

Surrounded in Safety

By Don Green

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Bible Verse: Psalm 125
Preached on: Tuesday, September 14, 2021

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, I'm delighted to see familiar faces and new faces here this evening. We're glad that you are with us. It is a blessing for us as a church to proclaim the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Savior of his people and he keeps his people. He keeps them in safety and he keeps them well and he keeps them forever.

We're going to go to Psalm 125 eventually but I wanted to open tonight by just reminding you of a familiar passage from the end of Romans 8 where we see the keeping, protecting power of the love of Jesus Christ for those that belong to him, and for those of us that know Christ, it is a place of security and comfort for us, and for those perhaps of you who do not know Christ, it is an invitation, it is a look at what Christ does for his people and that he offers this freely to you as well. Romans 8:35 says, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." That is a blessed passage. That is a passage that is well worth going to again and again as we just see the fact that the Lord not only saved us from sin but that he loves us enough to keep us, to protect us, you could say he surrounds us in safety. No matter what may happen in life, no matter what may happen in the world around us, the Lord loves his people and he keeps them.

He saved us to keep us and sometimes that just really needs to be emphasized. People that came out of backgrounds where you were taught that you could lose your salvation if you messed up too much, the Lord would cast you aside, you know, and it's designed, I suppose, to motivate people to be obedient to Christ, but it's a terrible theology and it's a terrible misrepresentation of the love of Christ. He saves us to keep us. He saves us because he loves us and when the Spirit comes in to dwell within us when the Lord saves us, it's just a downpayment of more things to come. And God once he has given salvation, does not withdraw it. He does not change his mind. The Bible says, "I, the Lord, never change." God is immutable and his purposes are forever and if he saved you once, he saved you forever.

So it's just very important for us to go back to these themes again and again and not rely on the way that we live for our security, not to rely on our obedience as the ground of our assurance of salvation, our assurance of salvation rests in the fact that Christ holds us, Christ keeps us, Christ saves us. As the announcements were saying before the service, a quote from Charles Spurgeon, "It's not your grip on Christ that keeps you, it is the grip of Christ on you that keeps you." And so what we depend upon is not our works to keep us but we depend on this unchanging love of the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us. That changes everything and if you are not a Christian here tonight, I would just tell you simply that Christ in love offers himself to you tonight, that you could know the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one and the only one who was crucified for sinners. He alone is the way to God. He said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." And so there is this open invitation from Christ to sinners just like you that you could come to Christ and enter into all of these heavenly riches of which we have been speaking, have all of your sins forgiven, have Christ name you as his own, share his righteousness with you so that you are perfectly reconciled to God, never to be separated again. That is just wonderful news. That's why the gospel is called good news, it's good news for sinners, sinners just like you.

Well, with that introduction, let me take you now to Psalm 125 as we go from the New Testament back to the Old. Psalm 125. As you're turning there, we have been studying through the Psalms for a few years now and we in our sequential study of them, we've come to Psalm 125 tonight and we are going to read it to open and then we'll dive into the text. Psalm 125:1,

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. 3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest upon the land of the righteous, So that the righteous will not put forth their hands to do wrong. 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.

We've certainly seen it a lot in the past two years that the nature of life on this earth is unstable and uncertain. We've seen how our physical health is vulnerable to hidden diseases, hidden in the sense that they are unseen, the threat is unseen and yet we become quite sick from it, our financial well-being is vulnerable, our political climate is turbulent and even in a personal way, relationships seem to come and go. People we thought were our friends kind of drift away, people turn on us, and there's just a lot of instability in life. It's the nature of life in this fallen world. I don't like that. I am a guy that does not like change at all. I do not like to change the shoes that I wear, you know, I just like to have the same kinds of shoes and when they wear out, I order the same kind again and that's just the way I go. I don't like change at all even in those little details, and so it's helpful to me to come to a Psalm like this that shows us how the Lord provides protection and stability to his people. While our circumstances change, the blessed truth and the anchor

of our souls is that the Lord does not change. The Lord is immutable. He is unchanging and Psalm 125 makes that the source of comfort for his people.

