
Author:	Rev. Ted Gray send email...	Order Of Worship (Liturgy)
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Title:	Our Help Is in the Name of the Lord!	O God, Our Help in Ages Past
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Pastor Ted Gray
07/01/2018

“Our Help Is in the Name of the Lord!”
Psalm 124:1-8

Many people agonize over the “what ifs” of life: “What if I would have pursued a different career? What if I had been born in a different country, or at a different time in history? What if...” Although the word “if” has only two letters, it can represent momentous changes.

David recognized that. He begins this Psalm by writing, *“If the Lord had not been on our side— let Israel say—if the Lord had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive...”*

Commentators are divided on what specific event David may have had in mind when he wrote the Psalm. Many believe it may have been inspired after David defeated the Philistines in a series of three military maneuvers described in 2 Samuel 5:17-25. Each time David defeated the Philistines he recognized God’s hand in the victory and, therefore, he wrote about how if the Lord had not been on their side they would have been annihilated by their enemies.

But those words are not applicable just to David some 1000 years before the birth of Jesus. Those words are equally applicable to us. If God had not been on our side we would be, in David’s words, *“swallowed up alive”* because God’s people today face similar hostilities to those that David faced.

Certainly we face the hostility of the world. Admittedly we don’t have the Philistines, or the Moabites and Ammonites trying to do us in, but we live in a world that is united in its hostility to true

Christianity. The hostility of the world against Christianity isn't just in those nations where the church is persecuted severely for her faith. In the United States we have seen a growing wave of opposition against Christianity. Prayer was taken out of public schools decades ago. The ten commandments have been systematically legislated out of public view. The media consistently portrays Christians in a negative light; personal attacks against God's people are direct and upfront. Should we be surprised? Not according to Jesus, who said, *"If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you"* (John 15:20) and he said, *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake."* (Matthew 24:9)

Ever since the fall of humanity into sin, the world has been a hostile place for believers. It started already when Cain took Abel's life, and that hostility will continue until the Prince of Peace returns and ushers in true, eternal peace in the new heavens and the new earth.

Along with the hostility of the world we all face a flood of many troubles. In verse 4 and 5 David is still speaking about Israel's enemies, and he likens them to a flood. In verse 4 and 5 he writes: *"... the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away."*

Scripture never sugarcoats the Christian life. As Eliphaz pointed out to Job, *"Man is born to trouble as sparks fly upward"* (Job 5:7). Jesus said, *"In this world you will face tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). Paul and Barnabas strengthened and encouraged struggling believers, assuring them that *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."* (Acts 14:22)

We see some of the troubles and trials of life from a distance. Verse 4 and 5 use the metaphor of a flood; and usually, though not always, floods can be anticipated. The hurricane is tracked; we know its projected path. We have time to prepare, at least to some degree. Or, after a winter of heavy snow, we know the rivers will rise and we know where floods will swell. And, as heavy summer rains pour down, flood warnings are given time and again.

But at other times floods give no warning. The Mideast, with its parched deserts and steep ravines was, and still is, prone to flash floods. The sudden downpours are too much for the parched ground to absorb; the ravines fill with water and the torrents sweep over people in a flash flood of trouble.

David certainly understood that the troubles of life are like floods. Some are seen from a distance. We see the clouds building and we know what we are in store for. But other times we are swept away, without warning, in a flood of unexpected troubles.

Nothing has changed from David's day. Christians still face the hostility of the world, Christians still face a flood of problems and troubles in the pilgrimage of life, and thirdly, Christians are caught in snares when least expected. In verse 7 David writes: *"We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped."* Back in David's day snares were often used to catch unsuspecting birds. The snare is an almost invisible thong that ensnares and encircles either the leg or the throat. The use of a snare relies on the hidden, it relies on the unexpected. That is what makes them so effective in catching their prey.

In the pages of Scripture, snares are often specifically associated with the devil. He is wily, crafty, seeking to snare the unsuspecting Christian. Lord's Day 52 (of the Heidelberg Catechism) warns us *"that our sworn enemies – the devil, the world, and our own flesh – never stop attacking us."*

Sometimes the attacks are in the open, obvious, and easy to see. Other times the attack comes by the hidden snare of sin, not only from the devil, or the world, but the snares of our own sinful nature. Always be on guard against the snares!

