

Take Life's Journey with the Lord

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I lift up my eyes to the hills-from where will my help come?

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

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

⁴He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

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

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

⁸The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore (Psalm 121:1-8).

1. My Tour Guide

Two weeks ago, I shared about Iceland. This morning, I'd like to share what I've learned from Scotland. Last year during my spiritual leave, I had the opportunity to visit Scotland. The only thing I knew about Scotland was that it was part of the United Kingdom.

When we decided to visit Scotland, we did not know where to visit and what to do. So we hired a local tour guide to help show us around. Our guide told us about the history and the wonderful things about the country. His guidance made the trip enjoyable. Here are some photos of Scotland.

Have you ever thought of what it might be like to have a tour guide for our lives? What would it be like to have someone guide us through every step of life? Our passage today tells us that we have such a wonderful guide for our lives. Let us look into what today's scripture, Psalm 121, says about him.

2. Psalm for the Pilgrims

Psalm 121 is often called "A Song of Ascent." This is one of 15 psalms (120-134). These psalms would have been sung by pilgrims ascending the road to Jerusalem located on Mount Zion.

Why did the Jewish people go to Jerusalem? Moses says in Deuteronomy 16:16, "***Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles.***" The men of Israel were commanded to travel to the Jerusalem Temple three times a year to celebrate what God has done during the Exodus.

Was anyone excited for the pilgrimage? The answer is yes and no. The pilgrims to Jerusalem would have been excited to worship God. However, they would have been afraid of the journey to get to Jerusalem. The road from Jericho to Jerusalem was notoriously dangerous. Over 18 miles, the difference of elevation between the two cities was 4,000 feet. The road would be narrow, rocky and have many blind turns. This made it a haven for robbers. When Jesus talked about the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus was talking about what would have happened on this specific journey.

That's why the psalmist says in verse one, "***I lift up my eyes to the hills-from where does my help come?***" The phrase "to the hills" in verse 1 implies two different meanings: One is images of danger and difficulty on the journey to Jerusalem. The other is an image of God who inhabits the temple. Looking to the hills is a search for divine protection.

When Jewish men planned a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, they worried about their journey. They would worry about where they might face trouble or if anyone would come to help them on the road.

In verse 2 the psalmist provides the absolute answer. "***My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.***" The psalmist tells the pilgrims that God of Israel, who created heaven and earth, would help them in their time of need. Where was the psalmist's confidence coming from? The psalmist probably learned this from his own experience. When the psalmist was attacked by robbers on his way to Jerusalem, he lifted his concerns and prayed for help facing toward the temple in Jerusalem. After his prayer someone came and helped him. Sometimes someone saved his life.

If we read 2 Chronicles 6:20, we notice that Solomon prayed when the Temple was dedicated. "***May your eyes be open toward this temple day and night, this place of which you said you would put your name there. May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.***" The Jerusalem Temple was a visual symbol that God was with the people of Israel, and God would listen to their prayers and help them.

In the verses 3 through 8, the psalmist tells us how the Lord would help his people. We notice that the word "keep" appears six times in this passage. The NIV version of the Bible translates this word to be "watch." This means that the Lord watches or guards or cares for Israel and provides assurance of protection.

Verses 3-8 can be divided into three groups. In the second verse, the verse expands on what is said in the first verse.

In verse 3, the psalmist says, “**He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.**” The psalmist assures pilgrims that the Lord will not allow their feet to slip. This is a crucial promise for pilgrims when they travel on foot on an unpaved road.

In verse 4, the psalmist expands on the theme in verse 3. “**He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**” He assures that the Lord would be awake all the time.

The psalmist says in verse 5, “**The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.**” The term “**right hand**” is a symbol of power. The term “**shade**” means shadow, like the shade from the noonday sun.

The psalmist says in verse 6, “**The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.**” The psalmist says that the Lord will not let the sun and the moon strike the pilgrims. He assures the pilgrims that the Lord will protect them on their journey.

The psalmist says in verse 7, “**The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.**” The psalmist assures the pilgrims that the Lord will provide protection from any kind of danger. Therefore, they do not need to worry about their security.

In Conclusion, the psalmist says in verse 8, “**The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.**” The psalmist assures that the Lord will take care of everything from the time they leave their homes to the time they return from Jerusalem.

3. My Journey in the U.S.

Have you ever worried about your own life or the lives of your children? Let me share with you my story. When Christine and I first came to the United States, we had our two-month-old daughter, Ahreum, with us. We didn’t know anyone in Kansas City, MO where I would go to school. We had to look for housing because the school didn’t have any dormitories. On the plane, an old lady sitting next to me said, “Don’t worry, God will take care of you.” God assured us through her that God would help us.

Our plan was to stay in a hotel until we could find housing. But when we arrived at the Kansas City International Airport, a college professor from my school came with a few students and allowed us to stay in his house for about two weeks. These were the first days of over 40 years in the U.S. that God has looked over us.

4. The Lord Helps Us through Other People

What about my ministry? I've been serving in the United Methodist Church for 36 years. Yet you might be surprised that I still feel uncomfortable at times with my preaching. But God constantly reminds me of his care so that I would not give up and continue to serve God's people.

For the past seven years, I've been very grateful to our lay leadership here at Swift Memorial Church. For every achievement in our church, I would like to give them credit. I am also grateful for my wife Christine who also does more than I could ever imagine. You may not care about my leaving, but you might be saddened because of my wife's departure. I am constantly reminded of God's care for me through the lives of others.

Every person is created in the image of God. Our scripture today tells us that God cares for every person. We may not always see God's direct help in our daily lives. But God continues to care for us in any circumstance through the lives of those around us.

5. Conclusion

Psalm 121 is a pilgrim's song. Each one of us lives a life of pilgrimage. There are hardships, celebrations, joys, and moments of pain. The psalmist tells us that the best way to travel in life is to travel with the Lord. God is powerful and faithful. He is like no one else in the way he helps us and cares for each of us.

6. Application

Psalm 23 says, "***The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.***" I saw that in Scotland, the shepherd is not always with the sheep. Look at this picture again. The shepherd lets his sheep stay in the fields or hills and does not stay with them all the time. I wonder whether the sheep would say that their true shepherd is not their human shepherd but the Lord. If the Lord takes care of the sheep, how much more God would watch over us?

Things constantly happen in our life's journey. When things go well, we are often happy. And when we face times of trouble or things are unpredictable, we may feel uneasy or afraid. Our passage today in Psalm 121 reminds us that there is nothing to worry about in this life. This is because the creator God watches over and listens to us. God is active in helping us in our times of need.

Many people love Psalm 23. What about psalm 121? Psalm 121 is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. This morning I have a question for you and me. How long do you think God will protect us? God will keep our going out and our coming in from this time on and forevermore. Amen.