Now Psalm 125 occurs in the midst of what are known as the Songs of Ascent, Psalm 120-134. We've said multiple times that those 15 Psalms occur in five sets of three, and each set of three follows the same pattern. The first Psalm will deal with a problem of some kind, the second will deal with the protection of God, and then the third yields over into the peace that God's protection gives for his people in the midst of their problems, and so there is this pattern that we're having the privilege to observe as we go through God's word together. Well, in this triad, in the second triad, Psalm 123 stated a theme of problems. Look at verse 3 with me, Psalm 123, beginning in verse 3 the psalmist says, "Be gracious to us, O LORD, be gracious to us, For we are greatly filled with contempt. Our soul is greatly filled With the scoffing of those who are at ease, And with the contempt of the proud." And so the psalmist is weighed down and heavy with the opposition of men that scoff at him, that scoff at his God, and the contempt of all of that just has his soul in turmoil.

Well, in Psalm 124, we see an answer to Psalm 123. We see the protection of God in verses 6 through 8 where it says, "Blessed be the LORD, Who has not given us to be torn by their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper; The snare is broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth." The protection of God's people is certain and the protection of God's people is powerful. It comes from the sovereign God who made heaven and earth, and if he spoke the heavens and the earth into existence, and he did, then obviously he is sovereign over everything that happens within it. He's sovereign over all of his creation. He's sovereign over all of his creatures. He's sovereign over men. He's sovereign over men. I repeat that for the sake of understanding that it is not the will of man that determines what happens, ultimately it is the will of God that determines what happens in the world and what the outcome of events are and God is directing everything as it happens to fulfill his will. Ephesians 1:11 says that he "works all things after the counsel of His will." Everything in the universe is worked out according to the plan of God. Genesis 50:20 says, speaking from the perspective of God's people, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." And elsewhere you see this theme of Scripture over and over again: the Lord is sovereign, the Lord is the one who reigns; it is not man, it is not Satan, God is the one who reigns. And that's so important for us to have etched deeply into our souls because it means that the God who is sovereign is the one who provides our help, and that means that there is nothing that hinders him from being able to help us when he decides to do so. And so that means that we can rest as Christians in him, that means that we can be confident in the midst of an uncertain and an unstable world because the God who protects us is the God who made it all, the God who loves us, the God who keeps us, we're in a place of wonderful protection and safety, and that spiritual reality is true even if it seems to be contradicted by the world around us. And Psalm 125, as I've titled the message tonight, tells us that we are "Surrounded in Safety."

Well, let's look, first of all, at our first section that I've titled God's surrounding protection. Two sections to this Psalm here this evening. First of all, we're going to see

God's surrounding protection and then, secondly, we're going to see God's surpassing peace. The protection of God leads to the peace of God for his people. Knowing objectively that God keeps us leads to a subjective sense of well-being in our souls.

The Psalm opens, Psalm 125 opens with a simile. It compares believers with Mount Zion, the mountain upon which the city of Jerusalem rests. Look at the first two verses here where it says,

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.

Now before we unpack the simile, let me say this: this is a Psalm about God's protection of believers and believers are identified in this Psalm with different kinds of terms all echoing the same theme of the ones of those who belong to the living God by faith. Here in the New Testament age in which we live, those who have repented of their sins, yielded their life to Christ and have given themselves to him in response to the work of the Spirit of God in their hearts. Here in this Psalm, you see God's people identified with different terms. In verse 1, you can look at it there with me, verse 1, "Those who trust in the LORD." Verse 2, "the LORD surrounds His people." Verse 3, the righteous mentioned there twice in the middle of the verse. In verse 4, "those who are good, those who are upright in their hearts." And so you see the psalmist speaking about believers from these different kinds of terms.

