

Text: Psalm 121

Title: “Looking Up”

Let’s open our Bibles to Psalm 121. This morning I’m starting a new series that I will explain in a moment, but in light of the horrific terror attack in Paris yesterday I am so grateful to be able to stand on the solid rock of Scripture when fear is everywhere. Follow as I read Psalm 121. Pray.

ILLUSTRATION – I was at the mall the week before last (less than a week after Halloween) and I was shocked to discover that they had set up the display where kids were already having their pictures made with Santa. I couldn’t believe it. It reminded me of this cartoon I saw recently. **SHOW CARTOON**. My wife had me up in the attic earlier this week taking down Christmas decorations.

We are entering what may be the most stressful time of the year for Americans. We have three holidays back to back ... Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. Do you already feel yourself tensing up? Well our spiritual ancestors, the OT people of God, had a number of special holidays or festivals, except they didn’t call them *holidays*. They called them *holy days*. They were seasons that drew them back to their spiritual roots and deepened their relationship with God. In fact, they even composed some songs that they sang on their way to Jerusalem for these occasions called the Psalms of Ascent found in Psalm 120-134. They are called Psalms of Ascent because people would likely sing them as they went up the ascending highway to Jerusalem, one of the highest points in Israel. They were ascending physically, but they were also ascending spiritually. By singing these psalms they were preparing their hearts to worship.

As we go through this holiday season this year I want us to allow these psalms help us step up and press in ... to **turn the holidays into holy-days** where we approach the Lord with wholehearted worship.

There are fifteen of these psalms starting with Psalm 120, and I plan to preach on a different one over the next seven weeks through the end of the year. I suggest that you read one of the Psalms of Ascent each day through the end of the year. There are 15 of them so you can read through them three times between now and New Years.

Today we start with Psalm 121. You will notice that there is an inscription above each of these fifteen psalms saying “A song of ascents.” A few of them also indicate that they were “of David” or “of Solomon,” but most of them are anonymous.

Now technically speaking none of these psalms directly relate to our Thanksgiving, Christmas or New Years holidays. But they reveal the distractions we all have as we move through the holidays ... distractions that can keep us from worshipping our way through this season. For example, here in Psalm 121 the psalmist is going through some kind of trouble and he asks himself a question:

Psalm 121:1 - I lift up my eyes to the hills— where does my help come from?

Something is troubling the heart of the psalmist. He needs help and he's looking up. I think he's looking to the hills of Jerusalem where the Temple of God is located and where God's people went to meet Him.

You see, troubles don't take a vacation over the holidays. People still have to go for cancer treatments. They still have to go to a job where there are pressures. They still have to figure out how to pay their bills. The psalmist is on his way to worship but his heart is weighed down with some trouble. "Where does my help come from? Who will help me through this trial?" Maybe you came to church today with those same questions. So we're thinking today about looking up to the One who is watching over us.

ILLUSTRATION – I walked into Home Depot the other day to pick up something. I was met by a kind lady who asked me, "May I help you find something?" I said, "No thanks, I'm good," knowing full well I didn't have a clue where that item was. So I spend the next several minutes roaming from aisle to aisle searching for what I was looking for ... all because I was too proud to ask for help.

We'd rather try to solve our problems on our own without God's help. You may be able to fix some things, but the greatest trouble any of us has is our sin problem. And you can't fix that on your own. Only the help that comes through Jesus can fix that problem.

The psalm opens with a question in v.1 ... "where does my help come from?" And the answer to the question comes beginning in...

Psalm 121:2 - My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Our help is from the Lord. And His help is...

- **PERSONAL**

Psalm 121:2 - My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

The help we need is in the person of the Lord. There are two important names of God here in this verse and they're both important.

Notice He is called "the LORD." And in most translations when this name of God is used the name is in all capitals. It signifies the Hebrew name YAHWEH . When Moses was sent by God to lead the Israelites out of the bondage of Egypt God told Moses to introduce God to the people by the name, "I AM" or "I AM WHO I AM." What an unusual name! But here's what it means: It means that God absolutely *is* (He exists). He never had a beginning. He simply *is* and always was. He will never end. God is completely independent. He depends on nothing or no one to bring him into being or support him. Everything depends totally on God. He is constant ... the

same yesterday, today, and forever. He is not becoming anything; He is who He is. God does whatever He pleases and He is always right and true. That's what this name "the LORD" means.

