

# The Upward Journey Home

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**Bible Verse:** Psalm 120-134  
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One of the privileges of being a pastor as opposed to a lecturer on theological themes is you have a unique privilege and a unique relationship with your audience. A pastor's ministry should not sound like a theological set of lectures over the course of time because there's a relational dynamic to a pastor and his congregation that needs to influence the things that he says and the way that he says them, and tonight we have just a perfect opportunity to be able to do some things in that vein, you might say. The reality of preaching and the reality of life right now for many of you is that there are a lot of bruised hearts right now in the life of our congregation. In one sense, that's okay. You know, life is hard, life is difficult, life casts us down and breaks our heart in many different ways and it's a privilege for us to come together around God's word and to be able to allow the Lord to apply the healing balm of his word by the precious ministry of the Holy Spirit to our hearts to help us in these times, and as a pastor, you're just kind of a vehicle, just kind of as John MacArthur says, you're just a waiter bringing the meal for other people to eat that the Lord has prepared for us in his word. So I want to be mindful tonight of bruised hearts in our midst and bruised hearts in those that will hear this message at a later time, and it's just a perfect text that we're coming to and I invite you to turn to Psalm 120 and what we're doing tonight is a kind of message that I really enjoy preaching; it's a broad overview kind of message to help you see how different parts of Scripture fit together and I think that when we're done, that some of the bruises might just be softened a little bit by the nature of what God's word has for us.

We come to Psalm 120 but in a broader sense we're coming to a whole series of Psalms, a series of 15 Psalms actually because Psalm 120 begins a series of 15 Psalms that are known as the Songs of Ascent, a-s-c-e-n-t, or the Psalms of Ascent. And all of these Psalms, 120-134, are very brief, just a handful of verses except for Psalm 132, and in each Psalm there tends to be a focus on one single theme, and yet as you read through these Psalms collectively, you find that there is a development and there is a repetition over the course of the Psalms. And so what I want to do is this, I'm not going to read all 15, although that would probably be a good idea. We did read Psalm 119 on a Sunday morning, didn't we? But what I want to do is just read the first three Psalms to kind of set the tone for us, get us into God's word and then be able to develop the approach that we want to take here this evening.

Psalm 120:1, and you see that these Psalms start with the psalmist writing with his own bruised heart, and I find that greatly comforting as we come to Scripture. It doesn't stand aloof from us in our sorrows, it enters deeply and intimately into them. Psalm 120,

1 In my trouble I cried to the LORD, And He answered me. 2 Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, From a deceitful tongue. 3 What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, You deceitful tongue? 4 Sharp arrows of the warrior, With the burning coals of the broom tree. 5 Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech, For I dwell among the tents of Kedar! 6 Too long has my soul had its dwelling With those who hate peace. 7 I am for peace, but when I speak, They are for war.

Psalm 121,

1 I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come? 2 My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. 3 He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber. 4 Behold, He who keeps Israel Will neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade on your right hand. 6 The sun will not smite you by day, Nor the moon by night. 7 The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul. 8 The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in From this time forth and forever.

Then Psalm 122,

1 I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." 2 Our feet are standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem, 3 Jerusalem, that is built As a city that is compact together; 4 To which the tribes go up, even the tribes of the LORD An ordinance for Israel To give thanks to the name of the LORD. 5 For there thrones were set for judgment, The thrones of the house of David. 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. 7 "May peace be within your walls, And prosperity within your palaces." 8 For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I will now say, "May peace be within you." 9 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.

And I think maybe even just with, you know, just an initial reading when you weren't really prepared for it, you can see differences in tones in these three Psalms. The first Psalm, Psalm 120, has kind of a dark theme to it. There's trouble and he's dealing with deceitful enemies, and he's away from home and he wants peace but those that are around him, they want war, and so there's this turbulent atmosphere to the first of these three Psalms. That tone immediately changes as you read Psalm 121, doesn't it? Immediately you see him turning to the Lord and saying in verse 2, "My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth." And he ends it on talking about the protection of the Lord in verse 7. So he goes from the turbulent sense to a trusting sense in the second Psalm, and then the third Psalm, you might say, is a little bit of the outcome of that. There's this

atmosphere of peace and wellness and harmony that marks that Psalm. So the Psalms are united by the inscription, "A Song of Ascents," each one of them have that inscription to them, but something is going on there and that something is repeated as you read through the other 12 Psalms in consecutive order. And so something's happening here as we read these Psalms together. It's a wonderful thing to see.

Now let me just give you a little bit of background to the Songs of Ascent and then we'll go into this in greater detail. What's happening here is this, is that most commentators believe that Jewish pilgrims sang these songs, these 15 Psalms, as they went up to Jerusalem for the three annual feasts, and they had to go up to Jerusalem, they had to ascend up because Jerusalem sits at over 2,500 feet in elevation. And so you go, I haven't been there but you go up to Jerusalem, you ascend upward. And as you read through these Psalms, there's a progression in them, a geographic progression, you might say. The Psalms begin far away from Jerusalem. When I say the Psalms, these 15 that we're considering here this evening. So in Psalm 120:5 he says, "Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech, For I dwell among the tents of Kedar!" He's far away from Jerusalem, as we'll see next week. But by the time you reach Psalm 134, they have arrived at the temple and look at Psalm 134:1 with me. He says, "Behold, bless the LORD, all servants of the LORD, Who serve by night in the house of the LORD!" He's at the house of the Lord now. He's gone from far away and now he's gone up to Jerusalem, he's at the temple, he's near. And what we find, just as we walk through these Psalms together, is that we see that there is a thread that is running through all of these Psalms and connecting them all together.

Now we have received the Psalms in our English Bibles in this arrangement and the 15 Psalms seem to be divided into an obvious grouping, five groups of three each, and within those groups of three or those triad of Psalms, five triads of Psalms – stay with me here because it's really important to grasping the essence of what's going on. The first Psalm of each triad like Psalm 120, the first Psalm of each triad is describing a problem that the psalmist is facing. The second Psalm of each triad is describing the protection of God. There is problem and then there is protection, and then the third Psalm in each triad is resting in the peace that the protection of God brings. So if you want to think about this in terms of an alliterated form that makes it easy to remember, you go from problem to protection to peace. Problem to protection to peace, and I'm going to show you this in very much an overview satellite perspective through all 15 Psalms here this evening. We're going to go through all 15 Psalms quickly and then draw some conclusions that have direct import for those of us that are here tonight with bruised and broken and discouraged hearts. This is a time of comfort from the Lord for us here this evening and it's a great privilege to be a pastor in order to bring the comfort of God to the people of God, and so it's with a great sense of anticipation that we go into this.

So how we're going to structure tonight's message is this: we're going to do it in five sections corresponding to those five triads of Psalms, and we're going to see these patterns. And here's what I want you to look for and what to anticipate and what we want to do. Often, especially in the Psalms, Scriptures use repetition in order to teach us. They use repetition in order to bring emphasis to what they are saying. And so as we look at

these 15 Psalms over time, we're going to see five emphases on problems, five emphases on protection, the protection of God, and five emphases on the peace that that brings. And so this repetition is designed to teach us, to instruct us. It's designed for us to enhance our meditation in a way that causes these things to go deeply into our hearts. In the midst of our trials, God does not leave us to simply be tossed about by the tempest, cast onto one shore of a problem and then the tide goes out and brings another one back in and we're just left responding helplessly to that. No, that's not the Christian life. That's not the life of faith at all. God has given us understanding and as the Holy Spirit helps us grasp these things, it brings comfort and strength to our hearts and heals those bruises that for some of us are very very raw even as we sit here this evening. There's no shame in admitting that. There's no shame in acknowledging that. The only way actually that we can find the help of God is when we bring our problems honestly before him and seek the help that he has promised to give us in Christ.

So we're going to do this in triads here and the first triad, if you're taking notes, I'm 20 some years in a ministry, 25 years in a ministry, and if I went back and took the preaching classes again, I would flunk them because I don't do it the way that they always taught us to do, and that's alright. So the clever title, the clever point for point number 1 is this: the first triad, Psalms 120-122. Isn't that clever? Isn't that catchy? Doesn't that just grab your attention and make you long for more? No, it doesn't but it communicates and it does what I want it to do for this evening so that's okay.

The first triad of Psalms 120-122 remembering that we're looking for these recurring themes of problem, protection and peace. Problem, protection and peace. And so Psalm 120 begins the whole series of these 15 Psalms with the psalmist in trouble. He is troubled in his heart and the opening theme of these 15 Psalms is trouble so that he says in verse 1 there, we read it earlier, Psalm 120:1, he said, "In my trouble I cried to the LORD, And He answered me. Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, From a deceitful tongue." And in verse 7, you see that there is not resolution for him in this Psalm standing alone, he says, "I am for peace but when I speak, they are for war." And so the Psalms open up in a troubled theme. Well, given the way that we framed things here this evening, that's very encouraging to us. We're assuming that many of you are in the midst of troubled times, of tumultuous times and that your soul is burdened and I know what this is like. You long for comfort and it just doesn't seem to come. It's been hard, it's been difficult and the comfort does not seem to readily come and we see that here in Psalm 120.

Now as you read on in Psalm 121, there is this promise that comes in the midst of the trouble. There is this provision of the guarantee of God that he is with us, and that's meant to stand alone as the next meditation. We've recognized the trouble and now right alongside the meditation on trouble is this meditation on the protection of God. Look at the first two verses of Psalm 121. He says, "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth." And he goes on in verses 7 and 8, he says, "The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul. The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in From this time forth and forever." There's not a Selah there. The end of this Psalm is a

perfect time for us to pause and meditate and reflect on what it is that we're seeing here as we're reading through these Scriptures in a consecutive way, which is the way the Psalms should be read. We just saw stated for us this troubled soul and you can just feel the surging up and down in his soul and the restlessness because of his location and the trouble that's around him, and what follows immediately is there is this protection promised from God. Take heart, in other words, in your trouble. The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever.

So the troubled soul is met with the promise of God and the result of that is a result, a finding of comfort and peace. Look at Psalm 122:6 as the Psalmist says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May they prosper who love you. May peace be within your walls, And prosperity within your palaces.' For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I will now say, 'May peace be within you.' For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good." We remember as we say these things, we remember as we step into the pulpit and as we hear the word of God here, we're always remembering that we are hearing the word of God, the very word of God. This is God's word, not the word of man. He used human instruments to write it, there's a human dimension to the Scriptures, but ultimately this is the word of God, inerrant, accurate in everything that it says, and communicating what God has to say to his people.

So as we come together tonight with our troubled and broken hearts, what do we find? We find in this first Psalm of this first triad, we find the liberty given to us by God to express our troubles honestly before him, and as we do that, the Scriptures immediately meet our troubled hearts and breathe into us this calming word that says the Lord will protect you, the Lord will guard you. He will not only guard you now, he will guard you your going and your coming out from this time forth and forever. You say, "Ah, that's a perspective I need. That's a perspective that lifts my chin up and let's me look above. This gets my head above water. Whereas I felt that I was drowning, now my head is above water and at least I can breathe in a few breaths of fresh air for my soul." Then having brought that promise of protection to us, you see the result is peace, wellness, harmony of soul, that in the midst of the trouble there is peace because the Lord has promised to protect me in the midst of it. This is meant for us to be appropriated individually. This isn't simply some kind of broad corporate thing. This is for you individually to lay hold of and to find your rest in. This is where the roots of your heart are to go to find the moisture that nourishes them and keeps the leaves of your soul green and vibrant rather than dry and shriveled because of it all.

So we see problem, protection and peace in the first triad. Now if you've never studied the Psalms of Ascent from this perspective, you might be a little bit skeptical to say, "You mean to tell me that this is repeated five times in this series and this pattern is repeated like this and you can actually shown that from Scripture?" Well, I am so glad that you asked. I really am. I really am because it's right there on the surface for everyone to see and so let's go to the second triad. The second triad, Psalms 123 to 125, and what do we find when we look at it with this sense of understanding? In Psalm 123, you find the theme of problems being renewed in an undeniable way.

Look at verses 3 and 4. We're going to look at all of these Psalms individually over the next several weeks and so we're just taking an overview now. In verse 3 of Psalm 123 he says,

3 Be gracious to us, O LORD, be gracious to us, For we are greatly filled with contempt. 4 Our soul is greatly filled With the scoffing of those who are at ease, And with the contempt of the proud.

You know, most of us have been on the receiving end of contempt, of people treating us badly, people in authority, at the job, at school, and you know, sometimes even with our families, you know, people that treat us harshly, treat us badly, and it weighs on us. You know, and you have this sense in your heart, "You know, I want to be at peace with you. I want to serve you. I want to minister to you." But what you get instead are these harsh rejections that just rip at the tender heart of a true Christian. This is just very very difficult, one of the most difficult things in all of spiritual life, in my humble opinion, is to walk through that and to have people that are close to you, people even within your own family, your own blood relations treating you this way and it hurts. It hurts and it weighs on you. Even in marriages, I know that you know that this happens. And parent and child relationships and it's just a wretched thing to go through and you go to the Lord and you say, "O God, be gracious to me because I'm filled with the contempt of those who are opposing me. I have a problem here and it hurts and I'm bruised."

And what does Scripture do as you continue on in the triad? Well, Psalm 124 answers with the protection of God once again. Look at verse 6 in Psalm 124:6 where it says,

6 Blessed be the LORD, Who has not given us to be torn by their teeth. 7 Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper; The snare is broken and we have escaped. 8 Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.

He made heaven and earth. He's promised to protect us and therefore it can be well with my soul. You see the protection of God promised. Even though it seems like you are trapped in the jaws of a trap that you can't get out of on your own, Psalm 124, using the metaphor, says, "My soul's been liberated. I've been set free. I've escaped from that because God has provided help to me." And he emphasizes God's role as Creator indicating the vastness of his power. He's sovereign over all of his creation. If he made heaven and earth, then it's obvious that he is sovereign over everything that happens within those realms. And because he's sovereign over it, it means that he can thwart the designs of the wicked, it means that he has the ability to comfort the hearts of his people, and he has the ability and the desire and the willingness and the promise to help us in the midst of those problems.

He promises to protect us and because he is the Creator, he has the ability to deliver on the promise. You know, I could make a promise to you and I'm going to protect you in all of your problems and I might mean it sincerely but it's not really going to be of any comfort to you. I don't know the inner workings of your heart. I don't know the situations

of life that you face. And I certainly don't have sovereign control over the people that are around you. You know, I could make that promise and it's a nice sentiment but there's a limit to the comfort that brings because you intuitively know that I don't have the power to deliver on a complete deliverance of everything, right? Well, with God it's not like that. He's the sovereign Creator of heaven and earth and when he says, "I will help you. I will be with you."

Let's look at Isaiah 41:10. This is a verse you really need to know if you don't already, one of the first verses that I memorized as a Christian based on a card that somebody gave me very early in my Christian life and I'm grateful to that friend who did so because it really imprinted this verse on my mind and I come back to it again and again. Isaiah 41:10 says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." Do you see the repetition there? Surely I'll do this. Surely I will. I will strengthen you. I will uphold you. I am with you. And it reminds me of Psalm 23:4, "I fear no evil for You are with me." So there is just this promise of the protection of God that the believer enjoys and can draw upon at any time, and the Songs of Ascent are teaching us by their repetition to respond to life this way.

Before I go into that, let's just see the answer of peace, the response of faith, you might say, in Psalm 125 as he speaks of the peace that the protection of God provides to his soul. He says, let's look at verse 1,

1 Those who trust in the LORD Are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever. 2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem, So the LORD surrounds His people From this time forth and forever.

And what's the conclusion of that? Verse 4,

4 Do good, O LORD, to those who are good And to those who are upright in their hearts. 5 But as for those who turn aside to their crooked ways, The LORD will lead them away with the doers of iniquity. Peace be upon Israel.

And so we have the problem in Psalm 123, we have this protection promised by God in 124, and the concluding theme of this second triad is the theme of peace, that sense of wellness. It's going to be alright. This hurts but the Lord is with me. Lord cares for me. The Lord loves me. The Lord will bring good out of this and therefore we find comfort for our souls in the midst of that.

So we see it: problem, protection and peace. And what this is doing is it's conditioning your heart to think in these terms, to start to process life in this way, and whatever the hardship might be, to have this sense that you can kind of step back from it and say, "Okay, this is a problem, this is a hardship, this is a difficulty, this is trial, this is adversity that I am in and that I am experiencing." And then you immediately link that in your mind and what the response of faith is as we're instructed out of the Songs of Ascent, it

says, "Ah, but there is the protection of God in this and I need to call those things to mind. I need to remember what the Lord has promised to me as one of his children. He's promised His protection. I'm not alone in this. This problem is not the final outcome of my life. This is not the final outcome of my soul because the Lord's protection is with me. I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, 'Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest.'" You say, "Well, I'm heavy-laden. I'm troubled of heart. I have problems. Lord, I come to You." And he says, "Yes, that's what you're supposed to do, My child." You come to the Lord and you pour out your heart before him and he promises to give you a refuge of protection and his love and care and concern is intimate, far more than your closest friend, far more than the most beloved spouse, far more than anyone on earth. There is this sympathetic high priest that we come to who loved us so much, dealt with our problem of sin with the protection of his shed blood on the cross and brought peace to our souls. Do you see it? This is the way God operates. This is how good he is to his people. So, "Yes, I have a problem but, ah," you say to your heart, you immediately say to your heart, "I have a problem but that's not the end of the story. That's not all-encompassing because there's this whole unseen dimension of the protection of God. He is with me. Okay, I can make it through another day. There's rest for my soul in that."

Well, let's look at the third triad, Psalms 126 to 128. Psalm 126 remembers a time of weeping that had taken place in the past. And again, we'll look at all of these things individually. So it says in verse 5, it recognizes the reality of problems, of trials, of adversity and it says,

5 Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. 6 He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Right now you're sowing sorrow and life is nothing but a sowing of tears in your life, licking your wounds, as it were, looking down at the bruises on your soul and it's like that for you, Scripture says remember in that time that there's a harvest of joy that comes when you're sowing seed like that in your life. It's a great promise to recognize.

So we see the theme of problem in Psalm 126. Psalm 127 responds with, again, the protection of God. Look at Psalm 127, the first two verses where the Scriptures say this,

1 Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain. 2 It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.

Even when you are unconscious in our slumber, the Lord is giving to you, he is blessing you, he is watching over you. So it says in verse 5, "How blessed is the man," speaking of the man who has a quiver full of children, but there is blessing that is given here and pronounced in Psalm 127, the protection of God, and the implication is in those opening verses is the Lord is building your house. The Lord is guarding your city. He is watching

over you even when you sleep. And so while, yes, there is this recurring theme of sorrow and tears in the life of the earnest tender believer, throughout all of it there is this promise of the Lord's protection that is taking place. He is actively doing this. He is doing this even if your prayers are faltering. He is doing this even, Christian, he does this for us even when our prayers are weak. And it reminds me of some things that we said when we were looking at the blood of Christ a few weeks ago, talking about that and talking about the power of the blood as our advocate before the throne, and how Christ serves us, and how Christ prays for us even now, and he intercedes for us before the throne. He represents us before God. You know, if you are a Christian, your name is written on, I'm speaking metaphorically here, your name is written like the stones of Israel were written on the breast piece of the high priest in Israel, and your name is written and your name is present before the throne of God because Christ loves you so much and represents you there. And the blood does that for us and my point is this, is that just because you are unable to pray, just because you are so troubled that you don't know how to speak, understand and rejoice in this: Christ is not limited by the weakness of your faith. The blood is not restricted by your inability to articulate what's on your heart. The blood speaks freely. Christ speaks freely on your behalf before the Father. Christ is reigning over you, Christ is with you and he is not limited by the weakness of your faith. His protection over you is unbounded by the illimitable greatness of his illimitable omnipotence.

That's wonderfully encouraging to know that there is a chest that we can lean on, that we can sob into and know that the everlasting arms embrace us in that and do not push us away because that's what God does for us. He protects us and he protects us because he cares for us. Isn't that what 1 Peter 5 says, casting all your anxiety upon him because, what? He cares for you, and because he cares for you, he protects you. In all of the chaos of life, in all of the inbound missiles seeming to land on you and raining down upon you, there is an iron guard of God over your life protecting you in the midst of it without fail.

So there's weeping but there's protection and what does Psalm 128 do then? It rests in the peace of the protection of God. The peace that this brings. Psalm 128:1,

1 How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways.

You are the privileged recipient of divine favor if you fear the Lord. God is blessing you even in the midst of the problem and you can enter into the joy and the peace of that because you put your faith in him and in his promises to protect you. So, of course if a sovereign God is watching over you, of course if a sovereign God is protecting you, then you're in a position of blessing. And so the peace is found in verses 5 and 6.

5 The LORD bless you from Zion, And may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. 6 Indeed, may you see your children's children. [Here it is again] Peace be upon Israel!

The problem, the protection and the peace.

Well, let's look at the fourth triad, Psalm 129-131. The fourth triad, Psalms 129-131. Now at this point, someone that's a little bit impatient might say, "Okay, I get the point here. I understand what's happening here. Problem, protection, peace. I've got it." That's good if you do but because we are slow to learn and we are slow to believe, because our faith is weak and we often stumble along the way, you would think that three times would be enough to establish this pattern but it's not. The Lord puts it in five times in order to convey the lesson to us by its repetition and to set it more deeply in our hearts than it would be if he had just stopped with three of these triads.

So we come to the fourth triad, Psalm 129, and by now you know what pattern to anticipate and you're looking for it at this point as you go through, and you're not disappointed, you find it right from the start. So Psalm 129 opens up with a statement, a recognition of problem. It says in verses 1 and 2,

1 "Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up," Let Israel now say, 2 "Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up; Yet they have not prevailed against me.

"I have had repeated," the psalmist says, "I have had repeated persecution and yet here I am, I still stand." And so you see persecution is there. In verse 5 it says,

5 May all who hate Zion Be put to shame and turned backward;

There is this opposition, there is this visceral hatred of the people of God that is being addressed here, and so you see the problem being stated once again. And with that, in Psalm 130 you're saying, "There must be something about protection in here someplace in this Psalm," and you're not disappointed. In Psalm 130:7-8 it says,

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is lovingkindness, And with Him is abundant redemption. 8 And He will redeem Israel From all his iniquities.

Yes, there is a problem but there is the loyal love of God in the midst of it and with him there is abundant deliverance in the midst of these things.

So what's the result of that? The result of that, of course, is peace. It's peaceful rest and you find that in Psalm 131 in vivid, sweet language and such a great poetic expression of peace. He says in verses 2 and 3 of Psalm 131,

2 Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; Like a weaned child rests against his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me. 3 O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever.

Isn't it one of the most sweet privileges to hold an infant, hold your baby, and after they've fed they just fall into that deep sleep and their head just kind of rests on you and you just see the trust and the tranquility that is on their face as they're sleeping on your

shoulder and you look down and say, "That child doesn't have a care in the world." Well, that's the picture that the psalmist is giving here. He's saying, "That's what my soul is like. I have fed on," so to speak, "I have fed on the protection and the promises of God. I have meditated on them. I believe them. I trust in them. I'm confident in that and as a result of that, I can put my head down and there is this rest that comes over my soul that is just like an infant on his mother's shoulder resting after being well fed, content and able to sleep because he's been provided for and he knows that he enjoys his mother's protection."

So what is there to keep him awake at night? That's the picture that's brought to us. That's the place that the Spirit of God would lead your soul even in the midst of your problems, even in the most severe adversity, the most irreversible of problems. Beloved, and I've emphasized this over the course of my ministry, haven't always lived it out the way that I wish that I had, but my shortcomings in living it out do not diminish the truthfulness of it. What I'm about to say is that your circumstances do not have to change in order for you to enjoy this peace and the reason for that, the obvious reason for that is that your circumstances do not have to change in order for God to exercise his protective care over you. The peace comes not from the problems changing, this series of Psalms assumes that the problems will be there. This assumes that life will go on, and as we come to the end of life, oh, we're facing this sadness in our own family with my dear mother, not her but her friend, and just seeing the decline that comes at the end of life and the physical decline that just accompanies old age and the approach of death. And that's not going to change. That circumstance just doesn't reverse itself at the age of 90 or whenever your health starts to fail, and so it can't be or if it's a loved one that we've lost and we've buried, obviously it doesn't change and the question that ultimately we have to come to, does that mean that my peace in the Lord is over? Does that mean that I now must live the rest of my life trapped in this dungeon of despair and sorrow and inconsolable grief? Is that what the Lord has left me to all the days of my life without relief?

Well, that doesn't fit in the course of these Psalms, does it, because the problems are never the end, these Psalms carry us in, it's like a tide carrying us on to the shore of the protection of God. We say, "Now, wait, wait, wait, this isn't the end of it. The circumstances might change but God's protection is the same. He is still with me. He has always been with me and I can rest in that. And, no, I won't get my loved one back, they're gone in an earthly sense forever. I'm not getting them back but surely the Lord is with me. Surely His right hand will uphold me. And surely my soul can find rest in Him in this." This is the way that we are to learn to walk through life and eventually, you know, we stumble along the way, we get it and we lose it, we lose sight of it, we get it back, we forget again, we go back to it, but through all of your weakness and stumbling, beloved, the Holy Spirit is doing something in you, he's cultivating in you a dependence that recognizes how much you need the Lord's help with you, it prunes you of your pride and your arrogance and your self-sufficiency, and that broken heart becomes the means by which God teaches you his comfort and the directness of his care for your soul and that is a precious place to be. And once you grasp that and you can come back to it again and again, over time it cultivates a deeper sense of peace and contentment and rest in your heart and that's what these Psalms are teaching us to do. No wonder, no wonder the

pilgrims were singing on their way up to Jerusalem. They were going to worship God and they were celebrating and remembering his protection and the peace that he brings in the midst of their adversity.

Well, let's look quickly at the last triad, the fifth triad, Psalms 132-134. It's possible that I skipped over here, but I don't think I did. Psalm 132 maintains the pattern of opening the triad with problems, with trials and adversity. Look at verse 1,

1 Remember, O LORD, on David's behalf, All his affliction... 10 For the sake of David Your servant, Do not turn away the face of Your anointed.

In other words, it's a negative way of saying, "Lord, be faithful to Your promise to me. Don't turn away from me but rather fulfill Your promise of protection.

Psalm 133, what does it say? It says speaking about the unity that brothers of the faith have together and in verse 3 it says,

3 It is like the dew of Hermon Coming down upon the mountains of Zion;  
For there the LORD commanded the blessing life forever.

In the midst of the affliction is commanding blessings to come out of them. Then with the blessing, the protection, Psalm 134 concludes this triad, the fifth triad, and concludes the whole series of the Psalms of Ascent with blessing. This is so sweet. It is so precious. It's the culmination of everything that the prior 14 Psalms have been trying to inculcate into our hearts. Psalm 134:1,

1 Behold, bless the LORD, all servants of the LORD, Who serve by night  
in the house of the LORD! 2 Lift up your hands to the sanctuary And bless  
the LORD. 3 May the LORD bless you from Zion, He who made heaven  
and earth.

There is that theme again of God being the Creator. May the one who has all sovereign power command blessing upon you and keep you in the wellness of his protection.

So how does this pattern of problem, protection and peace help us as we go out here this evening? Well, first of all, it's going to keep us oriented as we study these 15 Psalms consecutively in the weeks to come, we must remember as we go through these that each Psalm is not a stand-alone entity, that there's connection to them and we always want to connect them to the overall themes of problem, protection and peace that are being communicated to us and taught to us. But I think that beyond that hermeneutical interpretive help, this does something even more transparent and transcendent. Repetition is the key to learning and what I want to say to you tonight, what I want to suggest to you is that this kind of sanctified repetition is the key to your spiritual growth. The key to your spiritual growth. The repetition of the theme of problems in these 15 Psalms teaches us something very very important that you need to grasp ahold of. Beloved, recurring adversity is to be expected in the Christian life. Trouble and difficulty are not to be

something that is viewed as something alien to our expected spiritual experience. Adversity comes with the territory. Adversity comes with being on the receiving end of the onslaughts of Satan. Adversity comes with living in a fallen world. Adversity comes with you still having remnants of your sinful nature inside you. Temptation and trials are to be expected and that is shown and taught to us by the recurring themes of problems that we see in these 15 Psalms.

And how does that help you? You know, there was a time in life where I might have thought, "Well, that's not helpful at all. That's rather discouraging. You're telling me that I'm going to have more adversity coming in addition to the ones that I have right now." Well, it really does help. It gives you a sense of mature perspective that can help you from falling into despair when adversity hits. Yes, you are in a time of adversity. Yes, it has bruised you and hurt you deeply and I truly genuinely sympathize with you and pray for you in the midst of that. But that is not the end of the story. We can see from this pattern in the Psalms of Ascent that God does not intend to harm us when he sends that adversity to us. It could never be, that could never be the right conclusion. God does not intend those problems to harm us when they come into our lives, rather, beloved – watch this, this is really really really important – rather the recurring problems are designed to drive us again and again and again to the protection of God that he has for his children. And each new adversity weans us a little bit more from our self-sufficiency, weans us from our love of this world, weans us from the love of self, weans us from the fear of man and casts us upon the pillow of the protection of God.

We find peace as we drink from that ever-flowing stream and over time, beloved, in the midst of all of the adversity, you're learning something very very important. In your spiritual life experience, you are learning something that we all need to grasp very deeply. This earth is not our home. This earth is not our home. It could never be for us. Our home is in another dimension, it's in another realm. Our home, our home is in heaven. Our home is where the lover of our soul is. Our home is with Christ, not in this earth. God gives us temporal blessings here, we enjoy so many things here, we enjoy so many relationships and all of that, but this isn't home. It couldn't be home until I'm with my Lord, until I'm with my Savior, until I'm absent from the body and present with the Lord. Scripture says to us that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. This is just preparatory for the grand welcome, the grand entrance when the angels usher us into the presence of Christ. Scripture tells us explicitly in Hebrews 13, here we have no lasting city but we are seeking the city which is to come.

So through the multiplied problems and the recurring protection that God gives us and the peace that that brings, and the cycle of that repeats itself. I'm in a position of peace, and then new adversity hits that knocks me off my step and I go back to the protection of God again, and experience his peace again. The process, the recurring process of that is teaching you, it is weaning you from this world so that your heart would be set on your home that is in heaven and that's what God wants you, that's where God wants your heart to be. Not rooted in this earth, not loving this world but anticipating the hope that has been set before you.

So my dear sister, my dear brother, has affliction sorely wounded you here this evening? Remember the Songs of the pilgrims. In the midst of the problems, God gives very real protection that yields to very real peace. And my brother and sister in Christ, despite all appearances to the contrary in your life right now tonight perhaps, despite all of your feelings to the contrary, all is well. Your Lord is leading you on an upward journey home. The pilgrims in the Old Testament were going up to the physical city of Jerusalem. We are on an even greater journey, we're on a greater upward journey that leads us to our home in heaven where Christ is and where one day he will welcome us with his everlasting arms.

Let's pray together.

*God, I pray for these dear beloved friends in front of me and those that will hear in the future on later media. I pray, Father, that in the midst of the problems, the sorrows of life, that Your protection and Your promises of care for us would be swift to fill their hearts. May Your Spirit bring multiplied Scriptures to mind that are a blessing and a comfort and a respite in the midst of it all. And Father, as that happens, may it yield to a greater sense of inner peace, that subjective sense of well being that comes from resting our head on the pillow of the grace of God. And as we rest our head on that pillow, O God, may You give us that sense of comfort and contentment that the weaned child has on its mother's chest, content knowing that there is One bigger and greater than us that holds us, One bigger and greater than us that loves us, One bigger and greater than us that will always protect us and exercise everything that is necessary to ensure our well being so that everything works together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Father, for those that may be outside of those promises because they are outside of Christ, I pray that Your Spirit would teach them that a blood atonement has been made for sinners and that they would flee in repentant faith to Christ and enter into this great wonder of the blessing that belongs to those who fear the Lord our God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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