Now these terms are not claiming sinlessness for his people, it's simply identifying those who by faith belong to him. A genuine moral quality is worked out in the lives of those who are genuinely saved. It would be good for us to remind ourselves of this theme from the book of 1 John, if you would turn back in the New Testament with me. In 1 John, just after the book of Hebrews and the two letters of Peter, before the book of Revelation, if you're new to the Bible and it's fine if you are. I want you to look at 1 John 2:3 and 4, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Chapter 3, verse 7, "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."

Now speaking in New Testament terms, when the Lord saves us, he gives us a new nature. The Bible says that, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Behold, the old things have passed away. Behold, new things have come." And because God gives us a new nature, there is a change in demeanor, there is a change in disposition, there is a change in behavior that flows from the new life that God has given us. We are no longer

sinners who are dead in our trespasses, we have been given new life in Christ and that new life works itself out in our lives over time and changes the way that we think and the way that we live. That is a product of being born again. To be born again is to have new life from God and the Bible says that you must be born again or you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. So I would rightly ask you: have you been born again? Do you have new life from Christ? Do you know something about having passed from death to life, from sin to holiness, from rebellion to obedience to Christ? Do you know something of that? Is there something about your life, something in your heart that is inclined toward loving Christ because this is the mark of who true believers are.

So as we look at Psalm 125, we see these multiple terms referring to believers by the effect of saving faith, by the effect of saving life upon them, and so these are the people, and these alone, who are surrounded by the protection of God, and what we see here is that they are compared there in verse 1 to Mount Zion. Mount Zion is somehow a comparison that is apt for believers, that's why it's used in the verse this way. And as we've seen in the past, Mount Zion is a poetic name for the city of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem sits in the midst of mountains that especially in Old Testament times, were important for the defense of the city. The geography and the topography acted as a natural protection, a natural fortress for the city and so there was this natural protection that took place, and because it's the feature of the landscape, it never changed. It was always like that.

Now hold that thought in your mind. In Old Testament times, God manifested his presence in Jerusalem first in the tabernacle, the temporary tabernacle that was built, and then later in the temple that Solomon built, the presence of God was manifested in a great and supernatural way right there in this place that was known as his dwelling place. So Jerusalem, Mount Zion, then becomes identified with the presence of God because of the way that God manifested himself in the city. Now think through theologically what that means. Here in Jerusalem God is manifesting his presence, the God who is the Maker of heaven and earth, and when the people were obedient to God, when the people were following after him, they were safe, they were safe because the protection of God was upon them, and it was so critical for them to live in obedience so that they could enjoy the blessings of his protection. So the mountains that surround the literal city picture the protection of God that surround his people as they go through life. He surrounds them on all sides so that their enemies cannot reach them. His promises guarantee their safety.

Now my friends, knowing that many of you are in the midst of different conflicts of different kinds and facing sorrows and challenges of different kinds, this is where the Spirit of God would bring your mind and bring your heart to contemplate and to meditate on and to think deeply about. I understand and it's not that I've mastered the art of what I'm about to describe. I understand that it is a challenge to in the midst of the shifting circumstances and the threats to, you know, some of your very vital interests and vital relationships, it's difficult to remind ourselves of these things but this is why we need the word of God. We need the word of God to teach us, to instruct us, and to remind us of the reality of the possession that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. As part of his protection of us, God keeps wickedness, God keeps our enemies from utterly overrunning us and

utterly destroying us. Whatever happens, there is a rest and a confidence that God's hand is upon us and we can rely on that. I know that many of us need to hear this today in the days in which we live as our government is mandating things that would have been unthinkable not that long ago, in the midst of the challenges of spiritual forces in the church that are undermining the truth of God, you and I have to come back to the fact, step back from the circumstances and whatever else we think about them, we have to come back and say, "In the midst of even this, the hand of God is protecting me, the hand of God is helping me." And you as a Christian are entitled to have that confidence because that is what God does for those that he saves. We saw it at the end of Romans 8. We could look in so many different passages of Scripture. God protects his people and rather than drawing the nature of your response from the circumstances that surround you, you are to feed off of the commitment of God, the covenant-keeping, promise-keeping nature of God and say, "This determines what my future is. It's who my God is, not what my circumstances are that determine what the outcome of this will be for me."

