

Ascend:
What Will We See When We Look Up?

Psalm 121

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Text Introduction: We are considering Psalm 120-134 this summer. This is a collection of Psalms each bearing the heading, “A Song of Ascents.” The songs of ascents are a compilation of Psalms in the larger book of Psalms.

To what does this heading refer? Most believe that these are songs that worshippers sung as they made their way to Jerusalem (being on a higher plain) for thrice annual special times of worship.¹ If this is so, then we learn a great deal about what was on their hearts as they approached worship and thus understand what should be upon our hearts as we prepare to worship or just give attention to the subject of worship. This thought will guide us in the weeks to come. This is not so much as a practical guide to the “how to” of worship, but instead a theological mine for what prompts earnest worship.

Our Psalm today is Psalm 121. Psalm 121 is a more familiar Psalm than some of the rest in this unit. Sometimes it has been called the Traveller’s Psalm. Families have read it together before embarking on a family trip or sending a member of their family away on a trip. For example, the great missionary pioneer to Africa, David Livingstone, read this Psalm with his family before leaving for Africa.

The phrase, “My help comes from the Lord” was on an English coin back in the 1300’s.

Some call this the Soldier’s Psalm. One military hero indicated that this was his favorite chapter in the Bible and verses 7 and 8 “mean more to me than any other.”² Well, let’s read it today.

Text: I lift my eyes toward the mountains.

Where will my help come from?

² My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

³ He will not allow your foot to slip;
your Protector will not slumber.

⁴ Indeed, the Protector of Israel
does not slumber or sleep.

⁵ The LORD protects you;
the LORD is a shelter right by your side.

⁶ The sun will not strike you by day
or the moon by night.

¹ Other ideas include: Psalms that reflect entering the Promised Land the first time, re-entering after Exile, correlating to the climb up the steps to the Temple (one Psalm for 15 steps), and/or figurative for the journey back to God.

² J.S. Watson, USN captain, perhaps even Rear Admiral at one point, during days of Spanish-American War.

⁷The LORD will protect you from all harm;
He will protect your life.

⁸The LORD will protect your coming and going
both now and forever.

Introduction: Helen Lemell wrote the hymn “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.” Helen was well known for answering the question, “How are you?” with “I am fine in the things that count.” Helen wrote the hymn “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” after reading the pamphlet of a missionary. The pamphlet was entitled, “Focused,” and contained these words. “So then, turn your eyes upon Him [Christ]. Look full into His face and you will find that the things of earth will acquire a strange new dimness.”

Just a few years ago, the modern day band, *For King and Country* took the words of that hymn and Psalm 121 as the inspiration for their song, “Fix Our Eyes.”

Last week, as we began this study on the Songs of Ascents, we studied Psalm 120. The message is a simple one. “In my distress, I called to the Lord, and He answered me.” Though we get the assurance of His answer when we call, we said last time that this was a rather bleak hymn. We compared it to “singing the blues.” I gave last week’s sermon the title, “When Life Has You Down, Look Up!”

In today’s text, we discover, “What We Will See When We Look Up!”

Honest Question (Verse 1)

This Psalm begins with a question. The Psalmist’s question is not so much a question of despair that he will not find help, but an acknowledgement that he needs help.

It seems that we face two issues in our dealing with problems. The first issue is that we try to figure things out or work things out on our own. The second issue is to think that God is incapable in our problems.

So, notice the answer that begins to arrive in verse 2.

Hope-Filled Answer (Verse 2)

- General and Good Answer—It is a good answer to say that “my help comes from the Lord.” But, that answer can be amplified in the description of who God is. That’s what comes next. Who is God, his helper? “The maker of heaven and earth.” So, we have amore precise and powerful answer.
- More Precise and Powerful Answer

The question is not how big is your problem, the question is how big is your God. O, He is the maker of Heaven and earth.

In a lecture entitled, “Scientific Evidence for the Existence of God,” University of Oklahoma physics professor Michael Strauss says, “There are 322 parameters needed to form a planet capable of sustaining intelligent life. The probability that all 322 could develop by chance is ten to the minus -282.” (You put a decimal point with 282 zeroes, then a 1) Only God! What’s

more—according to a new estimate, there are about one trillion species of microbes on Earth. Here’s the amazing part: 99.999 percent of them have yet to be discovered. As one scientist noted, “We’re very far away from discovering what’s really out there.” In the latest National Geographic magazine, an issue devoted to Yellowstone National Park, this amazing factoid is offered: “If you drive every road of Yellowstone, you’ll cover one percent of the park.”³

And so God, the maker of Heaven and earth, can take care of you. Our problem is not the size of our problem, it is the size of our view of God.

This reminds me of Job 38-42 and the string of questions God presents.

- Most Particular and Personal Answer

Then, the answer is personalized. This is not some general answer; this is a very personal answer to you.

Elaboration on the Answer (Verses 3-8)

Key Word: Protection

You will see the key idea in verses 3-8 is protection. In fact, part of the beauty of this Psalm is that there are 58 Hebrew syllables before and after the statement in verse 5, “The Lord protects you.” What is the core of God’s answer? He protects. How?

- Constant—He will not sleep or slumber. The giraffe requires only between 10 minutes to two hours of sleep a day. God does not sleep.
- Close—He is a shelter right by your side. In 2014 and 2015, I had the honor and responsibility of serving as the moderator/president of the annual meeting of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. I had an extremely capable credentialed parliamentarian to advise me in navigating procedures to help us have a respectful and fair debate. He sat just to my right shoulder during the business sessions. In 2014, we had some difficult things come up, which I tried to handle, but I was getting messages that certain things were going to come up on Tuesday morning. My devotional reading that Tuesday morning in my read through the Bible plan for that year included Psalm 121. My heart was awakened. I need His help every day, but I knew I especially needed His help this day. Then I came to verse 5:

the Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

Once again, God used His word to comfort me. I had more than a parliamentarian on my right side; the Lord Himself was right by me.

- Complete—His protection is complete. Verse 6 indicates his protection both from the sun and the moon. We know the sun beats down on us physically. The ancients believed that to be

³ From Jim Denison. Denison Daily Briefing, May 25, 2016.

moonstruck was to be debilitated mentally or emotionally. This is where we get the word “lunatic.” So, God’s completion is perfect. It is complete. He protects mentally and physically.

- Continuing—His protection is both now and forever.

Conclusion: “I raise my eyes toward the mountain. Where will my help come from?” Think of all of the God moments on mountains. High on Mt. Moriah, God provides a ram for Abraham, sparing his only son Isaac (Genesis 22). Think of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai with God’s law, the very expression of His character (Exodus 20). Then, there is Jesus on the Mount, the hillside, delivering the greatest sermon ever preached (Matthew 5-7). It was on the Mount of Transfiguration, as the Gospels call that high place, where the declaration from Heaven is heard, “This is My beloved Son.” (Matthew 17) See our Savior on Calvary’s hill, bearing the full measure of God’s wrath for sinners (Matthew 27). Matthew said that it was on the mountain that the Lord delivered to them what the church has called The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16). From the Mount of Olives, the disciples saw Jesus ascending back to heaven but angels spoke this promise, “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11-12). Finally, join the apostle John on Patmos for the glorious Revelation vision. Join him at the end of the book where in 21:10-11 we read, “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.”

This is the God who is our help, our protector! Why would you look anywhere else?⁴

⁴ Adapted from sermon by Danny Akin on Psalm 121.