

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 4/25/93 PM  
Psalm 121 "The Difference God Makes in Life"

**Sharing Time:** Tonight's study of God's Word is entitled, "The Difference God Makes in Life." Think about that question, "What difference has God made in my life?" Share an area where He has made a difference.

**Intro:** With summer approaching, many people are starting to think and talk about vacations. What do you usually do before you take a trip? Let's put together a checklist of your routine before you head out on a journey... Make reservations at motel. Pack. Get traveler's checks. Check map. Sedate kids (?!).

Did you realize that God gave us a psalm in the Bible that describes the experience of a person preparing for a trip? Psalm 121.

We are continuing our mini-series, "How To Experience the Presence of God in Your Life." We've looked at Psalm 1, Psalm 15, Psalm 54, and last week, Psalm 63. Tonight we come to a very familiar psalm, Psalm 121.

Think about it. Life is a journey. We have a starting point, and a destination. We have a roadmap to guide us. We have a reservation.

Notice the heading over Psalm 121.

"A Song of Degrees" (NIV "A Song of Ascents")

If you'll notice carefully, you'll see the same heading over 15 consecutive psalms, from Psalm 120 through Psalm 134. What does the heading mean?

We can't be dogmatic. The Mishna records that in the Temple court in Jerusalem, there were 15 steps on the stairway leading from the Court of the Women to the Court of the Israelites. One theory suggests that the Levites sang these 15 psalms as they ascended these 15 steps, one psalm per step.

A more likely possibility is that the 15 psalms were songs used by pilgrims on their way up to the Temple in Jerusalem. At least 4 times a year, the Jewish people would journey to Jerusalem for the major feasts God incorporated into their calendar, such as the Feast of Unleavened Bread & Passover, and the Feast of Tabernacles. As the pilgrims traveled they used these 15 psalms in their worship on the road, to prepare their hearts for worship in Jerusalem.

See: Isa 30:29 "You shall have a song..."

Notice the longing for Jerusalem present in these psalms:

122:1 "I was glad when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord..."

122:2-3 "Our feet shall stand withtin thy gates, O Jerusalem..."

122:6 "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

125:1 "They who trust...shall be as Mount Zion..."

132:13 "For the Lord has chosen Zion..."

134:1, 3 "Behold, bless ye the Lord...in the house of the Lord...out of Zion."

It was a delight for God's people to go to Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel and the symbol of Yahweh's presence. It was also dangerous. The journey could be hazardous and risky. The threat of wild animals and greedy thieves was ever-present.

Q: How do you do what God wants you to do (i.e. go to worship in Jerusalem) when you know there may be danger on the way?

That's what Ps 121 addresses. Ps 121 reminds us we serve a God who makes a difference in life!

Q: What should we do when we face the threat of a distressing situation?

**Proposition: In Psalm 121, the Psalmist by example teaches us that when we face potential distress, we need to affirm 3 truths about our God.**

- I. Fix your focus on the Character of God (1-2).
- II. Fix your focus on the Concern of God (3-4).
  - A. He is concerned for the Universe (2).
  - B. He is concerned for His People (4).
  - C. He is concerned for the Individual (5).
- III. Fix your focus on the Control of God (5-8).
  - A. God preserves us in our troubles (7).
  - B. God preserves us in our travels (8).

### **I. Fix your focus on the Character of God (1-2).**

Vv 1-2 "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. From whence comes my help..."

Remember the setting. This is a song of ascents. It probably describes the traveler's thoughts prior to leaving for Jerusalem. Any trip is potentially unnerving. His was no exception. Suppose he lived in Beer Sheba. His trek would be 40 miles, uphill, through lonely, rough terrain.

Q: What does he do to calm his apprehension?

A: V 1--He looked to the hills.

Illust: Slides of hills in Palestine

As the psalmist looked at the hills, a question came to his mind.

V 1 "From whence comes my help."

Notice his admission of help. "From whence cometh my help?" There's nothing wrong with expressing your need. We're not invincible.

I love the confident expression in v 2! Where did the psalmist find help?

V 2 "My help comes from the Lord."

The hills prompted him to think of God. He focused on the LORD (=Yahweh). That's the covenant, personal name of the God of Israel.

Quote: Charles Spurgeon stated the obvious in his "The Treasury of David," "It is wise to look to the strong for strength." (14)

Illust: Ladies, who do you go to when you can't get a jar opened in the kitchen? Your toddler? I doubt it. You find the strongest grip in the house.

It's wise to look to the strong for strength.

Listen. You can't find anyone any stronger than the One who made heaven and earth!

Quote: Spurgeon, "Jehovah who created all things is equal to every emergency; heaven and earth are at the disposal of Him who made them, therefore let us be very joyful in our infinite helper. He will sooner destroy heaven and earth than permit His people to be destroyed..." (14-15)

Please notice the pronouns in the Psalm with me.