So no wonder that Scripture tells us to fear not. So many times Scripture takes us back to the reality that God is our refuge and strength therefore we will not fear. And in the midst of days like what we are going through and all of the challenges of life, and it will probably get worse, it will probably get worse. We are not post-millennial here, we understand that the nature of sin in the world is going to progress. Evil times will go from bad to worse, Scripture tells us in 2 Timothy, so that we understand that it will take a supernatural intervention of Christ in order to reverse the wickedness that the world is heading toward. So we understand that and our hope comes from the fact that we know that our God is a protector of his people.

We don't expect humans to get better, we expect God to be true to his promises and to keep us, and that is where our hope is so that the psalmist can say in Psalm 125:3, he says,

3 ... the scepter of wickedness shall not rest upon the land of the righteous,
So that the righteous will not put forth their hands to do wrong.

What he's saying here is that when there are wicked leaders, when there are wicked rulers over the people of God, God promises his people, God promises the faithful that that rule of wicked people will not utterly overwhelm them. It will not utterly ruin them. It will not force and compel them into wickedness of their own doing.

Now the scepter that he refers to, here's another one of those images that Psalm 125 is known for, the scepter is a small rod that the king held that was a symbol of his political rule, it was a symbol of his might. And so to have a scepter of wickedness, look at verse 3, the scepter of wickedness indicates that the people of God were being ruled by a wicked force at the time. You know, whether it was a foreign nation that was ruling over them like in the times when Assyria dominated or Babylon dominated, or whether it was one of the wicked kings of Israel that ruled over the people, men with authority were wicked and were a threat to the people of God. What we go through, what we walk through in this life with adverse political leaders is nothing new and it is nothing that

should dislodge Christian people from their confidence in God. Our view of God, our view of the future should not be driven by the headlines or election results. Our God is unchanging. His word is unchanging. Christ is unchanging. His love for us is unchanging. The efficacy of his atonement is unchanging. His intent to return is unchanging. And so while the landscape changes around us politically, while the landscape might change around us spiritually as the church continues to degrade, you and I who know the word of God, you and I who know the Lord Jesus Christ should have this abiding underlying confidence that it is well with our soul, and that we do not sing that hymn, "It is well, it is well with my soul," we don't sing that in vain and we don't sing it just to give lip-service to something we don't really believe. When we are singing a song like that, we should be remembering promises like this and that we sing them out of a heart that is full of confidence that God will be faithful to his people.

We can do that. That is what the Spirit of God works in us. Yes, we need the help of the Spirit of God to help us stand firm, we need the help of the Spirit of God to refresh our souls, we need his comfort in our hearts but his comfort is fed off of the truth that is in our minds, and the truth that is in our minds should be always that God protects his people. As I've been saying for weeks, God is with us and God is for us. He is favorably disposed to his people and if you're one of his, then the truth of that is designed to transform the entire way that you live your life. It redefines the reason that you live. You live for his glory. You live in gratitude. You live in trust in his promises, not in an ever-circling response of fear to the circumstances that are around you.

So the idea here in verse 3 when he says "the scepter of wickedness shall not rest upon the land of the righteous," the idea here is that God will not allow the rule of the wicked to last forever. The wicked will not so oppress us as to cause the faithful to fall. We will persevere in God's protection. And beloved, the ultimate fulfillment of this, the ultimate granting of the promise of God in this is when the Lord Jesus Christ will return visibly in the sky, come to earth and establish his righteous rule from Jerusalem and establish righteousness on the earth. That is going to be the ultimate fulfillment of this when Christ supernaturally intervenes into human history, as you read about in the book of Revelation, Christ supernaturally intervenes in human history, binds Satan, and puts aside human rulers and establishes himself as King over all the earth.

