

Lurgan Baptist Church 16:10:2005

Reading : PSALM 121

Help Is On The Way

One of the most powerful, pungent, poignant words in the English language is the word *help*. **Help!** - it is the cry of a mother with four children, three dogs, two cats and a parakeet after a week at home, while the husband has been away in U.S.A. on a “*business trip*.” **Help!** - it is the cry of a college student who sits down to take his final exam, only to discover he has studied the wrong chapters. **Help!** - it is the cry of a man sitting at a table surrounded by a stack of unpaid bills, hungry children, an empty bank account with no job in sight. **Help!** - it is the cry of a woman who has poured her life into hearth and home for twenty-five years only to have the husband she adores walk in and say, “*I'm leaving. I have met someone else, and I don't love you anymore.*” I wonder, have you ever been in a position where you needed help? More than that, have you ever been in a position where the only one who could possibly help you was the Lord? The Psalmist here was in dire need of help. Evidently he was in such a position and a predicament that there was no other place to turn but God.

Now this psalm may have been written in the days of Hezekiah, when the Assyrian army was threatening Judea and Jerusalem. If that were the case there was

plenty of cause for fear. It was either *surrender or siege*. Battle and bloodshed, unceasing war, famine, pestilence. And if surrender came at last sacking the city by an infuriated army would follow. As you hold your Bible open to this wonderful chapter you find three important words at the top of the psalm. “*A Song of Degrees, or Ascents.*” Now what does that mean? Well, there are fifteen of these psalms (120-134) The Hebrew word “*Degrees, or Ascents,*” comes from a root that means “*to go up,*” as ascending a stairway. You see, in those ancient days, the Israelites would travel to Jerusalem about 2700 feet in elevation for the three annual feasts. (Exod 23:14-19)

Coming from whatever distant town they called home, the pilgrims would make the long journey by foot, walking with their family and friends and enjoying their holiday travel. They were eager for good times in the Holy City, seeing friends again over the feast and making sacrifices to the Lord. *Now as they journeyed to Jerusalem they would sing these psalms together.* Has your family ever enjoyed a sing-along during a holiday journey in the car? Have you ever sung on your way to church, preparing your hearts for worship? It must have been a great comfort for them to be reminded of God's care for them as they travelled. My what about our spiritual journey? For these psalms are not limited to ancient history, but contain essential truths for our journey through this life, to our eternal home. You see, the Bible never lies to us by claiming that life is easy. The Christian faith is no free pass. But somehow we get the mistaken idea, that when we face trouble as

inevitably we will, we come to the conclusion, *that the presence of trouble implies the absence of God*. A greater mistaken cannot be made. I am going to give you three truths this that will carry you through the stormy seas and the furious floods that you are going to face in life.

1. THE LORD IS MY PROVIDER

Mythe Psalmist did what all of us tend to do when we are in trouble. He looked every place but the right place. He tried everything but the right thing. He asked every person but the right person. He found every avenue a dead-end street. Now most scholars are agreed that the rendering of (121:1) should be changed. Its not that the psalmist thought that his help would come from the hills, perhaps already occupied by the Assyrians, and until very recently had been scenes of idolatrous worship. No ! That's not what the psalm says. The writer makes a statement, “ *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.*” Then he breaks off and asks a question, “ *from whence cometh my help.*” Where I am going to find help ? My the answer to the problems that you face and I face, our homes face, our churches face, our leaders face, our governments face, our nations face, are not going to be found in the hills of humanistic living, nor in the halls of higher learning, but in the heaven of a holy Lord. The prophet Jeremiah had already warned the nation, “ *Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; Truly, in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.*” (Jer. 3:23) My we are all going to be shaken by the tremors of trials,

troubles, and tribulations. When we feel the ground literally shaking beneath our feet, God will give us exactly the three things that all of us need to overcome. First of all He will gave us,

(a) SECURITY:

“ *My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.*” (121:2) Can you think of anyone you would rather have as your helper than the God who created this universe. I'm talking about the God who is higher than the hills, mightier than the mountains, above all the armies, greater than all the generals. I'm talking about the God who created this world with a word, and one day will cremate this world with a whisper. I am talking about the God of whom we are told in (Pro 26:10) that he is “ *the great God that formed all things.*” I'm talking about the God of whom Jeremiah said, “ *Ah, Lord God! Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm. There is nothing too hard for Thee.*” (Jer. 32:17) My the God who created this world controls this world, and can do anything in this world, through this world, for this world, or with this world He chooses to do. “ *But our God is in the heavens; He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased.*” (Ps 115:3) My do you realise that God is your help in time of trouble, that God is your hope in time of tragedy ? *If we only realized how powerful our great God is, when we come to those times when God is the only help we have, we would realize that God is the only help we need.* Do we know what the experts say about our sun ? They tell us it is a ball of fire that astronomers classify as a

moderate star. In other words, just an average size star. Yet it has a diameter of 864,000 miles, but it is all gas two billion, billion, billion tons of gas.

