

March 4, 2018  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Psalms  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## MY HELP COMES FROM MY KEEPER

### Psalm 121

This is a song of ascent which pilgrims sang as they journeyed up to Jerusalem for the festivals. There seems to be a group of fifteen psalms (120-134) that were known as the “Pilgrim Songs” because the people sang them while on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. As far as we can tell, David composed four of the songs (122, 124, 131, 133), Solomon composed one (127), and we really don’t know who composed the rest.

Because of the setting in which the people sang these songs, it is not surprising that they all speak of God’s care for His people and for His chosen city Jerusalem. Or they are pleas for God’s help and protection. And some of them are expressions of joy in the LORD because He does protect and care for His people.

They are called songs of ascent because people walking to Jerusalem had to ascend. Jerusalem, situated at 2,557 feet above sea level, is higher than all the surrounding geography. Therefore, everyone who came to Jerusalem ascended.

Now imagine yourself among a group of pilgrims heading up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a festival, a holiday, a time of rejoicing. That is the typical setting in which people would have sung Psalm 121. There is no level entry into Jerusalem. All around as the pilgrims walked, he or she would see hills and valleys. Singing Psalm 121 you would sing about those hills. “I look to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD who made the hills.”

Do we modern pilgrims have the same confidence that allows us to look around us at the evidence of our Creator and remember that He helps us? Do we errantly think we don’t need any help right now?

Or are we too busy trying to stay afloat in a sea of distraction that we cannot enjoy the beauty of the coral reefs around us?

This song is a good example of worship. We worship the LORD when we bow our hearts before Him. We worship when we attribute to the LORD all the glory and exaltation He deserves for being our Creator, our Sustainer, our Helper.

### We Need Help (vv.1-2).

An honest assessment of self will reveal that we all need help. But contrary to some people’s views of this psalm, our help does not come from the hills. Yes, but didn’t the psalmist wrote, “*I lift up my eyes to the hills*” (v.1a). Obviously he did. But we might wonder which hills and why look up at them. Obvious also is that the setting for the psalm would refer to the hills surrounding Jerusalem, and maybe even more specifically Jerusalem the city. It is as the Sons of Korah wrote of Jerusalem: *Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain (Psalm 48:1).*

Those hills around Jerusalem, those hills that the people looked at, would be by nature enigmatic. By that we mean that sometimes they were a place of safety to which one could run and hide. David wondered how people could feel like that if they had the Lord for a refuge. He wrote, *In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, “Flee like a bird to your mountain” (Psalm 11:1)?* On the other hand, and opposed to being a place of safety, the hills might be a foreboding place where thieves and brigands hide out.

So, why did the singers look to the hills and conclude the hills were the source of their help? It was not that the singers believed help came from the hills. It is true that some English translations actually convey that idea by running two separate clauses together such as: “*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help*” (Psalm 121:1 KJV). It would indeed appear from that translation that my help comes from the hills.

That is kind of the idea that is conveyed in the third longest running outdoor drama in America, *Unto These Hills*. Some of you may have attended a presentation of this show in Cherokee, N.C. It is a story about the history of the proud nation of the Cherokees and how they were moved to the reservation in the hills of North

Carolina. It portrays the people's worship and trust in gods of nature, exactly as one might expect from anyone who looks to the hills for safety, protection, and provision.

In reality, the Hebrew text reads better by allowing the singer to state that he looks at the enigmatic hills surrounding Jerusalem and then poses a question. The question emphasizes a common need: *From where does my help come (v.1)?* Picture the pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem for the feast. They might be fearful of bandits or beasts and need help. They might be weary from traveling for many long days and need strength beyond themselves.

Picture every pilgrim on his or her way to the Celestial city of God, the New Jerusalem. We need help as we must fight a battle with temptation to desire what we should not have. We need help because we become discouraged even while trying to do right. We need help because we grow weary in well doing. We need help because we lack wisdom when we must make decisions. We need help because often circumstances are beyond our control. We need help because we face problems that we do not have the resources to solve.

In all of these kinds of things, we are admitting that we need help beyond ourselves. It is easy and tempting to look to government. It is easy to appeal to fellow travelers or even people who are not on their way to heaven. Our LORD's desires for us when we face insurmountable circumstances and unanswerable questions is to turn to Him in faith, believing that He is able and willing to do what we cannot do.