And what's going to happen then? I want you to try to find, if you can, the book of Habakkuk in the minor prophets toward the end of your Old Testament. This is a great prophecy yet to be fulfilled in our day because it has obviously never been fulfilled in anything in Old Testament, New Testament or subsequent history. In Habakkuk 2:14 the prophet says, "the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea." Christ will reign, Christ will be over all, and as a result of that, everyone on the face of the earth will recognize the glory of God. And in his righteousness as he rules over his people, it will be established that he put a limit, he put an end to the wicked and their time of reign was temporary, their time of rule was ended, and we will see the fulfillment of that and those who belong to Christ will rejoice in his righteous reign when he reigns from Jerusalem.

The scepter of the wicked will not last forever. It can't. It can't. It can't. And as a result of that, my beloved friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, as a result of that we live differently. We look to what the end of history will be with it having been previously revealed to us, we look to the end of history and say, "This all comes out well in the end. I belong to Christ. My sins are forgiven. I have new life in Him. I'm going to go to heaven when I die. And the whole world is one day going to be covered with the glory of the Lord, and as a result of that, my perspective on things is different than what it otherwise would be." What your worldview is, beloved, changes the way that you live, and so we must know these things. Ultimately we know and we rest in the character of God, the attributes of God. He is holy. He is faithful. He is merciful. He is good. He is sovereign. He is gracious. And as a result of that, there could only be one outcome for the people of God. Just one. The outcome for us, we will find in the end that God has protected his people so that they did not succumb to the wickedness that was over them for a time. We do not have to fall into following after the pattern of our wicked rulers and we do not have to yield to the pressures of corruption that are around us, and that is a great encouragement for us in times like these.

God is faithful to protect his people from wickedness, so much so that the New Testament can say in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." Now sometimes in the heat of the moment and the pressure of an adverse circumstance, you and I, words like this may come out of our mouth, "You know, I just can't take this anymore," and there's just that sense of frustration that comes out. I'm glad the Lord is merciful to us and doesn't strictly hold us to account for every careless word that we speak when we're in Christ. It's all been forgiven. You and I should recognize when we step back when there's a clarity of our mind, we should realize that as a Christian we should not be talking that way. If God is with us and God is for us, then we can walk through whatever he sends to us. God in his faithfulness will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to endure. There is never a situation where we must cave-in to fear. There is never a situation where we must cave-in to temptation and sin because we have absolutely no other alternative. My friends, if you sin, it's because you choose to sin, it's not because God has forced you to. That's just not the way that he operates. The reality is that in the temptation, Christ is always with us to help us endure it without sinning against him so that when we stumble, when we fall, we're the only ones to blame. The devil didn't make us do it. God certainly didn't make us do it. When we stumble, we take responsibility for it.

Now back in the book of Matthew 24 we see, again we see this principle looking toward end times where God limits temptation, he limits testing so that his people are able to endure it. So in Matthew 24:21-22 it says, "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." God will cut the days short so that his elect are able to endure it.

So in Psalm 125, we ask at the conclusion of this first point, who are these righteous people who are the beneficiaries of this promise? They are those who have come to the living God through the means and promises that he has established. God made promises to his people, God invited them to come to him by faith. Those who come that way, those who live in accordance with that new life are the beneficiaries of his protection. This becomes a great motivation to holiness. I want the protection of God compared to the choice of suffering the discipline of God if I fall into sin. I would rather know the protection of God than the discipline of God and that motivates us toward obedience, toward the kind of practical righteousness that is described here in Psalm 125. So again in New Testament times, who is it that has the benefit of this promise? It's those who have new life in Christ. It's those that have turned to him, who have left the world behind and embraced Christ as Lord, as Master, as God, trusting in his redemptive work at the cross to reconcile them to a holy God. By faith, not by works, those are the ones who have the benefit of that protection.

