

## **AFRAID OF SNARES, GOD CARES**

Psalm 124: 1-8 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

The Psalms of Ascent were songs sung on the way up, up, up to Jerusalem. Some of these psalms, in fact, ten of them, were probably written by King Hezekiah. Psalm 127 was written by King Solomon, and Psalms 122, 124, 131 and 133 were written by King David. This is a psalm of reflection, of looking back and celebrating what God has done. I think of the beautiful chorus, “Without Him.” You know the words—“Without Him I could do nothing, Without Him I’d surely fail; Without Him I would be drifting Like a ship without a sail. Jesus, Oh Jesus, Do you know Him today? Please don’t turn Him away, Oh Jesus, sweet Jesus, Without Him how lost I would be. Without Him I would be dying. Without Him I’d be enslaved Without Him life would be worthless, But with Jesus thank God I’m saved.” This is a psalm celebrating the truth Jesus spoke to His disciples in John 15: 5. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, it is he that bears much fruit, for apart from Me, you can do nothing.”

David was saying in verse 3, “Without the Lord, we would have been swallowed up.” In verses 4-5, David said, “Without the Lord, we would have drowned.” In verse 6, David said, “Without the Lord, we would be easy prey.” In verse 7, David said, “Without the Lord, we would not have escaped.” And in verse 8, David said, “Without the Lord, we would have had no help at all!” Many times all of us face terrible trials and troubles. God’s word makes in plain in James 1: 2-4 and in Philippians 1: 29. David pictures the Lord as our protector in Psalm 124: 1-2, he pictures for us the awful pressure, in Psalm 124: 3-5, and in verses 6-8, David speaks of our praise to God for deliverance. In verses 3-5, David reminds us that we are not swallowed up, in verses 6-7, he reminds us that we have escaped the snare, and in verse 8, David pictures us as safe in the Savior’s care.

So David is singing Psalm 124 by looking back. David’s mood and demeanor in this psalm is wonderful. He sees that God has intervened and he is praising the Lord. He sees the Lord as the God who comes through, who delivers, who protects, who heals, and who brings justice. As David looked back in praise, he clearly saw God’s hand. In retrospect, David was celebrating and rejoicing and cheering the Lord with thrill and enthusiasm in his voice. When we are in the middle of trials, we often see God as distant. God give us the ability to do what Vance Havner so wisely said. He said, “When you cannot trace God’s hand, you can trust His heart.” In our trials, which of us feel like celebrating? Yet, today, on January 31, 2016, here we are, together celebrating God’s goodness. I often find myself singing an old song by Dallas Holm. He sang it here in Rock Springs a few years ago when

Jinny and I went to see Him. The words are: “Here we are in your presence Lifting holy hands to You. Here we are praising Jesus For the things He's brought us through.” And that’s where we are today—praising Jesus, in His presence.

Today, let’s do our own reflecting as we consider what David considered: I propose three questions our psalm answers. (1) What Almost Happened To Us If Had It Not Been For The Lord? --vs. 1-5. (2) What Happened To Us Instead Because The Lord Helped Us? –vs. 6-7. (3) What Is Happening Inside Us Now As We Remember God’s Deliverance Or Anticipate His Deliverance? – v. 8. Open your heart today to the Lord as you look back on this last year and reflect with me.

### **WHAT ALMOST HAPPENED TO US IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE LORD?** (I.)

Look with me at verses 1-5. “If it had not been the LORD who was on our side—let Israel now say—if it had not been the LORD who was on our side when people rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters.” Beloved, look back on the last year, or the last couple months. What almost happened? It may be hard for you and I to think of doing it, but God wouldn’t mind a bit if our story would become a psalm of ascent in our lives, when we head to church to worship together. You can tell David is singing as the Worship Leader first, and then he calls all Israel to join him—v. 2.

So what almost happened? The psalmist first tells of a sudden attack of anger, verse 2, and then speaks of a deepening flood of anger, verses 3-5, next, of a menacing wild beast of anger, in verse 6 and last of a hidden trap of anger, in v. 7. **(1) This first image is of a sudden attack of anger by people.** Notice verse 2, “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us.” This first almost that happened may have already happened to some of us. It is not that David is saying these almost happened things never happened. No, they happened for sure to him as they may have happened to us. The image is of a sudden attack that could never have been predicted. It may have been pre-meditated, but there were no signs that it was coming. It was a sneak attack, a sudden ambush. Our enemy rarely gives us any advance warning of an attack. That’s why Peter tells us in I Peter 5: 8 to be sober and vigilant. That’s why Paul tells us to always keep on the whole armor of God—Ephesians 6: 10-18. If we are walking with the Lord daily in His Word, in prayer and practicing His presence, we need not feel unprepared. Nevertheless, sudden attacks are meant to do us in—to wreck our health, to ruin our hope, to seal our doom, to rob us of our peace and to destroy our trust in the Lord. Notice, this first image is of a rising up against us.

