could give him. Often the Israelites during their history put their trust in nations instead of the Lord.

But the answer is quick in coming. And it is the only sufficient answer that anyone can possibly give: “My help cometh from the Lord.” Sometimes the Lord helps us directly; at other times He may use people. But the assistance which He gives us is always real help. And there is no problem which can possibly arise but what He is sufficient because He is the Creator of the “heaven and earth.”

How clever the Devil has been to get people to believe that the “heaven and earth” are from some other source, or from no source at all! The attack upon the Lord as our Creator has been more devastating to our society and to our generation than any of us can possibly imagine. It does not change the truth that God is our Creator, but it does keep people from seeking the Lord. How wonderful it is when people can say from the heart, bypassing all human help, and any strength that any person may feel that he has in himself, “My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.”

But the blessing from this Psalm does not end with that statement, as wonderful as it is. The Psalmist then proceeded to describe the help that the Lord gives us.

But before we get into verse 3, let me call your attention to the name of the Lord that is used throughout the Psalm. It is Jehovah, the ever-living, never-changing, promise-keeping God. This makes the Psalm timeless. From the day it was first written, down to the present time, and forever, this Psalm will continue to be true. It is just as true for us today as it was when the people made their way to the Temple, singing these Psalms as they went. This is one big reason why we should not neglect the OT. It is for us just as much as it was for them.

With this in mind, let us now consider:

II. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE LORD’S HELP (Psa. 121:3-8).

First, will you note that there is one word which the Psalmist used to describe the Lord’s help. It is the word “keep” which appears first in the second part of verse 3. And then you have it again in verse 4. Again we meet it in verse 5. And then, although the translators changed the translation, it appears as “preserve” in verse 7 two times, and in verse 8 once. But it is always the same word in the Hebrew, and it is unfortunate that the translators have seen fit to change it. The NASB is actually worse than the KJV because there you find “protect...keep...guard.” Actually the last

word is probably the best translation because the word “keep,” or “pre-serve,” means *to guard*. You see, it is not just a case of the Lord helping us to do what we want to do, but we need help in being protected, guarded, from powers above us, and around us, *and within us*, which would destroy us. The Lord never intended for man to try to be self-sufficient as the emphasis seems to be today. That can only lead to eternal destruction. But He keeps us. He guards us from all of our enemies. He is the only One Who can possibly make good things which otherwise would be bad. So, as our Helper, the Lord is our Protector.

Verse 3 has to do with our daily walk. “To be moved” can be translated, *to slip*. Now what happens when your foot, or both of your feet slip? You fall!

This verse reminds me of Jude 24-25:

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

And why can He keep us from falling? Because we are in His hands. Cf. John 10:28-30:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

30 I and my Father are one.

You see, it makes a great deal of difference as to whether we are holding on to the Lord, or He is holding on to us.

Illus: Jim Rayburn helping his daughter across a stream walking on the rocks.

But there are times when our parents are not able to help us because they have to sleep. But the Lord guards us twenty-four hours of every day. In fact, as verse 4 goes on to tell us, the Lord made Himself responsible to keep the whole nation. And you will notice that the Lord is doing this even though we may not realize how much we need His help, and regardless how many of us may need His help at the same time.

“But,” someone may say, “there are times when the Lord’s people do fall.

How do these words fit into those situations?" I will tell you how. The Psalmist is telling us that if we do fall, it is never the Lord's fault. And that applies whether we fall in the day time, or in the night (when probably most people fall). The Psalmist was talking here about falling in our lives in our relationship with Him.

But the other part is that we need to trust Him. Of course, if we set out on our own (as we often do) we are going to get into trouble. But not if we are really trusting Him.

And there is a third answer that we can give. Often the Lord does guard us from our own sinfulness even when we are not trusting Him, and when we do not know how much we need His help. Perhaps there are times in every Christian's life when he could ruin himself, but God providentially steps in and a catastrophe is avoided.

In verse 5 the Psalmist made it very personal. It makes no difference who the child of God is, we can always say to him or her, "the Lord is your keeper." He is not just mine, but He is yours. Parents, believe this about your children just as you believe it for yourself.

The latter part of verse 5 and all of verse 6 speak of a danger which people in the middle east face continually, and that is the terrible effect that the sun can have upon them in the desert. But the same is true at night. The Psalmist has emphasized this before by telling us that the Lord never slumbers, nor sleeps. The difference between slumbering and sleeping, is that slumbering means *to get drowsy*; sleeping it *to go sound asleep*. Isaiah tells us this in Isa. 40:28-31:

28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

No mere human being can possibly give you that kind of protection. He is our Shade, able to do what no other can do, and certainly able to do what we cannot do for ourselves.

Now look at verse 7.

The Lord will guard us from all evil. This is a word which can be used in many different ways. But the latter part of this verse seems to suggest that the Psalmist was speaking here about *sin*. It is sin which has such a terrible effect upon our souls. The Lord is concerned about our physical safety, but He is also concerned about our spiritual safety. We are probably more inclined to be concerned about the physical than we are the spiritual. *For the child of God, it is never a matter of necessity that we have to sin! We all know that as long as we are in these bodies we can sin, but we don't have to sin!* Why is that? Because it is the Lord who is guarding our souls, making us what He wants us to be, which is making us like the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am sure that most Christians can look back upon their lives and can see how the Lord was looking out for our souls even when we were not really aware of the possible damage that could be done to our souls. How good and how gracious the Lord is in His dealings with us.

Do you remember how the Apostle Peter described the keeping power of the Lord? I am referring to 1 Pet. 1:3-5:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto
a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that
fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.
5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto
salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Isaac Watts wrote that wonderful hymn,

I sing the mighty pow'r of God, that made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.

Lord! How thy wonders are displayed where'er I turn mine eye!
If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky.

Creatures as numerous as they be are subject to Thy care;
There's not a place where we can flee, but God is present there.

Now for the last verse, verse 8.

Our lives are made up of goings and comings, which in one way means that they are continually changing. We go out in the morning; we come in at night. When we are born, we go out into the world; when a believer dies, or when the Lord comes, we come in to heaven.

Graham Scroggie once said, "Yes, from this very hour, to that hourless future. It is enough. The unchanging Lord will guard all our changeful life" (pp. 208-209). The Lord said, "From this time forth and forever." This not only includes 1997, but every year, and every part of every year, from now throughout eternity. And it has covered all of the past back to the beginning of time.

Concl: Where could you and I go to find what we have in the Lord?

There is no one else who is as great as the Lord. We can be thankful not only for His great power, and for His omnipresence, but a Psalm like this was written to teach us the love, the faithfulness, the sufficiency, and the mercy of our Lord. Let me remind you as I close, "The Lord is thy Keeper." And He is my Keeper. So let us trust Him today and tomorrow more than we have in our yesterdays. We are in a battle every day, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the Cross;
Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss:
From vict'ry unto vict'ry His army He shall lead,
Till every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in His strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you; ye dare not trust your own;
Put on the Gospel armor, each piece put on with pray'r;
Where duty calls, or danger, be never wanting there.