We must confidently rest in the certainty that our help comes from the LORD. Sing with the psalmist, *My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth (v.2)*. That means that my help is beyond myself. It is so good for us to come to the end of ourselves. That is a difficult conclusion to reach because we are so proud and self-sufficient by nature. In fact, no one will be born again until he or she reaches this point. That is what Jesus meant when He taught, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (*Matthew 5:3*). A spiritual beggar knows he needs help.

The spiritual beggar needs to reach out to God for help. But it is difficult to trust the unseen God. That is why our "faith" is really not faith. Our "faith" is often based on experience. That becomes a very shaky foundation when someone asks, "How do you even know

there is a God?" Skeptics and atheists deny the existence of God because they have never seen him or experienced him. And even if you believe God exists, "How do you know He cares about you or that He will hear you when you pray, or that He will answer your prayer?"

Real faith is assurance and conviction in the unseen. We are all familiar with the statement, *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"* (*Hebrews 11:1*). That verse teaches us that faith is confidence in the future. Faith rests in the certainty that God is the blessed controller of all things and, therefore, can be trusted to keep His Word. Faith is based on what it *does* and what it *is*. What faith *does* is it makes totally real to us things that we have not yet experienced. What faith *is* – it is full confidence in things that are not real or present yet, but which God promises in His Word.

Only faith can truly conclude that my help comes from the Creator. So you think the hills and soaring mountains are impressive? They are! My Helper in time of need created all such impressive things with a word. I have never seen the Creator in physical manifestation. I cannot see Him in bodily form because He is a spirit. I have never heard my Creator speak. But I know that He exists, I know that He cares for me, and I know that He desires to help me because He has said so in His Word.

In stressful times, it is so easy for us to look at the impressive hills and think that maybe we can find comfort or security in things. It is so easy to contact our friends on social media for solace or advice. But the only real help is from the Lord our Creator who is and always will be true and faithful to every word in the Bible He gave us.

### **What Does the LORD's Help Look Like (vv.3-8)?**

Our Helper does not slumber (vv.3-5a). He cannot sleep and still be the keeper. The people of Israel rejoiced to sing that the LORD is Israel's keeper. *Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep (v.4)*. Some form of the English word "keep" appears six times in the last five verses of this psalm. It is the same Hebrew word every time even though some English translations use the word

“preserve” in verses seven and eight. The Hebrew word is very common in Old Testament literature (found 460 times) and means to watch over, to guard, and most importantly, to diligently exercise great care over something or someone.

The Jewish pilgrims traveling up to Jerusalem could sing confidently that Yahweh God is their keeper. They took confidence in the many promises that God had given to the nation that He had personally built out of Abraham’s seed.

The Keeper of the Israelites is your keeper. Notice the emphasis on the individual. *He who keeps you (v.3). The LORD is your keeper (v.5a)*. These statements draw us into a very personal relationship with the Keeper of our souls. The Creator, the ever-existing, self-existing LORD diligently exercises great care over me. He has numbered the hairs of my head. He knows my inner most secret thoughts, even thoughts which do not seem important to me. He knows my past, present, and future in detail. He knows my weaknesses and my failures. He knows my stubbornness and rebellion. And still He loves me and watches over me. Because He is so great beyond human comprehension, the Creator God is able to exercise this same kind of care for unnumerable people at the same time.

He does not allow your foot to be moved. *He will not let your foot be moved (v.3a)* appears to be a statement of fact. It is true. However, it is also possible that this is more like a prayer request or a blessing that would read: “May He not let your foot be moved.” That idea fits well as it comes right after the acknowledgment that help comes from the LORD. Again picture the Israelite pilgrim walking along the stony paths, up hill most of the way, and sometimes along a precipice. This request or even statement of assurance would certainly be in place in that setting.

The prayer request is also fitting for our circumstances. Sometimes we scurry along life’s path clueless of the pitfalls along the way. Because of sin, life’s pathway is full of roots, rocks, potholes, and dangerous, slippery trails on the edge of sheer cliffs. Think of the picture again of the person taking a pleasant stroll through a rose garden down by the duck pond. That is not a picture of real life for Christian or non-Christian alike. But for some reason there are Christians who think that is what God owes them in this sin-

cursed world. People who think that way spend little time asking God to watch them diligently and to keep them from slipping and going over the edge.

Last weekend a tragedy occurred as happens too often. A young man from Georgia was visiting friends who gathered for a wedding. On Saturday they were hiking in Pisgah National Forest in McDowell County, N.C. The man was looking over Catawba Falls, stretched out to get a better view, lost his footing and fell 50 feet to his death. And everyone bemoans the fact that he was not being more careful. But that is a picture of real life. If we understand that we are one step away from spiritual destruction, we will ask the Keeper of our souls to keep our foot from slipping.