The Hebrew word for rose up is *quwm* which means to rise up to attack a neighbor or a parent or a relative. Jesus spoke of this happening in the last days. He told His disciples, “And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. David knew this to be true as his own son Absalom rose up to take away his kingdom and authority and to seek to kill him.

(2) **The second image is of a deepening flood.** Verses 3-5 states very clearly what happened and what almost happened. We read, “Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters.” Notice again that the enemy is not creation in turbulence with a physical flood. This is turbulence in people’s souls who have risen up against us. This flood is called in verse 3 “their anger” and it tried to sweep David away in the flood tides of its being spewed out and in the torrent of its raging waters. This deepening flood is far beyond the initial attack of people. Now, as with Absalom against his own dad, Absalom’s conspiracy grew with supposed men of God joining him like Ahithophel, David’s wisest counselor. Now David heard Absalom invited 200 guests and declared himself as king. He would no longer be under the rule of his father David. When anger breaks out in a rivulet, and then into a gulley washer, soon it becomes a flash flood, as folk take up the offense of others against us, and we stand helpless as the problem gets worse as the waters rise. This is a picture of a flashflood of anger that became as raging waters rolling over his soul.

David explained that the flood was ready to swallow him alive as the flood engulfed him, and the torrent swept over him, and the raging waters threatened to sweep him away. Have you ever had a man or a woman raging right in front of your face? Have you faced such angry ridicule? I have. It is menacing to be the target of anger. Anger spells, with the help of the devil, danger. Terrible images arose before David’s eyes. He pictures the flood as a huge fish, a shark with razor sharp teeth threatening to swallow him alive. Then the image changes from a blood-thirsty shark to the image of a gigantic tsunami wave bearing down on him ready to sweep him away. Beloved, don’t ever think that anger is a small matter. The anger of people—unsaved people and even as Jesus speaks of our families turning on us or even Christian brothers/sisters against each other. Sing your song to Jesus, beloved. If the Lord had not been on our side—oh, then it would have been curtains for you and me. Maybe you are presently at this moment under torrent of angry words, before the sharp shark teeth of an open mouth spewing anger. Maybe you are washed up on a beach, saved, but thrown there by the angry tsunami waves of someone’s violent anger. Think of it, praise God and pinch

yourself. What we have been speaking of wasn't sudden death for us, but only almost sudden death. We've been speaking first about what almost happened to us in the face of the violent anger of people that may have turned against us. 2ndly,

### **WHAT HAPPENED TO US INSTEAD BECAUSE THE LORD HELPED US?** (II.) Notice Psalm 124: 6-7. We read, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not

given us as prey to their teeth! We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers, the snare is broken, and we have escaped!" Beloved we have gone from what almost happened to what did happen to us. Again, there are two vicious images that we mentioned earlier in this part of David's song. Let's study what did happen when God intervened. (3) **The third image is of a menacing wild beast.** Daniel could have written this part of the psalm. But the writer you remember is David, and God did spare him from two literal wild beasts—first a lion and then a bear. Read about David's testimony to King Saul in I Samuel 17: 34 shortly before Goliath fell to one of David's five smooth stones in I Samuel 17: 50-51. The Jews had twelve different words for lions, which means that the Hebrew people took lions seriously. Nevertheless, Jeremiah compared Babylon to a lion—Jeremiah 4: 7 and 51: 38. And Peter compared Satan to a roaring lion in I Peter 5: 8. We know that Satan ultimately is our enemy and that our real enemy is not flesh and blood, but it is ultimately, despite the anger of people against us, ultimately our battle is against principalities and powers, against the rulers of this present darkness, against spiritual wickedness in high places." But David is letting us know that our Lord is stronger than the enemy of our souls. When we abide in Christ, we will win the victory. That's why David is now shouting and singing, "Blessed be the Lord who has not given us as prey to their teeth.

When the enemy is in our face, on our trail, and in our own home attacking, let us all say, "If it had not been that God was on our side, when people rose up against us—But this section of the psalm says, the Lord was and He is on our side. Right at the moment the shark was going ready to tear us to shreds, at the last second, God reached down and said, "Enough!" Just as the tree trunk we were clinging to broke loose to rage downstream, God reached out with His mighty arm and picked us away from the holocaust. David is celebrating his own Red Sea miracle.