Our Comfort

If Psalm 124 only spoke about the hostility of the world, the troubles of life and the snares of the evil one it would be a very discouraging Psalm, wouldn't it? But the Psalm is just the opposite. In all the troubles, hardships, and sorrows of life our comfort is in knowing, first, that the Lord is on the side of believers. Did you notice the double use of the word "if" in verse 1 and 2? *"If the Lord had not been on our side— let Israel say—if the Lord had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive..."*

A New Testament counterpart to Psalm 124 is found in Romans 8:31 where the Apostle Paul, after describing the greatness of God and the power of His redeeming love, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the special relationship we have to the Father through faith in the Son, writes: *"If God is for us, who can be against us...?"*

And most of you know what Paul goes on to say in the rest of Romans 8: *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"*

"... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Lord is indeed on the side of believers! That is one of the reasons why this Psalm is a Psalm of great comfort.

A second source of great comfort for the Christian – amid all the troubles of life, the hostility of the world and the snares of the evil one – is that the Lord protects His people. As verse 6 points out, *"Praise be to the Lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth."*

When David cared for flocks of sheep he had been spared from the teeth of the lion and the bear on many occasions, and he gave the glory to God. In 1 Samuel 17:37, as David confronted Goliath, he assured King Saul that the Lord would be with him. He said, *"The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."*

Or consider Daniel. Picture him in the den of lions and hear the agonized voice of King Darius. Daniel 6:19-22 describes how *at the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! My God sent His angel, and He shut the mouths of the lions..."*

Or consider Ezra, who when he arrived safely in Jerusalem after traveling through the dangerous desert, wrote in Ezra 8:31, *"The hand of our God was on us and He protected us from enemies and bandits along the way."*

Or consider Stephen, as he faced that group of angry Jewish leaders who were incensed at his speech before the Sanhedrin. You say: "Pastor, wait a minute. I think you used the wrong example. Didn't they stone Stephen? Doesn't Acts chapter 7 end with Stephen being stoned to death?"

Does that mean that God protected David, Daniel and Ezra, but failed to protect Stephen? Not at all! Even Steven was protected because he belonged, as does every Christian, to the Lord in life and in death. The Lord allowed him to come to the doorway of death, as all of us one day will unless the Lord returns in our lifetime.

And when the believer comes to that dark and foreboding door he is protected. He or she can say the words of Psalm 23:4 with confidence, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”* The true believer is protected, even in death, and can exclaim at death as did Stephen, *“Look! I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”* (Acts 7:56)

A third source of great comfort: The Lord is the source of our help and He is able to help for He is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. The last part of verse 8 qualifies the first part of the verse. The promise that *“Our help is in the name of the Lord...”* is qualified by God’s credentials as *“the Maker of heaven and earth.”*

Sometimes we want to help someone with whatever trial or hardship they face, but we recognize our own inability and weakness. Although we want to help, we ourselves are helpless. That is never the case with the Lord! His qualification to help you and to help me is that He is the Maker of heaven and earth.

Was the creation of the world – the creation of the entire cosmos and all that is in it – was that a long, hard project for Him? One in which He enlisted the entire host of angelic powers to assist Him so that finally, through a great cosmic effort the world came into being? Not at all! He spoke and this world, this cosmos, came into being by the power of His spoken word!

What David is saying there in verse 8 is that your help comes from the Lord, and He is more than able to help you. He is all powerful. He spoke and the world came into being, and He still upholds and sustains the world which He created, even when it totters. The Lord Himself has given us this promise, in Psalm 75:3: *“When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants, it is I who keep steady its pillars.”*

After all, He created the earth, including the solar system. Psalm 147:4 declares: *“He determines the number of stars and calls them each by name.”* Consider the sparrow falling to the ground. The Lord knows and cares. How much more does He know your situation and your need? And because He knows our every need, better than we know our needs, He assures us that He works all things for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Our Response

Since, as David says, *“Our help is in the name of the Lord...”*, what should our response be?

