

“OUR HELP”

I. Introduction

- A. As you can see by the title that is affixed to this psalm, it is one of the Psalms of Ascents, a collection that includes Psalms 120-134.
 - 1. These were pilgrim songs that were sung by the Israelites as they traveled up to Jerusalem for the great feasts.
 - 2. They served the purpose of stirring the people up to praise the Lord.
 - 3. I thought that it would be appropriate for us to consider this psalm tonight for a couple of reasons.
 - 4. First, it is a good text for us to ponder as we look back upon the year that is past and as we look ahead to the year to come.
 - 5. It is the kind of passage that helps us to remember God’s faithfulness in the past, and in doing so it assures us that God will continue to be faithful in the future.

- B. The second reason why I decided to preach on this psalm tonight is that it serves as a good introduction to the sermon series that I will begin next Sunday night on the book of Esther.
 - 1. Esther tells the story of an amazing deliverance that God worked for his people in the days when they were under the rule of the Persian empire.
 - 2. Even though God’s name is never mentioned in the book of Esther, the story that unfolds there makes it abundantly clear that if the Lord had not been on Israel’s side, their enemies would have swallowed them up alive.

- C. Psalm 124 is a thanksgiving song, a song that celebrates how God has delivered his people from a serious threat.

1. The title tells us that it was written by David, and David's tenure as Israel's king provided a number of situations that could have been the original background to the composition of this psalm.
2. Its theme certainly reflects the political situation in the early years of David's reign, when the Philistines were such a threat to God's people.
3. David employs a number of vivid images in this psalm to emphasize the miraculous nature of the deliverance that God brought about for his people.
4. It is a psalm that encourages us to stop and think about the things that the Lord has done for us.
5. And this is something that we need to do, because it is all too easy for us to forget where we would be if the Lord had not been on our side.

II. Recalling Our Hopeless Plight

- A. The psalm begins by recalling the hopeless plight from which God delivered his people.
 1. The point driven home here is that the church's survival is not due to its intrinsic strength.
 2. The church owes its continued existence entirely to the Lord.
 3. There are so many examples of this across both biblical history and church history.
 4. We might think of the story of Joseph in Genesis, or of the Israelites at the time of the exodus, or of Israel at the time of the Babylonian conquest, or of the church in its first few centuries, or of the church in the modern world.

5. There really is no other way to account for the survival of the covenant people except for the fact that God is on our side.
- B. The same thing can be said about our salvation and perseverance as individual Christians.
1. If the Lord had not been on our side, we would have been utterly overwhelmed by the forces aligned against us.
 2. If the Lord had not intervened, we would still be dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked.
 3. We would still be following the course of this world.
 4. We would still be under the influence of the prince of the power of the air.
 5. And as Christians, if we were not being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, we would never make it.
- C. David highlights the hopelessness of our situation apart from God's gracious intervention by using two vivid images.
1. First, he compares our enemies to a terrifying monster, a creature so powerful that it could swallow us up in a single gulp.
 2. Imagine treading water out in the middle of the ocean, and all of a sudden you see an enormous fin emerge from the water and get closer and closer with every second.
 3. There is no hope.
 4. You know that you are doomed.
 5. Second, David compares Israel's plight to being caught in a flash flood or raging torrent.

6. We might think of the terrible tsunami that struck Southeast Asia nine years ago.
 7. There is absolutely nothing you can do if you are caught in that kind of disaster.
 8. There is nowhere to run; nowhere to hide.
 9. There is no escape.
 10. This is a picture of where we would stand were it not for the fact that God is on our side.
- D. Think about the significance of the phrase “on our side.”
1. This tells you that God is favorably disposed towards you.
 2. It assures you that he will always defend you.
 3. He will protect you from all ultimate harm.
 4. Even when troubles come into your life, they are under God’s sovereign control.
 5. He will ensure that they are turned to your spiritual good.
 6. This is why Paul says in Romans 8, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (v. 31)
- E. It is important to remember that this remains true in spite of the many ways in which we fail as Christians.
1. To paraphrase Thomas Boston, as it was not the goodness in you that caused God to be on your side in the first place, the evil in you will not cause him to cease being on your side.
 2. Don’t allow your sin to cause you to think that God is no longer on your side.

