

“A Song of Gratitude”
Psalm 124
(Preached at Trinity, July 7, 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. We are continuing with the series of **Psalms 120-134**, each designated by the title, “A Song of Degrees,” or “A Song of Ascent.” They were originally contained together in a separate self-contained hymnbook but later added to Book Four of the Psalter. They picture the ascent of pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the feasts. They begin in a distant land and move closer and closer to Jerusalem.
 2. We've seen in these psalms the reality of the hardship God's people face as they travel through this world—But God is our never-ending source of comfort and deliverance.
Psalm 120:1 KJV - "In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me."
Psalm 120:7-1 - "I *am* for peace: but when I speak, they *are* for war. "
Psalm 121:1 KJV - "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."
Psalm 123:3 KJV - "Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt."
 3. As we come to **Psalm 124** we are reminded again of the wonderful deliverance God continually provides for His people.
Psalm 124:2-3 KJV - "If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: ³ Then they had swallowed us up quick"
 4. We'll divide this brief psalm into two simple parts:
Verses 1-5 - A call to remembrance
Verses 6-8 - A call to grateful worship
- I. A call to remembrance – **Verses 1-5**
 - A. Jehovah (יהוה) is the focus of **Psalm 124**
Verse 1 - "If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side"
Verse 2 - "If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side"
Verse 3 - "Blessed *be* the LORD"
Verse 8 - "Our help *is* in the name of the LORD"
 1. This is the heart of the Christian life
 - a. God is at the center. Our attention should be consistently drawn away from ourselves and directed to God.
 - b. The lost man is self-centered by nature. The reason Jesus is not his great passion is because his mind is fixed upon himself. The reason people are unhappy or discontented is because they have forsaken the one true source of happiness.
 - c. Our life is centered upon doing His will. We desire to reflect Him in all things
 2. We see Him as the source of all things
 - a. We look to Him in every circumstance

- b. And we are continually filled with praise at His infinite blessings upon our life
- B. **Psalm 124**, like the other psalms in this group of psalms, is very particular—very narrow in scope. These are psalms sung by the pilgrims – by God’s chosen people. Notice the unique, particular character of the psalm. He uses two expressions to designate this as being unique to God’s people
1. "who was on our side" – he repeats it again in **Verse 2**
 - a. God is on the side of His people. He is working on our behalf. **Psalm 56:9** – “When I cry *unto thee*, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God *is* for me.” **Romans 8:28 KJV** - "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose."
 - b. There is no greater confidence than this! God is for us. This is the ultimate expression of faith. God is for us. If God is for you all the forces in the universe will not be able to be successful in an assault upon you. **Romans 8:31** – “What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?”
 - c. The lost person cannot say this. He has no claim to this. For the lost person the only thing he can say is, “God is against me!” This is the greatest lament. God is against me! If God is against you you are ruined. Nothing can come to your defense.
 - d. We live in a fallen world full of calamity. There are plagues, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes, and fires. This world is full of sickness, sorrow and death – the list of afflictions are unending.
 - (1) Many times after suffering through a tragedy you’ll hear someone say, “It will all work out for the best.”
 - (2) But this is a vain, foolish claim. The truth is their suffering is but a foreshadow of the wrath to come.
 - (3) Instead of working all things for their good God is working against them. The Bible describes them as the enemies of God. The Bible describes them as cursed of God. Instead of God being for them He is against them
 2. The other expression of **Verse 1** that designates this as being unique to God’s people is - "now may Israel say"
 - a. This psalm is referring to God’s particular blessings upon His particular people
 - b. This is a call upon the people of God to remember
- C. **Verse 1** is a glorious call to remember God’s glorious mercies
1. It is a fragment full of meaning – “Had it not been for Jehovah . . .” It carries the sense of “What if . . .”
 2. David then describes the fierce nature of their enemies
 - a. We don’t know the precise setting of this psalm.
 - b. The superscription calls it a Psalm of David. Some dispute this. It is deleted in the Septuagint.

