

Yahweh Watches Over You

I. Walking by Faith

A. Is an uphill journey

1. A Song of Ascents – refers to Psalms 120-134.

These psalms were part of a Pilgrimage Songbook and would have been sung by groups of travelers as they journeyed up to Jerusalem to keep the feasts of the Lord at the temple where *“they would enjoy the special presence of God.” (Futato, 377)*

2. Challenging for them

The roads climb uphill to Jerusalem, making the journey long and sometimes dangerous as they faced the threat of robbers, wild animals and exposure. They must trust God to get them to their destination.

3. Challenging for us

“Life is a journey. Along the way we face difficulties. These difficulties can either be stumbling blocks or stepping-stones. How can we turn potential stumbling blocks into stepping-stones? Psalm 121 guides us into an aspect of that answer.” (Futato, 377)

B. Is traveling... toward unseen realities

1. Pilgrims are on the move. We are strangers and exiles in a far country. We belong somewhere else.

2. Like those before us

“[They] all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.” Hebrews 11:13-14

“Heaven is our home –it’s not just where we’re headed. It’s where we are from.” (Doug Webster)

3. The New Jerusalem

- a. The pilgrimages to God’s appointed feasts in Jerusalem point forward to a heavenly reality.

- b. A feast with God

“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well aged wine.” (Isaiah 25:6)

- c. In a beautiful permanent place

The city of God, where *“God Himself shall dwell with us.” (Rev 21:1-3)*

“We are headed to the “New Jerusalem where we will enjoy Him forever.” (Futato, 121)

C. Is knowing where to turn for help (the right travel guide and evacuation insurance)

“I lift my eyes to the mountains. From where does my help come?”

1. What’s significant about mountains?

“In ancient Israel and the ANE, mountains were a metaphor for the divine realm.” (Longman, 414)

- a. Inspiration

The majesty, beauty, and unshakable firmness of the mountains impart a sense of refuge and quiet strength.

- b. Jerusalem, the city of God, was surrounded by mountains. It was thought that to look to the mountains surrounding Jerusalem was to look to God, since at that time, Jerusalem was the place where

heaven met earth. This explains why the first verse in the KJV is written as a statement rather than a question.

c. Pagan Worship

A Hebrew pilgrim would have associated mountains with the Pagan shrines that stood on hilltops or “high places” where the gods of nature and fertility were worshipped. A traveler would be tempted to turn to the allurements of sacred prostitutes and priests to ward off angry gods and the forces of nature. A snare.

2. Creation or Creator?

The central question being asked is will you turn to God, or to created things for help and security?

3. *“My help comes from the Lord, who made the heaven and earth.” (v.2)*

“[The psalmist] knows something better. The thought of this verse leaps beyond the hills to the universe; beyond the universe to Its Maker. Here is the living help: primary, personal, wise, immeasurable.” (Kidner, 431).

4. He is **with** you –not a just a travel guide, but your ever present companion.

II. Yahweh won’t let go of you

A. The I Am watches over you

1. He is the self existent, self-sustaining, transcendent, Lord of the cosmos, yet He draws near and identifies Himself with fallible people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

2. Not passively from a distance - He is actively *working* for you to protect and preserve you.

3. This psalm is not a lament – it expresses solid confidence in Yahweh, who is mighty to save. (Longman)

B. He has the power to help

1. The statement “my help comes from Lord,” assumes two things:

a. We will have trouble on our journey.

b. We can have confidence in the Lord’s ability and willingness to help us.

“The point of this psalm is not that we won’t have problems, but that God will keep us safe as we go through them.” (Boice, 1079)

2. Yahweh the Creator – *“Who made heaven and earth.” (v.1)*

“God the creator [is] the one who begins, maintains, controls and directs everything in his creation.

Nothing can happen outside his direction; every situation we face, every danger which threatens, is within his created realm. (Motyer, 368)

3. Yahweh the Redeemer

a. *“He keeps Israel.” (v.4)* The covenant keeping God who redeems his people with an outstretched arm.

b. *“He keeps you.” (v. 3)* The psalmist alternates between “my” and “you,” reminding his soul of God’s faithfulness with an internal dialogue. Make these truths personal.

c. The God of the Exodus has done everything necessary, through His son, to carry us to our destination.

“Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:1-2)

“As Jesus implies in this sequence, he has not secured our eternal home only to loose us in earth’s troubles! The eternal significance of the work of redemption is part of our present security.” (Motyer, 368)

C. He will protect you

1. The dominant theme

a. The key word in this psalm (shamar), is translated as keep, watch, guard or protect and is used six times to describe God as the one who guards us.

2. It’s comprehensive – God’s care for us keeps building in ever increasing promises:

a. *“He does not sleep.” (v. 4)*

God is working for you around the clock, tirelessly. He never takes time off - even when you do.
“For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.” (Psalm 127:2)

b. *“He is your shade.” (v. 5)*

Protection from exposure *“from dangers real (sun stroke), and imaginary (moon stroke). Sun...moon: comprehensiveness expressed by contrast.” (Motyer, 368)*

“What the psalmist really means...in figurative language, is that nothing either of the day or night can harm us if God is keeping guard. God is our covering against every calamity. He is our shade against the visible perils of the day as well as the hidden perils of the night.” (Boice, 1078)

c. *“He will guard your going out and coming in from this time forth and forever.” (vv.7-8)*

A pledge of comprehensive care that covers everything starting now and going on *“not to the end of time but without end; like God Himself who is (Ps. 73:26) ‘my portion forever’.” (Kidner, 432)*

D. He will preserve you –

1. *“He will not allow your foot to slip.” (v.3)*

a. *“The promise of this psalm is not that we shall never stub our toes but that no injury, no illness, no accident, no distress will have evil power over us, that is, will be able to separate us from God’s purposes in us.” (Peterson, 42)*

b. Stumbling doesn’t refer to physical falling in scripture. It’s used figuratively in the OT to describe someone who is:

An enemy of God – *“In due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near.” (Deut. 32:35)*

Overcome by sin or weakness - *“May they not rejoice over me when my foot slips...For I am ready to fall... I am full of anxiety because of my sin.” (Ps. 38:16,17)*

Suffering under oppression - *“Who will stand up for me against evildoers...If I should say my foot has slipped, Thy loving-kindness Oh Lord will hold me up.” (PS. 94:16,18)*

2. *“Yahweh will Himself keep you from all evil. He will keep your soul.” (v. 7, Motyer’s translation)*

a. He keeps all evil from getting inside us. *“Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” (I John 4:4)*

“Once we get this psalm in our hearts it will be impossible for us to gloomily suppose that being a Christian is an unending battle against ominous forces that at any moment may break through and overpower us. Faith is not a precarious affair of chance escape from satanic assaults. It is the solid, massive, secure

experience of God, who keeps all evil from getting inside us, who guards our life, who guards us when we leave and when we return, who guards us now, who guards us always.” (Peterson, 46)

b. He keeps your soul. No one can “snatch you out of His hand.” (John 10:28-30).

“Amidst seas of adversity, [we] will remain upheld, not because of [our] own doing, but because of the preserving hand of God. The one who has justified will never again condemn us. (Romans 8:33-34) The sure confidence we have today that we will remain with God tomorrow is God Himself.” (Jason DeRouchie)

III. Jesus came down to get you

Jesus came...

1. As a pilgrim, He left heaven to journey in a far country to find you and bring you home.
2. To be destroyed - unprotected on the cross so that you would be protected forever.
3. So that His going out would accomplish your coming in - forever.

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude, 24-25.)

Questions for discussion:

1. Comment on the following quote:

“We know that God created the universe and has accomplished our eternal salvation. But we can’t believe that he condescends to watch the soap opera of our daily trials and tribulations; so we purchase our own remedies for that. To ask him to deal with what troubles us each day is like asking a famous surgeon to put iodine on a scratch.” (Peterson, 44). Does this sometimes describe you? What has helped you out of this way of thinking?

2. Can you think of a time when you felt helpless or out of control? Describe how the Lord has helped you.

3. Write a portion of this psalm out in your own words, or as a prayer.

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