Now, if we are careful in our study we will catch sightings of Jesus in these Psalms of Ascent. The longing expressed in the heart of the psalmist in each of these songs is finally and ultimately met in Jesus, though in a literal sense the psalmist didn't know this. Jesus is the fulfillment of everything the psalmist longed for in going up to the Temple. Yahweh, the LORD, became a human in the person of His Son Jesus Christ.

It is from this One that our help comes. If you trust in the LORD through His Son Jesus Christ you can rest assured that He will take care of you.

But God is also called the "Maker of heaven and earth." He is the One who created everything. He made the planets and the vast universe. He created the boundless complexity of nature. He's in control of the weather. He formed your body in your mother's womb and instructs every organ how to function.

So what is it that calms our fears and encourages us when we face difficulties and hardships? The Maker of heaven and earth is our help. Can you imagine anything that is a problem for the Maker of heaven and earth? Can you think of an issue that cannot be solved by the One who said, "Let there be light," and there was light?

And again, God revealed Himself in a human body in the Person of Jesus Christ who was with the Father in the great act of creating everything that exists today. And this Jesus can stand in the midst of the winds and the waves and calm the storms of our lives.

This is God's *personal* care given to you *personally*. Every reference to "you" in vv.3-8 is singular. That means that the psalmist is speaking to himself. The Lord ... the Maker of heaven and earth ... cares about you personally. The Lord's help is personal but it is also...

- **PRACTICAL**

This God is personally and practically involved in the big and little details of our lives. Today I'm reading from the NIV 1984 version. And maybe you picked up the fact when we read through the psalm that the word "watch" is repeated several times. In fact, in the Hebrew it is repeated six times. This is a powerful word. It paints the picture of God standing guard over His people. His eyes are constantly open and He never misses a single detail. We are looking up to the One who is watching over us. The God we can't see sees us. And ...

1. THE LORD IS OUR SAFETY (vv.3-4).

Psalm 121:3-4 - He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Now we have to sleep every day. So there are several hours every day that we are out of commission. But the God who is watching over you never sleeps; He is continuously watching. He's paying attention. He's taking care of things. When we are faced with the most dangerous situations, God is watching over us and hears us when we cry out to Him.

ILLUSTRATION – Parents, you know about this. There are a lot of noises that don't awaken you in the night. But I would venture to say that the cry of one of your children isn't one of them. You hear a thud; you jump out of bed thinking your child has fallen out of the bed. You hear a cry and you're instantly awake. The difference with God is that He never even sleeps.

And this is the reason that you can go off to sleep at night ... because He never sleeps. You can close your eyes and slip from consciousness and forget your troubles because God never sleeps. You can rest because He never rests from caring for His creation. Our safety ... salvation ... is in Him. You can not only rest physically, but also rest spiritually. You can rest from the work of trying to save yourself and keep yourself saved because God never rests from His work of keeping you. Peter reminds us that we have...

1 Peter 1:4 - an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you,

1 Peter 1:5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Yes, threats will come, and we may experience attacks, but we are never in ultimate danger because the Lord is our safety. God is in absolute control in every circumstance. We look up to the Lord who is watching over us. Also...

2. THE LORD IS OUR SHELTER (vv.5-6).

Psalm 121:5-6 - The LORD watches over you— the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

Now this may be a little hard for us to understand. Most of us are not threatened by extreme heat or cold. We live in air conditioned and heated homes. We drive in air conditioned and heated cars. But that wasn't so for ancient people. These pilgrims who were traveling on foot across country to get to Jerusalem knew the dangers of a heat stroke from the sun. They knew the dangers of traveling at night and the threat of robbers or animals. And on the journey they trusted in the Lord. He was their shelter and their protection.

We are more vulnerable than we think. As hard as we work to protect ourselves from illness or attack or troubles, we are all vulnerable. So we must look to the Lord who is our shelter.

Psalm 91:1 - He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

So the Lord is our safety and our shelter. But also...

3. THE LORD IS OUR SECURITY (vv.7-8).

Psalm 121:7-8 - The LORD will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Really? No harm? Absolutely yes! Nothing finally and ultimately harmful will come to you. A surgeon prepping for surgery knows that he is about to go in and, in a sense, do harm to his patient in making an incision. But it is not finally or ultimately harmful because it will lead to healing.

Every aspect of our life ... coming and going ... both now and forevermore ... is in the hands of the God who loves you. Your health, your financial future, your job, your family, your dating life ... He sees it all. And when you trust Him in those things you can live in the security that there's nothing that can ultimately crush us as the people of God.

And here's the deal: When you look up to the One who is watching over you you look into the face of Jesus.

Romans 8:32 - He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?