Celebrating like Israel did as they stood on the far shore of the Red Sea. An hour before the closing of the Red Sea, all 3+ million Jews were hurrying across the sea floor of the dry bed of the Red Sea God had parted. Behind them Pharaoh and his mighty chariots and charioteers came rushing across the Interstate 80 God had opened in the Red Sea. You can imagine as the Jews made it to the other side, they looked back in horror and saw Pharaoh and his army coming. Then the One who was on their side, the One who led them into the trap of standing helpless before

the Red Sea, the One who parted the Red Sea and dried out a path across the waters, the same One who saw the rushing Egyptians not far from making it across the Sea, that same One you and I serve said, “Enough!” God told Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea, and the sea obeyed the Lord. Those Egyptians bearing down on Israel were history in moments—their bodies washed up dead on the shore. The Israelites could have perished, but they didn’t. David could have been slain by his own son Absalom, but Absalom became a dart board for David’s army as he hung by his long hair, caught in the bough of a sycamore tree.

(4) **There is a fourth image of being caught in a hidden trap.** Notice verse 7. “We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers, the snare is broken, and we have escaped!” We all need to memorize scripture this year to lighten our way and save us from the snare of the fowler, from the hidden traps of the devil. The picture here is of a helpless bird that unknowingly eats its way, walking into the trap of the bird catcher, the fowler. The picture shows how most of us get caught by the enemy in his traps. He uses things we like or we love or that we lust to woo us into the trap. Satan has fascinating bait he offers to us. Yet, think back to the traps you have walked into in this last year. Beloved, there is no trap that can hold you or me if God wants us to be free. The Lord here in our text did more for David than spring the trap that was shut on him. God not only opened the snare to let him out. God broke the trap so it could not be used again. The death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ has broken the trap, the domination of sin and death in our lives. We have been set free indeed through the blood of Jesus Christ and by His resurrection life. Praise God that though the traps of the enemy have been very real, meant to entrap, steal, kill and destroy us, we are not helpless. We are saved, set free, lifted up, carried out, plucked out from the burning, lost sheep, we have been found out on the side of the mountain cliff ready to die. Yes, we have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken and we have escaped.” Jesus breaks every fetter. Jesus breaks every fetter. Jesus breaks every fetter, and He sets us free.” I have been thinking back over this year as your pastor. I know some of the stories in which God has come to the rescue. I know what the Lord has done for both you and me. I also know that some of us are still facing the sudden attacks of anger, the raging floods and tsunamis of people’s wrath. I know it may be attacks to your face, angry words on the phone, or in letters, on email, in texts, or attacks behind our backs. I know the enemy has his mouth open to destroy some of us right now. I know the lions and bears may have us cornered and we may have stumbled into the enemy’s trap. But God. But God. But God! Thirdly and lastly,

**WHAT IS HAPPENING INSIDE US NOW AS WE REMEMBER GOD'S DELIVERANCE OR AS WE ANTICIPATE HIS DELIVERANCE.– (III.)**

Notice Psalm 124: 8. We read, “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” We’ve seen the lightning flashing and heard the thunder roll. We seen sin’s breakers dashing trying to conquer our soul. We’ve seen what almost happened and we’ve seen what did happen in the nick of time. What lessons have we learned or re-learned today? The psalmist David is celebrating. His imminent funeral never happened. Notice what David is celebrating. **(1) David isn’t just celebrating that his help is in the Lord. No, David is telling us his help is in the name of the Lord.** David is trusting in the character and reputation of the Lord who consistently, daily, and predictably hears and answers, who rescues us and delivers us. The name of the Lord is our Deliverer—our Help. He restores and forgives us. When we call on His Name, the Lord listens and He saves to the uttermost. It’s all in His lovely Name. It’s who He is and it’s what He does.

**(2) David is celebrating the covenant Name of the Lord.** This is the name Jehovah, Yahweh, the great relationship Name, the Name God showed Moses at the burning bush, the Great I Am. When Moses wanted to see God, God revealed Himself in his relationship, covenant Name. This covenant Name means God commits Himself to us His people. He commits to help us. He commits to love us and deliver us. This is the New Covenant God we serve, who has written His Name in our hearts and who has written our Names as believers not only in His Lamb’s Book of Life, but He has written our names on the palms of His hands. **(3) David is celebrating that His victory has come before and will ever come again not by chariots or horses, but by who our Lord is, our help is in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.** Our help is in the Creator of the whole world, earth, sky, and water, heaven and earth. He made it all out of nothing by the word of His mouth. Nothing we have in our life that is out of control is outside His control. Nothing we cannot change is closed to His changing. Nothing is outside His almighty jurisdiction. Nothing is beyond His sphere of influence. The hardest hearts can be melted by His love or broken by His discipline. He maintains and sustains everything in heaven and earth by the same word of His mouth that created the world. Lord, keep us from being impatient with Your timing. Keep us from being blind to Your will. Rescue us from being so individualistic that we forget we are part of the whole Israel of God who is singing. Open our eyes to see that the Christian’s hope is not ultimately healing and protection on earth, but your ultimate love and protection for eternity. Forgive our short-sightedness. Show us the miracle afresh of our being rescued from sin, judgment, death and hell. Give us David’s psalm and let us sing Psalm 124 to you. We love you, Lord. Amen.