

Psalm 121

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our text for this day is Psalm 121

A song of ascents.

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—
From whence comes my help?
² My help comes from the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.
³ He will not allow your foot to be moved;
He who keeps you will not slumber.
⁴ Behold, He who keeps Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.
⁵ The LORD is your keeper;
The LORD is your shade at your right hand.
⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
Nor the moon by night.
⁷ The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;
He shall preserve your soul.
⁸ The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in
From this time forth, and even forevermore.

We pray: Dear God and Father, give us and renew in each of us a love for Your Word. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I. **My dear friends in Christ Jesus**

Psalm 121 is called **“A Song of Ascents”**. The people of Israel were all the time making pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Three times a year, at Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles, Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem. Imagine a group of people on that journey, maybe as part of a caravan. They have been traveling for many days. They are bringing their offerings and tithes to the Lord in Jerusalem. Then, they see it. They get their first glimpse of their destination, the city of Jerusalem, and the Temple and suddenly their longing is becomes reality. They break into a new song, a glorious song,

“I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? ² My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

Actually, this is not just a psalm to be used on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It is not just a psalm to be used on a journey, even though some have called it “The Traveler’s Psalm.” This psalm brings hope when life is dull and dreary, when life becomes difficult, when the road seems so hard. This psalm speaks encouragement when we are going through difficult times

In the Old Testament, God told the people of Israel to build a tabernacle and later the Temple and that His presence would reside in that place. Even though the Jews connected the presence of God with the tabernacle or the temple, still, it would be wrong to equate those buildings, or that city, with God. Jerusalem or the temple was not the goal of those pilgrims. God was. A relationship with God was. The worship of the true God was. Much, the same as coming to church is not the goal. No, we come to church, as the Jews came to the Temple, to meet God, to worship Him. So, for those Jews, it was not Jerusalem or the Temple itself that was most important. It was God. The worship of the true God.

Their relationship and worship of the true God was most important. And let us be clear, **the psalm is pretty specific.**

The psalm is exclusive. When the Jews saw Jerusalem and the Temple on the horizon, when their hearts were turned to God, they did not think of Zeus or Apollos (Roman gods at the time of Jesus and the disciples) or Baal or Marduk (false gods of the surrounding nations of Israel in the Old Testament). The Jews didn’t think, “No big deal, we all—all the nations of the earth—worship the same God, right?” Not at all. Remember that God called the Israelites to be separate from the gods of Egypt. On coming to the Promised Land, the Israelites were not to intermarry with the Canaanites out of concern that the Canaanite religion would be assimilated into the worship of the one true God. Later, while in captivity in Babylon, the Jews were to remain separate, distinct, exclusive. No, that commandment kept ringing in their ears, **“I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me.”**

God’s people today also reject the idea that all the religions of the world worship

the same God. There is only one God who is the Maker of heaven and the earth and that God is not Allah and it is not Buddha and it is not Brahma or Vishnu. No, there is only one God and that God is the maker of heaven and earth, that God is the author of grace, that God is the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All these other false religions are based on works. All the other ideas of god are from the father of lies, from Satan.

The true God, the Maker of heaven and earth, He is the only God full of love. He is the only God who would have His only begotten Son die for the sins of the world. He is the only God of help. As we lift up our eyes to the hills, we know that our help, our only help, comes from our Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Yes, lift up your eyes to the true God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who reminds us again and again through His holy Scripture that He knows you, He is keenly aware of whatever your trouble is, and that He loves you with an everlasting love.

Yes, lift up your eyes to the One who has that heavenly home waiting for you, that New Jerusalem. Now apply that to your life and your perspective of life. Doesn't it change everything? We can look down at the problems we daily face, seeing our sin broken world going on to its destruction, or we can lift up eyes to Jesus. How we must with the psalmist say and apply them to our life, **"I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? ² My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."** That is the new song we sing as we go along this road of life. There is more. The remainder of the psalm gets specific about

II. **The Promises of the One to Whom We Lift Up our Eyes**

For the psalmist would remind us vv. 3, 4—**He will not let your foot slip—He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

Notice how the psalmist moves from his own declaration of trust in God to encouragement for the reader. Earlier he said, **"my help."** Now he says, **"He who watches over you."** Clearly the message of the psalm is meant for the comfort and strength of others who are themselves looking for help.

