

Going Up and Needing Help

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Preacher: Terry McCutcheon

[0 : 00] We're going to turn on our Bibles, and our reading today comes from Psalm 121, which you will find in page 516 of the Pew Bible, Psalm 121, and we shall read the full Psalm together.

So let us hear then the Word of God. A song of ascents. I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber.

Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade and your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

[1 : 10] Now just a short prayer to ask God's help. Father, what we know not, we pray that you would teach us. What we have not, we pray that you would give us. And what we are not, we pray that you would make us.

For our good and for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, since the last time we met, there was a referendum in Europe.

Should we be in or should we be out? And the votes were cast. And the nation, the complete United Kingdom, has voted to leave. I'm not making a political statement.

But what I'm saying is in the days that have ensued, the days that have followed, all that that decision has sought to do is to make us a wee bit more fearful. It seems that our security is now under much more threat.

While we remain in Europe. While Scotland go alone and be now independent from the UK and be part of you. There's so much in earth.

[2 : 15] Security seems to be a wee bit more under threat. But even before that referendum happened, we live in a world where we are constantly under threat.

Under the threat globally and nationally from the threat of terrorism. Just this morning, again in Turkey, a suicide bomber took the lives of 36 people. And dozens more were injured.

All the uncertainty around our finances. Jobs and finances are under threat. As we've tried to go over an economic crash, there has took the best part of nine years to try and go over.

And every year there's a new disease or virus like Zucca or Ebola or swine flu that threatens to rob us of our health or indeed our lives.

And Rangers have got themselves back into the Premier League. A league where they belong. But now what that means is this. Rangers and Celtic will play each other at least four times this season.

[3 : 27] And if anybody knows anything, they will know this. That the threat of domestic violence has intensified in this city when that game of football is played.

So it seems that no matter where we turn, we are under constant threat. Threat in our country, our airports, in our finances and jobs, in our health and lives and even in our homes. So it's no wonder that we all long for security.

We all long to be safe and to know that everything is going to be alright. And it is to this issue of security that Psalm 121 seems to be addressing.

If you gaze your eyes over the Psalm, you will see that the word keep, keeps or keeper is mentioned six times. And it seems that the Psalmist, through his own experience, wants to tell us and teach us and convince us of the security that is found only in the Lord.

My title this afternoon is Going Up and Needing Help, which I've taken from the heading of the Psalm and the question that's asked in verse 1. The heading of the Psalm you will see is a song of ascents.

[4 : 36] That there is part of the inspired word of God. And what it means is this. It literally means a song of going up. You'll see in your Bible from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134, they all have this heading, a song of ascents.

For they are the songs that the pilgrim people of God sang as they were going up to Jerusalem, as God had commanded them to do, in order to celebrate the three great feasts, the three great feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Atonement.

So the Psalmist is a pilgrim. He is going up. But if you look to the question that's asked at the end of verse 1, you will see that the Psalmist is needing help.

Verse 1. From where does my help come? He's needing help. He's going up, but he's needing help. But why does he need help? Well, that brings me to my first point.

Verse 1. Life is full of hills. Life is full of hills. I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

[5 : 43] I've heard these words a lot when I've been out maybe hill walking with Christian folks. In fact, I've often spoken them a lot myself. And what I've always thought was this.

That is that when the Psalmist saw the hills, he associated them with the Lord. That the hills made him think of the Lord. Maybe like a Scottish person abroad who sees some hills.

It reminds them of home. But that's not the case here for the Psalmist. Nor is it the case that the Psalmist thinks his help comes from the hills.

Some of my favorite movies are westerns. Especially the Clint Eastwood spaghetti ones. Though I like the John Wayne ones as well. But you know how these cowboy and Indian films usually go.

The Indians are attacking the cowboys. And the cowboys have got all their wagons running a circle. And the stupid Indians are circling, getting picked halfway. I've always wondered why they've done that.

[6 : 43] Going running, running, running a circle. But you know how it usually goes. The cowboys are usually low in men and low in ammunition. And you think, well that's it. They're done for.

