

“Dwelling Among the Wicked”
Psalm 120
(Preached at Trinity, June 9, 2013)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Micah wrote of the glories of the New Covenant:
Micah 4:1-2 KJV - "But in the last days it shall come to pass, *that* the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. ² And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."
2. What a glorious thing to enter into the house of the Lord. But Micah draws our eyes beyond this current age to the glory of the age to come—heavenly Zion. Oh what glory it is to be pilgrims on our journey to the Celestial City.
3. Tonight we begin a series of 15 brief psalms each with the designation, “A Song of Degrees.” The word translated “degrees” in the KJV is from the Hebrew word, מַעְלָה *ma`alah* which literally refers to stair steps. Most translate this word “Ascent.” These are Songs of Ascent.
Apparently, they were songs used by pilgrims on their ascent to the Temple at Jerusalem three times a year for the various feasts—The Feast of Unleavened Bread or Passover; The Feast of Harvest or Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles.
Exodus 34:23-24 KJV - "Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. ²⁴ For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year."
4. This group of psalms were originally contained together in a separate self-contained hymnbook but later added to Book Four of the Psalter. These psalms begin in a distant land and move closer and closer to Jerusalem. In **Psalm 122** we read, "Let us go to the house of the LORD" and by the time we get to the last psalms in this series we find the priests, "servants of the LORD, Who serve by night in the house of the LORD!"
5. These psalms are significant to us because they chronicle the pilgrim’s journey to the house of God. We too are on a journey, a long pilgrimage full of dangers and toils, yet we press on with great joy.
6. **Psalm 120** may seem a strange beginning to this series. There is no mention of Jerusalem or any intention of going there. Instead we find the pilgrim in a strange land surrounded by opposition. This is our condition. We find ourselves in our journey and surrounded by those who do not know God. It would seem in **Psalm 120** that the wicked are all around him. We can identify with this. May God encourage our hearts tonight as we consider the experience of God’s pilgrims on their journey to the house of God.
We’ll look at it under two simple headings:
 - I. Distress in a foreign land
 - II. The hope of deliverance

- I. Distress in a foreign land –The psalmist describes the distress of this world in two ways
- A. First of all, he describes the moral condition of this world - this world is characterized by lies and deceits
- Verse 2** – Lying lips, deceitful tongue; **Verse 3** – false tongue
1. The lying tongue is characteristic of lost humanity
Psalm 58:3 – “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”
James 3:7 – “For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; *it is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”
 2. Of the list of seven sins that God particularly abhors two deal with the lying tongue
Proverbs 6:16-19 – “These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: ¹⁷ A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹ A false witness *that speaketh lies*, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”
 3. Spurgeon referred to the unbridled tongue as the “vehiculum Diaboli”, the chariot of the Devil, wherein he rides in triumph.”
 4. Our world is filled with lies and dishonesty
 - a. Politicians lie in order to bolster their position. Few really trust those who lead them
 - b. Businesses lie and misrepresent their products
 - c. Students cheat on their exams
 - d. Husbands and wives lie to one another
 - e. Scientists lie about the origin of the universe and the beginning of life. They lie about the environment. They twist the facts to suit their agenda.
 5. Deceitful tongues are full of venom and of great danger. Flattery is the sin of deception which God hates.
The flatterer seeks to win your trust while hiding murderous intentions.
Proverbs 29:5 KJV - “A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.”
Psalm 12:3 – “The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, *and* the tongue that speaketh proud things:”
Proverbs 26:28 – “A lying tongue hateth *those that are* afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.
 6. The psalmist reminds us of the world in which we live. But it must not characterize us
 - a. Church members can fall into hypocrisy
1 Timothy 4:1-2 - “ Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; ² Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron”

- b. ὑπόκρισις – the acting of a stage player
People professing to be Christians are actually dressing up like actors pretending to be something they are not
- c. Many a ministry has been brought down by these pretenders
- 7. Of course, our ultimate enemy of lies is Satan
 - a. He is called the father of lies
John 8:44 NAS - "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*; for he is a liar, and the father of lies."
 - b. He spreads lies and deception. He seeks to redefine marriage. He calls alcoholism a disease. He calls killing babies being pro-choice.
 - c. He is the author of false doctrine. He removes the word sin from the Gospel and calls into question the infallibility of God's Word.
- 8. We grow weary of the lies and deceit
Psalms 120:2 KJV - "Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, *and* from a deceitful tongue."
- B. Second, this world is characterized as a place of unending enmity
Psalms 120:6 KJV - "My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace."
 - 1. By our very nature our hearts are filled with hostility
 - a. This world has always been a place of war. War has destroyed great civilizations.
 - b. 39 million died during WWI, 108 million died during WWII
 - c. Look at the world today. It is no different than any other time in history. Nations still rise against nations. A large part of our nation's budget is set apart to fund our military.
 - d. This is because men rise up against men
 - 2. People like to see themselves as good people but this is far from the truth. Daily activities are often displays of hostility.
 - a. It can be seen on the roadways as drivers show a complete absence of courtesy.
 - b. Offices are often places of petty squabbles and intense competition
 - c. Families are often divided over insignificant issues. A loved one dies and families squabble over the inheritance.
 - d. Even churches have been places of conflict and division.
 - 3. The atrocities man has committed against man are unimaginable. The tortures and torments have been terrible. Persecution has been without limits. Wicked men have found great joy in the suffering of God's people.
 - 4. The warlike character of humanity finds its greatest expression in our warfare against God
Romans 8:7-8 KJV - "Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. ⁸ So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