Vv 1-2 "I, my"

Vv 3-4 "He, He"

Vv 5-8 "thy, thy, thee"

Notice the movement. In the psalm, the emphasis moves from "I" to "Him" to "you." In the beginning verses, the psalmist affirms his confidence in God. In the final verses, he shares his conviction that what God could do for him He could do for everyone!

In this sense, Ps 121 is a blessing. The psalmist pronounces a blessing.

See: Num 6:24-26

Application: We are not to "hoard" our experience with God. When God helps and blesses us, we are to share that with others.

Key: We can't pass on to others what we've never experienced ourselves.

Illust: Dads and moms, if you say, "Why don't my kids seem enthused about God any more? I can't get them to come to church. They never get their Bible off the shelf. What's the problem?"

There could be various factors. But here's the first to check. Is God real in YOUR life? Listen. If you're not confident in God, why would you expect your kids to be? I'll be frank. If God's not making a difference in my life, what right do I to have to be frustrated over the spiritual apathy of my children?

Illust:

Here's the first lesson. When in situations of distress, fix your focus on the Character of God. Look to God. Cultivate a relationship with God.

## **II. Fix your focus on the Concern of God (3-4).**

Vv 3-4 "He will not suffer thy foot..."

Q: What do we learn about the "concern" of God in Ps 121?

A: We're told of 3 objects of God's love. Imagine 3 concentric circles...

### A. Circle #1: He is concerned for the Universe (2).

V 2 "Who made heaven and earth."

The universe is in God's care. He made it.

The next circle is more focuses...

### B. Circle #2: He is concerned for His People (4).

V 4 "Behold, He who keeps Israel..."

God holds the universe. That's great. But this is more personal. God takes care of Israel. That's His chosen people. Out of all the nations of the earth, God chose Israel to be His own. He redeemed Israel. He revealed His Word to Israel. He guarantees He will "keep" Israel.

Here is the key word in the Psalm.

"keep"--Hebrew (shamar) = to guard, to watch, to preserve

In Gen 2:15 the same word is used of Adam.

Gen 2:15 "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to till it and to keep it."

Adam's job was to "keep" the garden. He was to take care of it. He was to develop it. He would pour all his energies into bringing out the best of that garden.

That's what God does with His people.

Illust:

But God's concern is even more personal than that...

### C. Circle #3: He is concerned for the Individual (5).

V 5 "The Lord is THY keeper..."

I thank God that He is concerned for His universe, and for His people. But do you know what really amazes me? This truth right here. God is concerned for the individual, for me.

The Lord is "thy" keeper. That's 2nd person singular. In modern English, we use the word "you" for both singular and plural.

Eg--Coaching T-ball, "When I say, "You get the ball," I have to be careful. I may be talking to one person, but the whole team could take off.

That's why in the old English of the KJV you see the pronouns "thy, thou."

Here's a mind-boggling fact. The Creator of the universe is interested in individuals:

--thy foot (3)                      --thy keeper (5)

--thy shade (5)--thy right hand (5)

--thy soul (7)                      --thy going out and coming in (8)

Q: Have you come to grips with the fact that God cares for you?

Illust:

Tran: When facing distressful situations, what should we do? First, we must fix our focus on the Character of God. Then on the Compassion of God.

### **III. Fix your focus on the Control of God (5-8).**

Vv 5-8 "The Lord is thy keeper..."

One of the great themes of Scripture is the Sovereignty of God. Nothing merely "happens" to the child of God. There's no such thing as "chance" or "luck." We serve a God who is sovereign. He is in absolute control.

eg--

Q: What does God's control mean practically?

A: Watch this. The psalmist mentions 2 things God controls...

A. God preserves us in our troubles (7).

V 7 "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil..."

"evil"--NIV "harm"

Notice carefully. What is it that God preserves? Not our bank account, not our estate, not even necessarily our health or reputation "The Lord shall preserve THEE." The Lord shall preserve THY SOUL.

It's YOU God is interested in. He is shaping us, molding us, fashioning us, into the image of His Son. The Christian life is not a cushioned life. It is a well-armed life. The dark valleys may come, but God's presence will preserve us.

Ps 23:4 "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..."

We serve a preserving God. He preserves us.

Eg--a great encouragement when counseling the terminally ill

B. God preserves us in our travels (8).

V 8 "The Lord shall preserve..."

The Hebrews had a favorite way of expressing totality. They'd do it by naming a pair of opposites.

"thy going out" = the start

"thy coming in" = the finish

Listen. If God's in charge of the start and the finish, you can count on Him for everything in between too! He's in charge.

Illust: Story in Spurgeon about little girl on a ship in a storm (21)

**Conclusion:**

Q: Does God make a difference in life? He sure does?

O friend, may I encourage you tonight to "lift up your eyes unto the hills."

From whence cometh your help?

Can you say with confidence tonight, "My help comes from the Lord"?

Is the Lord Jesus Christ your helper? Is He?

Challenge: Let's fix our eyes on...

1. The Character of God
2. The Concern of God
3. The Control of God