Now, second point here for this evening as we go into the second section of the Psalm: what does a Spirit-filled understanding of the protection of God, what does it produce in the life of those who believe? Point 2: it brings us God's surpassing peace. It brings us God's surpassing peace and what's interesting here is that the promise of protection does not make us inactive in response. It does not make us passive in response. We do not accept that old line "Let go and let God," that just says, "Well, you just need to be passive and there's nothing for you to do, just surrender to the Spirit and God will take care of everything and you have no responsibility whatsoever in your sanctification. You just need to stop trying and start trusting," is the language that was often used. Well, there's an evident way, there's an evident point that refutes all of that. The New Testament is filled with commands to believers on things that they are to do and things that they are to believe. If we are commanded to do things, that means that we have something to do. It's not just a matter of just surrendering everything and just being passive in your sofa chair. No. We are to be stirred up into faith and 2 Peter talks about that in the first chapter. We won't take time to look at it. What you see here in Psalm 125 is this, is that the promise of protection does not lead to spiritual inactivity, rather instead in a way that applies to us even today, the promises of God stir his people to prayer. We exercise faith, we see the promises, in response to that, it moves us, it motivates us to pray that God would exercise his promises to us, that in prayer we would express our dependence upon him and not simply turn from the promises and then go live anyway that we want to. That's what we see in this next section.

Look at verse 4 as it opens with, this second section opens with a prayer as he speaks to God and addresses him. He says,

4 Do good, O LORD, to those who are good
And to those who are upright
in their hearts.

This is a prayer. He is saying, "God, in accordance with the promises that have just been stated, exercise Your power to do good to Your people." He's praying not only for himself but he's praying for the people of God all together and so he's saying, "God, You

are the protector of Your people," indicative statement, "therefore, God, in keeping with consistency with Your promises, do good to Your people." And we see the promises of God and we pray in response to them. The promises, as it were, come down from heaven, we send them back up to God asking for his blessing, showing our dependence upon him.

So this prayer is asking God to protect his people. Notice that at the end of verse 4, he says, "those who are upright in their hearts." Their righteousness is a matter of the heart, not simply outward conformity to some set of rules. It's no wonder that Scripture tells us to examine ourselves; is there some kind of principle of inclination and love for righteousness in your heart because those are the ones that God does good to. But by contrast, and the psalmist comes full circle here, in keeping with the theme of problem, protection and peace, by contrast the psalmist says the enemies of God will not be found among his friends. Verse 5,

5 But as for those who turn aside to their crooked ways, The LORD will lead them away with the doers of iniquity.

Those who manifest their faith by the uprightness of their heart, by obedience, contrasted with those who embrace sin, embrace iniquity, and the outcomes for these two different groups are completely different. The one will experience the favor of God, ultimately being blessed and entering into heaven with him. Those who reject Christ, those who turn away from him, those who prefer their sin to righteousness will find in the end that the Lord was not bluffing. The Lord will lead them away with the doers of iniquity and the word to the doers of iniquity in New Testament terms are genuinely frightening.

Go back to Revelation 20 with me. Revelation 20. This is the ultimate destination for the doers of iniquity. At the end of time, before God introduces the eternal state, he gave to the Apostle John a vision of what would happen and he says in verse 11, "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." This is the ultimate leading away of the doers of iniquity. This is the ultimate outcome of a life of sin. This is the destination for those who reject Christ. And oh, oh, oh, how I pray that none of you would be numbered with them. How I long for the Spirit of God to do a work in each heart to bring you out of sin to Christ, and for those of you with whom he has already done that, that you would dwell in the promises and the protection of God and manifest by your inner serenity and the tranquility of your heart as you look to an uncertain future, that you would manifest by spiritual obedience, by faith in Christ, by confidence in him, that you would manifest that you are numbered among the redeemed because this is where Psalm

125 leads us, to an uprightness of heart that is manifested first and foremost by a trust and a believing reliance in what God has said in his word.