- c. If it is a Psalm of David we could presume he is referring to the Philistines. They were the dreaded enemies of Israel who often threatened to consume them.
3. David always knew the hope of Israel's survival and their hope of defeating the Philistines was always in the hands of God
2 Samuel 5:19 KJV - "And David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand."
- a. What if God had not intervened?
- b. David describes the terrible consequence of such a contingency
 In **Verse 3** he described the speed of their demise if God had not been with them - "swallowed us up quick"
 In **Verses 4-5** he describes it as a mighty flood that would have consumed them - "Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: ⁵ Then the proud waters had gone over our soul."
 In **Verse 7** he describes it as a bird being freed from a deadly trap
 "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped."
- c. Jeremiah described the tender mercies of God, always faithful, always present each day.
Lamentations 3:22 KJV - "*It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*"
- D. We can put this question to our own life – "What if . . ."
1. What if God had not sent His Son to suffer in your place?
 What if God had not ordained that you would hear the Gospel?
 What if He had not given you faith and repentance?
 You would have lived your life consumed by your sin and locked away in the torments of hell.
 2. And what if God's grace didn't continue with you to preserve and keep you? Do you think yourself strong enough to press on without the power of His Spirit dwelling in you?
 3. What if God had not shown you favor in His rich provision giving you your daily bread? Do you think the enjoyment of the rich bounty you enjoy is without His mercies?
 4. And what about the countless times He has protected you from disaster and death?
 How did you survive past infancy? How many times has He preserved your life?
 5. Some people struggle with, "What if He didn't die for me?"
 This isn't a question we are to ponder. If you repent of your sin and trust in Him He HAS died for you. If your desire is to spend your life following Him you can join in the ranks of others who follow Him.

II. A call to grateful worship – Verses 6-8

A. Verse 6 is a call to corporate worship

1. There is a veiled question being posed in **Verses 1-2**. The question is this: “What if God had not been on our side? What if He had not defended us from our enemies?”
But the answer is plainly given—He did defend us!
He says in **Verse 8** - "Our help *is* in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth."
2. **Psalms 124** is a call to remembrance. God *has* preserved us; He *has* protected us – He *has* been on our side. If His mercies had not been continually with us we would have been consumed. They would have quickly swallowed us up.
God’s people are continually exhorted to remember.
1 Chronicles 16:11-12 – “Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually. ¹² Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth;”
Ecclesiastes 12:1 – “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth”
Isaiah 46:9 – “Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me,”
3. After the call to remembrance they were called to worship
Psalms 124:6 KJV - "Blessed *be* the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth."
“Blessed” - בָּרַךְ –
 - a. Of God to man בָּרַךְ refers to His gracious provision; Those blessed of God are the recipients of His goodness & favor.
After creating Adam and Eve we read that God blessed them
Genesis 1:28 NAS - "And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it"
 (1) God is the great fount of every blessing
 (2) In **Psalms 102** we read:
Psalms 103:2 KJV - "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:"
 We must be ever mindful of God’s wonderful dealings with us
 - b. Sometimes, we the Bible uses בָּרַךְ in the sense of us blessing God
 (1) Usually God’s blessings upon man, the beatitude verses, use the Hebrew word, אֵשֶׁר 'esher
 בָּרַךְ has a different sense.
 (2) We’ve seen it elsewhere in the Psalms
 such as in **Psalms 103**.
Psalms 34:1 KJV - "I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise *shall* continually *be* in my mouth."

- (3) With the use of the word of man towards God it means to kneel or praise – it is an expression of worship
Psalm 95:6 KJV - "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel (בִּרְךָ) before the LORD our maker."
- (4) The NIV and CSV translate **Verse 6** "praise"
Psalm 124:6 NIV - "Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth."
4. They remembered God as their Creator, sustainer, Covenant keeper and praised Him
Psalm 124:8 KJV - "Our help *is* in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth."
5. Remember, **Psalm 124** is a corporate psalm
Psalm 124:1 KJV - "If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say;"
6. It is a call for God's people to rise up to remember and to praise. Our remembrance of God's powerful deliverance drives us to praise now and increases our faith for the future.
- B. The heart of the psalm is this: "If God had not blessed us with His almighty protection and provision we would have been consumed. But He *has* provided for us and so we will praise Him.
1. What is it that drives you to worship? Is it not the glorious remembrance of Christ? Is this not at the heart of the Lord's Supper?
Luke 22:19 KJV - "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me."
1 Corinthians 11:26 KJV - "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."
2. For many professing Christians they come to church on Sunday because they feel this is what they are supposed to do. But it isn't an expression of deep felt gratitude.
3. The Sabbath is a wonderful expression of gratitude and worship to God our LORD and our Redeemer.

Conclusion:

1. What a wonderful psalm of deliverance. God has delivered us from our enemies, seen and unseen. **Psalm 124:7 KJV** - "the snare is broken, and we are escaped."
2. For the psalmist the enemies were largely seen – evil men with evil intents.
Psalm 124:2-3 KJV - "when men rose up against us: ³ Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:"
3. We too sometimes face evil men with evil intents. But we also battle unseen foes. If Satan walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour how shall we escape? He seeks to swallow us up. How shall we be saved?
Psalm 124:2 KJV - "If *it had not been* the LORD who was on our side"