But then all of a sudden, the camera pans to the distant hills. And you see a dust cloud rising up into the sky. And you think to yourself, what's up?

And then all of a sudden you hear,
do-do. And it's not the rag and bone man. It's the cavalry.

Help is coming for the hills. The cavalry are coming to save the day. The hills are not where the psalmist's help comes from. Nor does the psalmist.

The psalmist doesn't associate the hills with the Lord. Nor does he see the hills as the place where his help comes. But the psalmist sees the hills as his problem.

[7 : 39] The hills fill the psalmist with fear. Remember the psalmist is a pilgrim en route to Jerusalem. And he must pass through the hills in order to get there.

Remember Jerusalem? City on a hill. Walled city. Inside the city. Inside the walls. Safe. Outside the walls. No safe. Because the hills are dangerous.

For that's where the bandits, the muggers, the robbers and the outlaws hang out. And remember the psalmist could be carrying his tithe. Tenth of his annual income to be given to the temple.

And the muggers and the robbers, well they would know this. And you can just picture them rubbing their hands at the thought of such rich pickings. Because the robbers would see the pilgrims as their pension scheme.

And remember the psalmist doesn't have a mobile phone. And there's no mountain rescue either. So the hills fill the psalmist with fear. But the hills aren't just the place of the muggers and the robbers.

[8 : 40] They are also the places of pagan shrines. The high places. And all sorts of people lived there. Pagan priests offering false promises. And this pagan worship was often tied up with sexual immorality.

And cultic prostitutes. So you can just imagine the prostitutes waving to the pilgrims and saying, Come and spend your money here. So the hills are filled with trouble, temptation, fears and worries.

Life is full of hills. And friends, the Jews seen their whole lives as a pilgrimage. A journey to the presence of God. And it's the same for us. Because although we are not on a physical journey to the physical place called Jerusalem, We are on a spiritual one.

Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 22. But you have come to Mount Zion. And to the city of the living God. The heavenly Jerusalem. So we aren't immune from the hills.

We are open to the same trials and hardships. Just the same as anybody and everybody else. Life is full of hills. And so comes the question of verse 1.

[9 : 50] From where does my help come? And there are many ways of answering that question. Some people will answer that their help comes from themselves. From their career.

From their wealth. The great amount of money they've amassed. They see that their wealth is security against all the troubles of life. They think that because they've got a few quid, they're secure.

Or others look to help in religion. Man-made religion. Some seek help there. In the bookshops in the city centre. In the mind, body and soul section.

You'll find lots of books. And how to help you wage your way through life. And sadly. There are many in our city. Who have just tried to blot out the world.

By using drinking drugs. Just wanting the world to go away. But friends, the Christian knows. That help is to be found only in one place.

[10 : 47] And you see, that's the real difference. That's the real difference between a believer and a non-believer. They both need help. But only the Christian can have the answer.

That this psalm has. And that is verse 2. There is a God who made the hills. Life is full of hills. But there is a God who made the hills. The psalmist knows that this is a real source of help.

Verse 2. My help comes from the Lord. Who made heaven and earth. You see, the believer knows that there is a creator God. Who made the heavens and the earth.

Who made the whole cosmos. He's not a sun God. He's the God who made the sun. He's not a moon God. He's the God who made the moon. He made the whole cosmos.

And is there sovereign. And rules over every part of it. He rules over everything in this world that we see. Even the hills. So all the fears, the many dangers, toils and snares that we might confront.

[11 : 51] Are under the control of the God who is, verse 2. The maker of heaven and earth. Do you realize that with your troubles? That they are under his control?

There's no point looking everywhere in the world for help. If that world has been made by someone outside of it. You can only go to the person who holds all the world in the palm of his hands.

He is the only one who can really help. Because he controls it. And he's in charge of the world. You can only go to the maker. A number of years ago I bought a washing machine.

And I actually knew how to work it then. Because I was single. And I don't know how to work it now. But there was some literature came with a washing machine.