That's a pretty great challenge, isn't it, from Scripture? This is, you know, as Scripture so often does, it just takes a spiritual scalpel and it slices us open and it opens up to our mind and to our conscience where we're really at. But these themes of trust and obedience mark the ones who are under the protecting hand of God, and if you know yourself to belong to Christ, then you respond to that with this prayer that says, "God, be good to Your people, especially in days like this where there's threats from so many different directions. God, protect Your people, protect my family. God, protect my church. God, protect our elders. God, protect like-minded believers in other parts of the nation and other parts of the world. God, do good to them! You're the God who protects us and we're living in evil days. It sure seems like, Father, we're living in a country that is under Your judgment. If we read Romans 1, we just see a manifestation of Your judgment taking place. It's not that You will judge us, it is that You are judging us. That's why things seem so confusing and why everything just seems so irrational in the world around us." It's a mark of the judgment of God just as when he struck Sodom and Gomorrah and struck the blind men, they were just blindly moving about, moving about in their lust and their rage and just blindly trying to get their hands on the visitors that came to their city. Irrational.

Well, in the midst of that, what we do as the people of God is we say, "Lord, in times like this, don't let the scepter of wickedness overrun us. Do good to your people. Keep us in peace. Keep us in Christ. Keep us in unity with one another and have Your hand and keep us in the small of Your hand, and thus prove Your faithfulness to Your own promises."

The Psalm ends in light of the promises and the peace, the Psalm ends there at the end of verse 5,

Peace be upon Israel.

Peace be upon Israel. We trust God but we do not presume on his grace. And so the Psalm ends in this benediction, a recognition that the people of God go through heartache, through hardship, through headaches, but in the end, in the end we live by the outcome. In other words, we shape our response to life by what we know to be the ultimate outcome of it all. We rest in the midst of the uncertainty because God blesses his people with wholesome peace in the end. And my friends, the outward trials in your life, the outward difficulties if you are in Christ, are no indication that God has abandoned you. That could not possibly be correct. Rather they ultimately simply remind us of our ultimate victory. The pressures push us back to his word, we remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, we remember that he has promised not to let us be tempted beyond what we are able, we remember that he will do good to his people, and we rest in that. We rest in that. We walk not by the sight of what we see, we walk by faith in the promises. We stand on the promises of Christ our King and we know that ultimately he will bless us, he will certainly keep us, and this blessing will last throughout all of eternity. Christ himself said in John 14:27, you don't need to turn there, he said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the

world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." And he goes on at the end of chapter 16, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Beloved, we who are in Christ, we're surrounded in safety. We know more and we have more manifestation of the protection of God on this side of the cross than the Old Testament saints did. We're in a position of even more informed trust. We know that Christ has protected us with his own blood and now he keeps us safe. He is our solid rock, our foundation, our refuge, our fortress for complete and utter safety, and I bid you to trust in him tonight as we go.

Let's pray together.

Gracious Father, thank You for being so good and so faithful to us. Thank You for saving us from our sin. Thank You for saving us from Satan. Thank You for saving us from eternal destruction. And thank You for surrounding us in safety in our Lord Jesus Christ. O Lord Jesus, You said, "No one can snatch them out of My hand." There is no power so great that it could undo Your protection. Nothing can loosen Your grip on us. You are the Sovereign. You are the great King. You are the mighty One. And in Your grace and goodness and inestimable kindness, You have chosen to set Your strength and love upon us in a way that means that we are utterly secure. And so, Father, as we look to You and as we trust in Christ, we simply ask You for each one here, that we would be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, praying to You, letting our requests be made known to You, and then that wonderful peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, Father, may it guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. We pray in His blessed name. Amen.

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