First, remember how the Lord has helped and blessed you through the troubles of life. In this Psalm David is remembering the Lord’s work in his life and in the life of Israel as an Old Testament nation, and he writes: *“If the Lord had not been on our side, we would have been swallowed up alive.”* In today’s vernacular, “If the Lord had not been on our side, we would be toast, we would be doomed.”

In your life and mine, as we reflect back, aren’t there many “ifs” when we would have been destroyed had our help not been from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth? How often has God protected you, guarded you and cared for you, even though you didn’t realize it at the time but only see it in retrospect?

However, nowhere do we see God's help and His deliverance – the fact that He is indeed on our side – more than we do at Calvary. There at Calvary we see the reason why the eternal Christ, God Himself, took on human flesh and became like us in every way except sin. Jesus is the greatest help, the greatest deliverance, for He delivered us from the penalty and curse of our sin. And we are told to remember. The Bible is a book that calls us, time and again, to remember the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. And on the front of the communion table, prominent in most churches, are the words of Jesus, *“Do this in remembrance of Me.”*

But aren't we often like Israel in the Old Testament, that we forget the Lord and His deliverance? We often forget not just our deliverance from the hostility of the world, the flood of troubles and the snares of the evil one, but we even forget so quickly our deliverance from the judgment of sin by the shed blood of Jesus Christ!

Christ, of course, is pictured all through the Old Testament. He is the Rock that accompanied Israel. He is portrayed and prefigured in all the sacrifices and ordinances of the Old Testament scrolls. But how quickly the people forgot God's work in their lives. They forgot His protective care. They failed to see His hand of guidance.

In Psalm 105:5 the Holy Spirit tells us, *“Remember the wonders He has done! His miracles, and the judgments He has pronounced.”* One Psalm later, Psalm 106:7: *“When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to Your miracles; they did not remember Your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.”*

By contrast, when we consciously remember what the Lord has done, the Maker of heaven and earth, even in the hardest toughest times of our lives, we will praise Him! Verse 6: *“Praise be to the Lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth.”*

Praise be to the Lord! Count your many blessings! Remember what God has done in your life, even in the deep valleys – especially in the deep valleys of life – and you cannot help but praise Him!

A third response is to trust Him. Scripture makes it clear that we will face the hostility of the world, floods of many troubles, and snares when least expected. But Scripture also makes it clear that in all the circumstances of life we can put our trust in Him, for *“Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.”* And He will give us all that we need in the pilgrimage of life.

That is true for our personal lives, it is also true for the life of the turbulent, divided nations of the world, and for our church. Every church is a bull's eye for the adversary. Every true church faces troubles, every church faces the snares and the hostility of the world, because there is nothing more that the devil would like to do than to destroy the body and bride of Christ on earth, the true church.

But every member of true church can look to the future with full trust and confidence. Our trust and confidence is in the Head of the church, Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:21-23 assures us that when Jesus was raised from the dead He was raised *“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And God (the Father) put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”*

The same God who has blessed His church throughout history, and strengthened her so that the gates of hell cannot prevail against her, will continue to lead, guide and bless His bride, for His Son, who is the Redeemer and Head of the church, *“...is the same yesterday and today and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8).

No matter what the future holds – for our nation, for our church, for our individual lives – our help is in the name of the Lord! He is the Maker, the Creator and Sustainer, of the heavens and the earth. May your trust, and mine, always be firmly placed upon Him, through faith in His dear Son, Jesus Christ! Amen.

- bulletin outline -

*Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.
Psalm 124:8*

“Our Help Is in the Name of the Lord!”

Psalm 124:1-8

- I. We face, as did David and Israel:
 - 1) The hostility of the world (1-3)

 - 2) Floods of many troubles (4-5)

 - 3) Snares when least expected (7)

- II. Our comfort is in knowing:
 - 1) The Lord is on the side of believers (1, 2)

 - 2) The Lord protects His people (6)

 - 3) The Lord is the source of our help (8)

- III. Our response:
 - 1) Remember (1-5)

 - 2) Praise (6)

 - 3) Trust (8a)

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