3. As Boston says, "The foundation of the promise stands sure in Christ, whatever alterations the frame and case of a believer's spirit do undergo." [*A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 95]
4. You hope is in Christ, not in your evaluation of your performance.

III. Celebrating Our Unlikely Deliverance

- A. In the next part of this psalm, David praises God for the unlikely deliverance that he has brought about for his people.
 1. David says, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth."
 2. And in order to help us see the greatness of what God has done for us, David employs another image.
 3. He likens our situation to that of a bird that has been caught in a fowler's snare.
 4. The more the bird struggles, the more will it get tangled up in the trap.
 5. It is a hopeless situation for the bird, a situation from which it cannot save itself.
- B. This is a picture of the plight that we all find ourselves in in our fallen estate.
 1. The more we try to save ourselves, the more we ensnare ourselves.
 2. The more we try to justify ourselves, the more condemnation we bring down upon ourselves.
 3. It is vital that we recognize this.

4. It is the only way we will understand why God receives all the glory for our salvation.
 5. As Calvin puts it, "He only truly attributes his deliverance to God, who acknowledges himself to have been lost before he was delivered."
- C. It is good for us to look back and reflect upon what God has saved us from.
1. Some Christians can do this by recalling the kind of life they were living prior to their conversion.
 2. For them, the difference between what they were before coming to Christ and what they are now is very clear.
 3. Other Christians may not have had that experience, but we can all look back and ponder what sort of things could have happened to us if the Lord had not been on our side.
 4. You did not know it at the time, but God's preserving grace has kept you from all sorts of perils.
 5. On top of that, the Bible makes it clear that every human being is born dead in sin.
 6. The fact that you are no longer in that hopeless situation is entirely due to God's gracious work in your life.
 7. He has set you free from the fowler's snare.
- D. Make sure that you take time to reflect upon this on a regular basis.
1. Do not take God's mercy for granted.
 2. Express your gratitude to God for the great things that he has done for you.
 3. Reflect upon the many pitfalls and trials that he has brought you through.

4. Consider how he has always sought after you and brought you back to himself when you have strayed.
5. Praise him for his mercy and his loving care.
6. He is the one who breaks the fowler's snare, not you.
7. Give God the credit for all of your escapes.

IV. Confessing Our Faith

- A. In the final verse of our psalm, David makes a confession of faith.
 1. He says, "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth."
 2. This was the phrase that was used at the beginning of worship in Calvin's liturgy for the church in Geneva.
 3. It is not very hard to understand why Calvin would have chosen to use this verse for that purpose.
 4. This is the most fundamental truth of the Christian faith.
 5. It is an excellent verse to commit to memory.
 6. Our only help, our only hope, comes from the Lord.
 7. And we will never be disappointed when we look to him as our source of help, because he is the one who made heaven and earth.
- B. Notice also that David says that our help is in the "name" of the Lord.
 1. Why do you think he said it that way?
 2. Why not just say, 'Our help is in the Lord'?

3. He certainly could have said it that way, but the Bible uses the concept of the 'name of the Lord' to emphasize the fact that God has made himself known to us.
 4. The God who is your help is not a distant God.
 5. He is not a God who remains cloaked in mystery.
 6. He is a God who has told us his name, a God whom we can truly know, a God who is worthy of our trust.
- C. The last verse of this psalm also shows us how remembering God's past faithfulness helps to stir up our faith in God in the present.
1. If we look back at verse 1, we see that the psalm begins by reflecting upon how the Lord *was* on our side in the past.
 2. Then, as we look at verse 8, we see that the psalm ends by declaring that the Lord *is* our source of help in the present.
 3. The more we remind ourselves of how God has been with us in the past, the more confident we will be that he will continue to be with us in the present and on into the future.
 4. He saved you when the jaws of death were bearing down upon you.
 5. He preserved you from the raging torrent that would have swept you away.
 6. He set you free from the fowler's snare.
 7. If he saved you from such hopeless situations in the past, you can be confident that he will save you from any trouble that lies ahead of you.

V. Conclusion

- A. As we move into a new year, it is good to remember that there are many hazards in the Christian life.

- B. There are many threats, many trials, many temptations, many troubles.
- C. But if the God who made heaven and earth is on your side, then you can be certain that you always live in perfect safety, no matter what.