

The hope on the hill (Psalm 121)

(Preached by Mick Germain, at St. Giles Presbyterian Church, Ottawa, Oct 23, 2022)

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?
- 2 My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
- 4 Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
- 6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
- 7 The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
- 8 The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

1- Intro

I want to take us on a journey together this morning. I want us to journey to a place of trust, a place of peace and a place of absolute joy. Although it may seem as though I am selling you a vacation that you cannot afford, let me assure you, this is a journey you cannot afford to miss.

We'll be spending our time in the book of Psalms today, in chapter 121. This is what we call a Psalm of Ascent, or a song of ascension as others call it. This is a psalm that was prayed and sung while God's people were traveling to the temple, when they actually had to climb the hill from the various valleys they were in. It is important that you know that this isn't simply a poetic image of heights & depths, this was what these people saw while ascending.

When we read those various verses, we see the cry of a people who trust God. Anyone who knows the stories of the Israelites will tell you that they were not an obedient people. They were elected as God's people, yes, but they were not examples of great believers. They disobeyed everytime they could, and everytime God called them back. Every time. Keep that in mind when we look at this passage, that these were people just like you & I. They had families, businesses, friends, problems & victories.

By the end of our time together, I really hope that we will grow into a deeper trust of God, a greater love for Him and an unwavering dedication to being with Him. That we will have a better understanding of the hope that we have on the hill.

2- v1 v2

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

2 My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

We begin our journey with them, at the bottom of the hill. We begin our journey in the valley. This is going to be a difficult journey for them, and our christian walk is going to be difficult for us too.

By foot, it would take approximately 30hrs to get from Nazareth to Jerusalem. Many of us dread the thought of doing any type of exercise, yet here is God calling His people to Him, and they know that that will take 30hrs of actual walking. Remember back then, if you wanted the presence of God, there was one place to find it, that was in the ark of the covenant. The ark was in the temple, and that temple was in Jerusalem. You wanted God, you wanted to be obedient to his ordinances, you were going to have to walk up that hill. You were going to have to trek yourself out of the valley, under the beating sun, bringing your stuff, because if you didn't, you wouldn't get to the Lord.

We can understand a bit how they felt. Our christian walk isn't simple, there are illnesses, heartache, trials and trouble. We find ourselves struggling often. Even our spiritual life is difficult, it takes effort to pray, it takes effort to gather together, it takes effort to study the Bible. While we have our destination, in picture form at least, we still have this toil to undertake to get there.

We read in verse 1, "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?". In my journey, when I'm fighting the good fight, while I'm under the beating sun of life, I lift my eyes to the hills. I lift my eyes from my situation, and I look up. I look above the situation, and I can't help but ponder where does my help come from?

Based on my situation, based on my trials and difficulties, it is impossible to believe that I'm doing this in my own strength. You have to look at the situation and ask yourself, "where does my help come from?". Because as Christians, we must be able to answer such a question.

David answers it this way: My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Does my help come from positive thinking? Does it come from waking up in the morning and declaring that I am beautiful, strong & independent? Does it come from my friends telling me that things will be alright? Of course not! David says "My help comes from the Lord". Not just any Lord, not just any person of power, no, his help, my help, your help, is from the maker of Heaven & Earth. He is the creator of things both physical & spiritual, He is the maker of that which changes and that which is eternal. Not too bad for a source of strength! Can this morning you truly believe that your help, the strength in your body, is of the Creator Lord?

If you aren't convinced, let's continue through our passage

3- v3 v4

3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

4 Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Verse 3 starts very strongly. Remember that David is going through something difficult, and the verses that we are reading are the answer to that question he has in verse 1. He is answering theologically, not emotionally, to the situation before him.