Psalm 2:1-3 KJV - " Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, *saying*, ³ Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

5. Even God's pilgrims on the journey of grace have to guard their hearts against anger, envy, jealousy, and the competitive spirit that leads to a desire to dominate others.
6. The Meshech and Kedar of **Verse 5** are simply speaking of these people of hostility. Meshech was in the far north and Kedar in the south. He is speaking of the entirety of the pagan world. And he was a foreigner among them. He found no comfort with them. Peace was not to be found among them for their hearts were only filled with war.
7. Notice the hostility was not the fault of the righteous man

Psalm 120:7-1 KJV - " *I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.* "

Romans 12:18 NAU - " If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

Matthew 5:9 NAU - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

8. The greatest picture of this was Jesus. He came speaking peace and yet they hated Him. This should characterized us as well.

C. God's people grow weary on this pilgrim journey

1. The wickedness seems to know no bounds
2. The hatred and hostility causes us great grief

How Noah must have wept during his days building the ark

2 Peter 2:4-9 NAU - "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; ⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶ and *if* He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly *lives* thereafter; ⁷ and *if* He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men ⁸ (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds), ⁹ *then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,"

II. The hope of deliverance

A. The psalmist cries out in distress. The pilgrim's lips were filled with prayer
Verse 1 - "In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me."

1. God's people are a praying people. It is one of the chief elements of faith
We go to God trusting Him with our life.
2. And He hears - This has been a common theme in the Psalter

Psalm 3:4 KJV - "I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill."

Psalm 22:21 KJV - "Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me "

Psalm 34:4 KJV - "I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears."

Psalm 34:17 KJV - "*The righteous cry*, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles."

Psalm 66:19 KJV - "verily God hath heard *me*; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer."

Psalm 118:21 KJV - "I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation."

3. This is the testimony of all who follow God – “He hears my prayers.”
It was the testimony of Christ

John 11:41 KJV - "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me."

4. What comfort as we go through the trials of life. What amazement that the God of glory would turn His ear towards us. What wonder that He cares for us as His dear children and while we are on our journey to Zion He provides richly for us.

B. God delivers us from the wickedness of this world

Psalm 120:1 KJV - "In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me."

1. This has been the testimony of God’s people from the beginning.
Distress, prayer, deliverance
2. The only deliverance from the lies of this world is Jesus Christ.
Satan is the father of lies – Jesus is the truth. He delivers those who cry out to Him.
"In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me."
3. The only deliverance from the hostility of this world is Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. In a world of strife Jesus is our peace.

C. In the end God will make all things right. He will bring perfect judgment

1. The psalmist asks the question – what shall be the reward for the lying tongue?
Psalm 120:3 KJV - "What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?"
 - a. Surely it must be a wonderful reward full of delights since human beings give themselves so tirelessly to the pursuit. Surely there will be great profit for the lying tongue. But there is none!
 - b. The psalmist describes a fitting punishment
Psalm 120:4 KJV - "Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper."
2. It isn’t the retaliation of the righteous. Vengeance belongs to God
3. Like the flaming arrows they have shot at others it will return upon them with burning coals.
Romans 12:19-20 KJV - "Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

James 3:6 KJV - "And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

Revelation 21:8 KJV - " But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone"

Conclusion:

1. **Psalm 120** is the testimony of our life as the pilgrims of God
We live in a world of lies and deception. We live in a world of hostility. But we are not of this world.
2 Corinthians 6:17 KJV - "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you,"
2. We are marching to our eternal home. We are heading to the house of God. Although we grow weary of the wickedness of this world we can rest assured of His deliverance.
Psalm 120:1-2 KJV - "In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me. ²
Deliver my soul, O LORD"
3. May God grant us to live in holiness as we continue our journey.
1 Peter 2:11 KJV - "Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul"