

“Help From Above”
Psalm 21
(Preached at Trinity, June 16, 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. Where do you turn during times of difficulty? This can be a fearful world. The word “fear” is found over 300 times in the Bible; we find the word “afraid” 164 times. Are you fearful? Do you worry? Are you sometimes gripped by anxiety? Are you faced with decisions that seem overwhelming? Where do you turn?
Psalm 121:2 - "My help *cometh* from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."
2. One of my favorite passages in the Bible comes from the lips of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
Daniel 3:14-18 NAU - "Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ¹⁵ "Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, *very well*. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" ¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷ "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ "But *even* if *He* does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."
3. As the psalmist continues his ascent to God’s holy Temple he focuses his eyes upward. This psalm is the second of the Psalms of Ascent – psalms sung by pilgrims making their journey to Jerusalem for their three annual feasts. Each psalm brings them closer to the Holy City. We can see the ascent from the previous psalm.
 - A. In **Psalm 120** we find the distress and weariness of the pilgrim dwelling in a world of evil. He cries out to God for deliverance.
 - B. But now in **Psalm 121** we find him clearly looking upward towards the sure source of his help. Although this world is full of trials and tribulations the pilgrim must never lose focus of the source of his help.
Psalm 121:1 KJV - "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."
 - C. These psalms remind us of our own ascent to our heavenly home.
4. Some have referred to this psalm as the “soldier’s psalm” as the soldier in great danger looks upward to God as the source of power and victory.
Psalm 121:4 - "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."
5. It has also been called the traveler’s psalm for those going abroad with confidence of God’s tender care.
Psalm 121:8 KJV - "The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore."

6. The truth is we do live in a dangerous world. Dangers are always around us, sometimes unseen and greater than we can imagine. Catastrophe can be at the next step. It is particularly dangerous for God's people. Satan is always poised for attack shooting his flaming arrows at the faithful. The wicked hate God and those who follow Him. But God is our constant protector. He neither slumbers nor does He sleep.
 7. The key word is the Hebrew word, שָׁמַר (shamar). It is used six times in **Verses 3,4,5,7,8** translated "keepeth" and "preserveth"
It can also be translated "to guard or watch" As a tireless watchman, God guards over His people. He will continue to sustain His people.
 8. There is a universal sense to this psalm. God's powerful protection is available for all of His people. **Verses 1-2** are in the first person—"My eyes" and "my help." But **Verses 3-8** change to the personal pronoun, "You." He is "your" keeper.
Hear carefully – God will keep you. He will never forsake you.
 9. **Psalm 121** divides naturally into four stanzas each consisting of two verses.
 - I. The certainty of God's help – **Verses 1-2**
 - II. The constancy of God's care – **Verses 3-4**
 - III. The comfort of God's shelter – **Verses 5-6**
 - IV. The ceaselessness of God's preservation – **Verses 7-8**
- I. The certainty of God's help – **Verses 1-2**
 - A. The psalmist focused his eyes above
Psalm 121:1 KJV - "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."
 1. The chief characteristic of a lost person is he is a down-dweller. His attention is upon the here and now. His thoughts are on the things of this world and the pursuits of this life. These things consume his life.
 - a. The Bible describes him as a lover of this world
 - b. Such are opposed to God
1 John 2:15 KJV - "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."
James 4:4 KJV - "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."
 2. God's pilgrims keep an eye lifted upward
Colossians 3:1-2 KJV - " If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ² Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."
 3. We know the source of our comfort; the source of our protection
"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."
Psalm 46:1-3 KJV - "God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ² Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; ³ *Though* the waters thereof roar *and* be troubled, *though* the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. "