If a person climbing a hill slipped, injury could easily result. Even so as we make our pilgrimage through life on earth, our feet can easily slip and lead to all sorts of harm and danger. Since our pilgrimage on earth continues without stopping until the day, we enter our heavenly home, we need constant protection—protection that comes from someone who will not fall asleep on the job even for one moment. That is why we are reminded in this psalm that the Lord’s protection is never ending. The psalmist emphasizes this point by saying the Lord will “**neither slumber nor sleep.**”

Israel needed the Lord’s protection as it wandered in the desert and throughout its history. Think of all the times that the nation God had chosen was under attack from threats of all kinds. These threats were not just physical threats. They were threats to their spiritual welfare too. The Lord never fell asleep as He watched His people continue on their journey. They may have wandered many times from the path He laid out for them, but even after doing so, the Lord provided help to spare them from complete destruction.

In these two verses, we see the Hebrew word for watch used twice. It will be used four more times in the psalm. The Lord watches, not as a mere spectator to see what will happen, but as a watchman who is positioned to provide warning from attack. The Lord watches as a parent makes sure a little child does not encounter danger. The Lord watches as our loving, heavenly Father who knows how frail we are and how often we are subject to attack from Satan and all his evil forces. The Lord watches all the time!

The psalmist continues —**The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.**

The psalmist repeats the theme: “**The LORD watches over you.**” Can he emphasize that anymore? Indeed, he does. The psalmist provides the reader with a picture to make the emphasis more clear. The sun can end up being a potential hazard, even though it was created to bring us much good. Too much sun can lead to illness, harm to the skin or eyes, and even death in extreme cases. That is why shade is good and offers protection from the harmful effects of the sun. The moon too may have been thought to be the source of some harm in the days of old. The point is

this: no threat that comes during the day and no threat that comes during the night will harm us.

The Lord's watchful eye is over us at all times. It never closes in sleep. It is over us all day and all night. The constancy of the Lord's watching over us has now been well established.

Moreover, we are told, **The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul.** V.7

Yes, the psalmist reminds us "**The Lord will preserve you from all evil**"-all harm

It is in connection with this verse, however, that some troubling questions may arise. How is it that the Lord keeps us from all evil, from all harm when this or that injury, illness, or setback occurs in our lives? What do we say to a person who has suffered a great tragedy? What exactly does it mean that the Lord will keep us from *all* harm, from all evil? Does it mean we will never be injured or stricken somehow? Though this psalm has made the point most emphatically, Christians may still wonder or doubt that the Lord does indeed keep us from *all* evil or harm throughout our entire lives.

We pray in the Seventh petition of the Lord's prayer, "**Deliver us from evil.**" The Lord does deliver—either by keeping evil from us or by making it serve our good! Paul's reminder is in place here too: "**We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose**" and then the apostle goes on to say. ³¹ **What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?** ³² **He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things** ³⁵ **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?**

³⁷ **Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.** ³⁸ **For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities**

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nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:28).

Then the psalmist goes on to say, **He shall preserve your soul.** My fellow redeemed, what is God's desire for you, for me for all people. He wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, as it is Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:4) God wants

to preserve our soul. That is why Jude wrote, **“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, ²⁵To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.** (Jude23-24)

And Paul the Apostle in writing to the Thessalonians reminds them of this wondrous truth,

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Thessalonians 5:23)

Here we have our God’s assurance that He will preserve our soul. He will not turn His back on those who confess His Son as their Lord and Savior. God our heavenly Father will never forsake those whom He has called to new life in His Son. God will never abandon those who have been bought at such a price—the life blood of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ true God and yet-true man.

And thus, the psalmist would remind us—**The LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.**

God’s protection is not only constant as we come and go from day to day, but the true God will see us through to the life that is to come. When our earthly pilgrimage is over and we step into the perfect life of heaven, it will only be because our faithful Lord has kept us on that path. And there in heaven’s eternal day we will lift up our eyes to Him the Maker of heaven and earth, our Creator, Redeemer and Helper and we will worship and praise Him forevermore.

May each of us be encouraged and make the words of the psalmist our own so that we will believe more firmly that our help comes from the Lord who made the heaven and the earth.

And may God grant this for Jesus’ sake. Amen.