They were asking me to buy insurance. I thought, I've just bought the thing. You know, you're not going to tell me it's going to break down. But in the stuff, there was a great line. There was this line that jumped out at me.

[12 : 50] And it said, Who better to fix your washing machine than those who made it? I thought, that's a great selling point. And that's right, isn't it?

Who better to fix it than the person who made it? Because they know how it all goes together. All the wee bits, you know. And that's the thing about all the places that people in the world turn to for help.

They're all within the world. They're on the same level as the hills. The struggles, the hardships that we face. They can't ultimately help us. Only the God who made even the hills can be a real help to us.

And to have this God as your help means three things. Firstly, in verses 3 and 4, it means ceaseless guidance. Ceaseless guidance. Through all the paths of life, he will not let your foot be moved.

He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Your foot will not be moved. You won't slip. Because you have the tireless attention of the God who made the universe.

[13 : 55] He's always watching. He's always listening. He's always caring. And he's your God. He doesn't sleep. He doesn't even slumber.

Well, what does that mean for you and I as believers? Well, this is what it means. It means that our own weakness and folly will never be able to derail us if this is your God.

As pilgrims on route to the city of God, we often do stupid things. Well, I know I certainly do. We often put our foot in the wrong places. And we're likely to slip.

We often take foolish risks. And we get weary. So weary. We're likely to fall and to fall badly. But God says, verse 3, Your foot will not be moved.

You won't slip. And as we do these things, we won't put ourselves outside of His fatherly guidance. Even if you're in danger of slipping badly, He will not let you slip.

[14 : 53] And there are many here who have been Christian for years who could testify to that. The countless times that God has done that for them. And can you see the liberty that this brings?

So many are fearful of putting a foot wrong. Of making a wrong decision that will somehow put them outside of the will of God. And they'll spend the rest of their lives regretting and living outside of God's will.

But this psalm says, no. He will not let your foot be moved. Of course, we can blatantly rebel. We can blatantly rebel against God and His Word.

We can stop walking up to Jerusalem. We can turn around and walk back down the hill. But that's a totally different thing. If we are earnestly seeking to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, He will not let your foot be moved.

He won't. And you see how liberating this is. There's no need to be paralyzed, waiting for special guidance. Wait, wait, wait all the time. Is it Dundee? Is it Darby? Is it Dallas?

[15 : 55] You know. No. I can walk in confidence. Knowing that I'm in a constant covenant relationship with a God who knows even the hairs in my head. He will not let your foot be moved.

So I can walk into life with confidence. Knowing that I receive ceaseless guidance as He directs my feet. He provides ceaseless guidance through all the paths of life.

And the God who made the hills, the second promise that He gives is a sure protection. Verse 5 and 6. A sure protection.

In all the trials of life, a sure protection. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade in your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. So think about all the natural trials and hardships of life that we all have to face. None of them will overcome you if this is your God.

[16 : 55] They won't. You have the constant protection of the God who created all the natural order. And He knows it all inside out. Verse 5. This God is your shade.

He's like a shadow. He won't leave you. He's your shade. The Lord is not promising here immunity from hardships, but security in them. Not kept from hardships, but kept in them.

The psalmist didn't think that the sun wouldn't harm Him if He went out without putting sun cream on. We don't need to worry about that here in Glasgow. Nor did He think the moon wouldn't be there at night, or that He would be exempt from the fears that darkness brings.

The commentators often link moon through the word lunar, and therefore the word that's associated with that is lunatic. The horrors, the fears that come in the night when we're lying in our beds in the darkness of night, where He'd often get full of some horrors, didn't they, at night time?

But in all these things, whether by day or night, the psalmist knows that He has a sure protection. Come rest your head, and nestle gently, and do not fear the dark of night.

[18 : 08] Almighty God keeps watch intently, and He guards your life with all of His might. Doubt nor His love, nor His power to keep. He never slumbers, nor does He sleep.

And all of these things, the psalmist knows He has a sure protection. And none of these things would be allowed to stop Him finishing the journey and getting to Jerusalem.