- B. The psalmist describes this great powerful helper
Psalm 121:2 KJV - "My help *cometh* from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."
1. He is the God from whom all things come. God is the Ruler of the earth, the Ruler of the universe. He governs and determines all things.
Romans 11:36 KJV - " For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. "
 2. The God who created all things watches over us.
 From where do you look for help? Do you see God as a certain help? Does this vanquish all fear and destroy all doubt.
- II. The constancy of God's care – **Verses 3-4**
- A. The Psalmist describes another danger – the slipping foot
1. There are many ways to imagine this
 - a. Slippery ice where you cannot find firm footing
 - b. A rocky ledge on a mountainside
 - c. Or we could just see it metaphorically – the slippery paths of life where we find it difficult too find firm footing.
 - d. The point is, for God's people He will not allow their feet to slip. The Psalmist described this firmness in **Psalm 1**
Psalm 1:1-4 KJV - "Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. ² But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. ³ And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. ⁴ The ungodly *are* not so: but *are* like the chaff which the wind driveth away."
 2. God keeps His people steadfast, immovable. We are built firmly upon the truth. The lost man stumbles upon the truths of God's Word. God's people find them a firm foundation. God's people stand firm.
Proverbs 3:19-24 NAS - "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens. ²⁰ By His knowledge the deeps were broken up, And the skies drip with dew. ²¹ My son, let them not depart from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion, ²² So they will be life to your soul, And adornment to your neck. ²³ Then you will walk in your way securely, And your foot will not stumble. ²⁴ When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet."
- B. This Divine care is constant. God's watchful eye is never slumbers
1. All of earth's powers are limited
 - a. The most powerful army can run out of resources
 - b. The most powerful warrior will need to sleep

2. We remember Elijah's challenge to the prophets of Baal
1 Kings 18:27-29 NAS - "And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened." ²⁸ So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. ²⁹ And it came about when midday was past, that they raved until the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention."
3. God never grows weary. He never closes His eyes to sleep. He maintains a constant eye upon His people. He keeps us, sustains us.
 Do you find comfort in God's constant care?

III. The comfort of God's shelter – **Verses 5-6**

- A. The psalmist describes God: "the LORD *is* thy shade upon thy right hand."
 1. **Verse 5** is the third use of the word שָׁמַר – God is our great Provider
 2. The picture is of a protective shelter
 The desert sun could be intense and could quickly become life-threatening if shade wasn't available.
 3. We find this pictured in the Book of Jonah
Jonah 4:6-8 KJV - "And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made *it* to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. ⁷ But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. ⁸ And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, *It is better for me to die than to live.*"
- B. Life is full of adversity that scorches us like the merciless sun
 1. The psalmist testifies
Psalms 121:6 KJV - "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night."
 2. Once again we find the constancy of God's care – Day and Night
 - a. There are obviously dangers from the intensity of the sun
 There are also dangers with the darkness that came with the absence of the moon. Few can imagine the darkness of a moonless night.
 - b. The ancients believed the the rays of the moon could have an adverse effect upon the mind and body. We get our word *lunatic* from this
 - c. God is with His people through every type of adversity – He is our ever present shelter.
 Does that bring you comfort?

IV. The ceaselessness of God's preservation – **Verses 7-8**

A. This fourth stanza serves as a summary of the entire psalm – three more times we find the word שָׁמַר

1. The word for soul is נַפְשׁ - God will preserve our life
2. He will preserve our coming and going
3. He will preserve us until the end – now and forever, at the beginning and at the end—even until our death

B. This in no way implies the God will shield us from adversity

1. Our lives may often be in danger
Christians are not immune from life's tragedies
2. But God is the determiner of all things.
God has two purposes in all that He brings upon your life – His glory and your sanctification. Both are needful for us
3. But no matter how severe the trial He will not allow us to be consumed.
He will preserve His own until the end
Jude 1:24 KJV - "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy"
4. His presence never ceases to give us comfort. He enables us to see the brevity of this life and thus the brevity of our adversity
5. Each of us can also bear testimony to the countless times God miraculously intervenes. He often shows Himself a mighty keeper and provider in our lives
6. **Psalm 18** is not the fanciful musings of someone with an overactive imagination but the experience of a believer.
7. But during those times that He allows us to go through the adversity; during those times when our enemies prevail we still rejoice in our great King and find comfort in this: "He is able."
Daniel 3:16-18 KJV - "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter. ¹⁷ If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Conclusion:

1. Do you find comfort in this God?
2. Are you trusting in Him? Are you keeping your head up and eyes looking to God in all things?

Psalm 121:1 KJV - "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

Psalm 73:25-26 KJV - "Whom have I in heaven *but thee?* and *there is none* upon earth *that* I desire beside thee. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart faileth: *but* God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."