"He will not let your foot be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber". This verse should be tattooed upon your hearts, it should be imprinted upon your mind. David declares that the creator of the universe will not let our foot be moved. He won't let us fall into evil, He won't let us lose our way. On our journey of faith, many live with that fear that as we march on that we might take a wrong turn. That by our lack of focus, we might accidentally fall into the pits of despair. Yet, the Word says otherwise. The Word says that He won't let your foot slip. Now, you may willfully choose sin, and sinful ways, but you will never accidentally fall into it. If anything, we ought to fear our own desires more than we do God abandoning us.

What else do we read? He who keeps you will not slumber. God doesn't need sleep, and in your moment of need, your prayers will not be left on some heavenly answering machine. God answers prayers, He answers all of them. Sometimes the answer is not what we wish to hear, but He always answers. He did so in the past, He does so now, and He will answer in the future.

4 Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Although this seems like repetition for us, the original language changes the focus from you to us. God doesn't only say that He cares for you as His Child, but He cares for all of His children. That means all believers, not just anyone who has been created, but He cares for all of those that He calls His own. This is important, why? Because He doesn't care about you because you are special, or better than your neighbor, no, He cares about you because You are His Own.

As His Own, He says that He won't slumber on you. As His Own, He says that He won't let you fall into Hell.

What a blessing! That I am made His own by His own strength and merit, and not by mine. What a blessing! That I am made His own, by the righteousness of Christ who gave His life to buy me.

4- v5 v6

5 The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand.

6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

Look how David takes a word from the last sentence and builds it up. We can't misunderstand what he is saying because he builds upon each statement. "He who keeps Israel", and he moves into "The Lord is your Keeper."

The Lord is your keeper, not a mantra, not a benevolent deity, no, The Lord of lords, the King of Kings. Not a single thing in this whole universe, and the next, is without servitude to Him. As a great theologian once said, there is not a single rogue molecule. Down to a molecular level, and smaller, He is Lord. Beyond simply being Lord of even the minute, He is the Lord that keeps you.

He keeps you, and beyond that He is the shade on your right hand. In times of war, the right was without protection. On your left hand, you held your shield, and on the right, you held your sword. The Lord is your protection on the most vulnerable side of you. You are struggling in an area, you are struggling in many areas? Good! Because the Lord is your protection there. The Lord keeps me, He defends me, He protects me, He covers my weakness. What a promise to the child of God!

Playing with this idea of shade, we read that the sun will not strike us by day. This refers to sun-strokes, which nowadays can be deadly, so imagine back then. The Lord is your protection, He won't let the elements affect your physical body. There was a belief at the time of moon-strokes, essentially that the moon's rays could lead to madness, that's where we get the word "Lunacy" from. He won't let the elements of this world affect my body, and He won't let them affect my mind. Things are going to be bad, and I'm going to be exposed to bad things, yet He is going to be with me.

We can have assurance in that today. The amount of people affected with depression, with physical ailments, with relational problems, has skyrocketed in these past 20yrs. The amount of people in this very room that deal with those things is large, I don't even need to know everyone here, because all I need to know is the human experience. Yet, God says "I am with you".

5- v7 v8

7 The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

8 The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

The Lord will keep you! Again and again, we read that He will keep us. We found out that He keeps us from falling into evil, prevents our foot from slipping, and now we read that He keeps us from evil itself. He doesn't simply keep you from certain evils you might face, He protects all those who trust Him from all evil. From evil things, from the men who do evil, etc.

Nothing can separate you from the love of God, nor His protection. He will keep your life, what a blessing. Wait, does that mean that you will not experience sickness? That you will not experience loss? Of course not! Christians are martyred every day, and Christians experience loss and hurt. What this promises us is that the Lord keeps our eternity in His Hands.

Isn't it great that the hope that we have, the hope on the hill for Israel, the hope from the empty tomb & resurrected Christ for us, will keep us forever. That all throughout our lives, He is with us, protects us, and knows our whereabouts. He is never surprised by our situation, nor does He ever scramble to get us out of it. He is always sovereign, always above the situation, always in control.