And this is a constant theme throughout Scripture. Isaiah 43, And see what that verse says?

When, not if, When you walk through the waters, I will be with you. It doesn't say, geez, I shout if you get into trouble, or I'll see you at the other end. It says, when you walk through the waters, I will be with you.

You will never sink beneath the waves. And the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking to His own disciples, said, In the world you will have tribulation, But take heart, for I have overcome the world.

[19 : 18] In all these things we are more than conquerors, Because God is our keeper. He watches over us. And verse 5, He is at my right hand. When fears are upon us, as they often are, He is right at my right hand.

I remember when I first became a Christian, I was so full of fear, Of bumping into people from my past. Filled with terrible fear. But knowing Hebrews 13, 5, I will never leave you, Nor will I forsake you.

Knowing that the Lord was right at my right hand, Filled me with courage, And confidence. And was a great comfort to me, As I went about my life. I wonder if you, like me, Have panic attacks, About things happening in life.

Things that you won't be able to handle. Maybe like me, You dread the death of loved ones. And you don't know how you'll cope, When they are gone. Well verse 5, The Lord is your keeper.

He watches over you. He is your shade at your right hand. Ceaseless guidance. Sure protection. And this brings us to the third great promise, We have from the God who made the hills.

[20 : 24] Ceaseless guidance. Sure protection. And now in verses 7 and 8, We have the certain promise, Of eternal life. Can we see? Verse 7 and 8, The Lord will keep you from all evil.

He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out, And your coming in, From this time forth, And forevermore. Nor even death itself, Can harm you.

If this is your God. Your life is in the hands of the eternal God. And He will keep, He will watch over you, From this time forth, And forevermore. What an amazing promise.

As we get older, And ill health comes upon us, And we have thoughts of death and dying. Thoughts that can fill us with great fear. And we feel it too as Christians.

We are not exempt from, Exempt from the fear of death, Nor from death itself. Because in this world, Death is part of the wages of sin. Charles Spurgeon said, There were the three Ps of salvation.

[21 : 27] Jesus has saved us from sin's penalty. Day by day, He is saving us from sin's power. And one day, He will save us from sin's presence. Saved from sin's penalty.

Day by day, Saved from sin's power. But not yet saved, From sin's presence. It's all part of our mortality. And death casts a shadow, Over every one of us.

It stalks every one of us. But the Psalmist says, That if this is your God, Even death, The last enemy, Even death shall not overwhelm us.

The Lord will keep you. You're going out, And you're coming in, From this time forth, And forevermore. Well, do you believe it? Do you believe it?

We're not immune from the physical hardships, Or immune from death that stalks every one of us. But we are armed against it. And we will certainly overcome it.

[22 : 24] We have no need to fear the valley of the shadow of death. Because the Lord is with us. And here is resurrection, hope, and certainty. Right in the middle of the Old Testament.

Here it is, the Lord Jesus Christ saying, I am the resurrection and the life. Right in the middle of the Old Testament. Friends, the believer's life, With God will never cease.

Though throughout this year, And every year from now, Many things will afflict us. But nothing of ultimate harm, Will ever be allowed to come anywhere near us.

And this all causes me to finish with a question. And I think it's obvious what I'm going to ask. Where does your help come from? Where does your help come from?

As you leave this building, And go into that world, With all the threats of security on your life, Where does your help come from? You see, Only the maker of heaven and earth, Can offer ceaseless guidance, Sure protection, And the certain promise of eternal life.

[23 : 29] And he says to you this afternoon, Come to me, All who labor, And are heavy laden, And I will give you rest. For I hold this world in the palm of my hands.

I am its maker. Come to me. The God who made the hills, Is our life and salvation,
Through the Lord Jesus Christ. Surely, You will not go, Without the security, That he alone
offers.

Surely, You will trust him, As your Lord and saviour. Surely, You will do that. Amen. May
the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, And the love of God the Father, And the fellowship of
the Holy Spirit, The Comforter, Be with us all, And those whom we love, Both now, And
forevermore.

Amen. Amen.