It is wise to ask for this care and watchfulness from Him who neither slumbers or sleeps. Again it is probably best to see verse three as a prayer. First the request is, “May He not let your foot be moved (v.3a)” and then we are praying because “He who keeps you will not slumber” (v.3b). If we see verse three as the request, it is easy to view verse four as the assurance to the prayer. *He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep (v.4)*.

We need sleep and we often slumber. That is why pickets and soldiers on guard duty change shifts throughout the night. How much confidence we should have in the God who watches over all without ever needing to sleep or rest. I have learned over the years to go to sleep each night praying in my mind to Him who does not sleep. Instead of fretting or worrying or planning, which will cause you to toss and turn, it is better to commit everything to God in prayer and go to sleep.

Some commentators think that the pilgrims sang this song in the evening as they were approaching the city of Jerusalem and watching the sun set behind the hills of the city. I like how J. J. Stewart Perowne imagined the setting in which this song might be sung. He wrote, “Others, again, have conjectured that this was the song sung by the caravans of pilgrims going up to the yearly feasts, when first they came in sight of the mountains on which Jerusalem stands. At evening, as they are about to make preparations for their last nights encampment, they behold in the far distance, clear against the dying light of the western sky, the holy hill with its crown of towers. The sight fills them with a sense of peace and security, and from the midst

of the band a voice begins: 'I will lift up my eyes to the mountains.' And another voice answers, 'Surely He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. Surely He who keepeth thee will not slumber.' And anon the whole company of pilgrims takes up the strain, 'Behold He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. Jehovah shall keep.'" (J.J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms, vol. 1*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publishing, 1989, pp. 373, 374).

Our Helper is our shade (vv.5b-6). He is the right hand shade. The people sang, *the LORD is your shade on your right hand (v.5b)*. Very practically shade is a necessary protection from the heat and even harmful rays of the sun. The right hand pictured a person's strength. Therefore, we might see a warrior in battle protected by God's shade so that he can wield the sword with power. Or it is the farmer laboring in his field or vineyard shaded by God, strengthened to do God's work for God's glory. This was clearly the picture when God protected the entire nation of Israel with the cloudy pillar during their wilderness wanderings.

It is also an accurate picture of the circumstances in life that are as inevitable as the sun rising in the morning. The sun is good and appreciated until it becomes unbearable on a mid-July afternoon when you need to mow the lawn. And so, circumstances come and go in life with little notice. But when the circumstances of life get heated up by conflict, health problems, relational issues, we long for shade from God. He provides the shade of His grace and mercy whenever we ask. Oh, that we would learn to run to Him sooner when we begin to feel the heat of unfavorable circumstances, the blistering rays of testing or temptation.

Because the LORD is our shade, we are neither sun struck or moon struck. *The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night (v.6)*. We can understand easily enough the sun striking us by day. That was the reason for the shade offered in verse five. We pray for that protection and rejoice when God gives it. But what does being struck by the moon at night mean? God created the sun to rule the day, during which time we labor and need protection not only from the sun but all evil that abounds during the day. God created the moon to rule by night. Of course we have the English word "moonstruck" that means to be mentally or emotionally deranged, supposedly from the effects of the moon. Or it means to be

unbalanced because of romance. Probably the idea here is to express a parallelism with "struck by the sun." We pray that they LORD will protect us from every evil that is associated with the moon being out at night, just like we long to be protected from the evil of the day.

Our Helper's contract is eternal. He keeps our lives from evil. *The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life (v.7)*. The LORD is able to watch over us, diligently guard us from all evil. That is why we prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." The world is full of evil. Our bodies long to be evil. While we must fight and resist the "world, the flesh, and the devil," we must remember that God desires to keep us away from such evil.

Sometimes evil overtakes the child of God. Such was Job's case. In those times, God is still watching over us and gives grace in order to endure the testing. And ultimately, God delivers us to heaven, because He keeps us forever. *The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore (v.8)*. The Keeper of our souls consistently watches over His children in life. He will still be keeping us through all eternity. He loves us and watches over us, not because we are worthy or have done something to deserve it. He loves us and watches over us because He is faithful to His promises.

We should rejoice and sing that our help comes from God the Creator. Even when it appears that other people are helping us, we must remember that God created other people and gave them gifts and grace by which to help us. If we understand even a little of this truth, we will desire to praise and worship the Keeper of our souls.