There is the crushing weight of a million million pounds of matter over every square inch of the sun's core. In fact, the only thing that keeps the core of the sun from collapsing is energy, unbelievable floods of energy that raise the sun's internal temperature to 25 million degrees Fahrenheit. It consumes 657 million tons of hydrogen each second. *Yet it has been calculated that the sun can go on burning for another 50 billion years.* Yet that massive star could not even cause one drop of sweat to fall from the brow of our Lord and our God. I don't know what kind of problem you may be facing in the weariness of the journey, I'm certain it can seem all but insurmountable, but will you take a fresh look at the God of Creation, your God who created and sustains every atom of the universe. *Now do you think He's up to the challenge ?*

(b) STABILITY:

“ He will not suffer thy foot to be moved,” (121:3)
The word to be moved literally means *“ to slip and slide, to stagger, to be shaken.”* For the pilgrim going up to Jerusalem, there were many dangers. How easy it would be to sprain an ankle, or even fall while walking on uneven rocky paths. My even now and then the adversities of life that land at your home, may put a right flush on your face. You may stagger but you'll not fall, because it is God who will not allow your foot to be

moved. There is a wonderful promise found in (Pro 3:25-26,) *“ Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the consolation of the wicked, when it cometh. For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.”* My the feet that are standing on the solid Rock of Ages can neither slip nor stumble. When others are falling like flies, the man of God who stands for God, will not, and cannot fall. (a) (b)

(c) SERENITY:

“ He that keepeth slumber nor sleep,” (121:3-4)
Now no parent can watch their children twenty-four hours a day, but God does. Have you ever heard the old saying, *“ Out of sight, out of mind ?”* My you are never out of His sight and you are never off His mind. God knows you ! Aren't you glad that God knows who you are ? ***Isn't it unbelievable ?*** The God who made heaven and earth knows you by name, indeed He knows the very hairs on your head by number. (Matt 10:30)
Now if the Lord knows all that, don't you think He's up to date on the larger issues of your life ? Don't you think He knows exactly how you feel this and cares deeply ? My God is on watch twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, a hundred years a century, ten centuries a millennium. The reason why you should be able to go to sleep at night is because He doesn't. When David was being pursued by his own son, and there was a “ Wanted Dead,” poster on him, and he was to be shot on sight, he said, *“ I will both lay me down in peace and sleep for Thou Lord only makest me dwell in safety.”* (Ps 4:8)

Back in the days of World War II when the Germans were bombing London all night, every night, after a particularly devastating run on a certain city the citizens began to search among the ruins for the dead and the dying and the missing. There was a godly old grandmother they could not find, and they looked everywhere. Then someone finally found her soundly asleep in her little bedroom. They came in and said, “ *Why Mrs. Smith, how could you sleep with all of that bombing going on ?*” She said, “ *Well, it says in the Bible. He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.’ So I figured there was no need for both of us to stay up all night and I went to bed.*” Have you ever paced the floor at night because of your children, some financial problem, an illness, or another problem in your life ? My do we not realise “ ***God works the nightshift ?***” The Lord is always there when you need Him. In the loneliest, darkest hour of the night, He is there because He does not slumber or sleep. (1)

(2) THE LORD IS MY PROTECTOR

Do you see what the psalmist says ? “ *The Lord is Thy keeper.*” (21:5) Now several times in these verses we find the word “ *keep.*” In fact, this word is used six different times in this one psalm. It means “ *to guard and protect.*” You see,

(a) WE ARE VULNERABLE ON ALL SIDES:

In ancient days a soldier had two primary weapons. He

had a shield and he had a sword. But his most valued weapon was the shield because that was his only defence and the shield was always held in the left hand. So the most vulnerable part of a soldier was his right side.

Do you see that this is exactly where the Lord always stands, at our most vulnerable point. “ *The Lord is Thy shade upon thy right hand,*” the Lord always puts His strength at our greatest point of weakness. He deliberately takes up a position so he can defend us no matter where an attack may come from sometimes from our families, our friends, our foes ! But the Lord is our shade. It can be translated “ *shadow.*” God is like our shadow. Do you know something ? Your shadow follows you every moment of the day. So God is

“ *your shade at your right hand,*” that’s like He is always standing at our right hand, right there. No matter where we go, what situation we face, how we feel, who opposes us, no matter what the world throws at us, God is right there. *Is that not encouraging ?* The American Indians had a unique practice of training young braves. On the night of a boy’s thirteenth birthday, after learning hunting, fishing, and various other skills, he was put to one final test. He was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone.

Until then, he had never been away from the security of his family and tribe. But on this night, he was blindfolded and taken several miles away. When he took off the blindfold he was in the middle of thick woods and he was terrified. Every time a twig snapped, he visualised a wild animal ready to pounce. After what seemed like an eternity dawn broke, and the first rays of sunlight entered

the interior of the forest. Looking around the boy saw flowers, trees and the outline of the path. *Then, surprised he saw a man standing just a feet away, armed with a bow and arrow.* It was **his father** who had been there all night long. Do you see those times when you are terrified ? Those periods when you visualise all sorts of things about to pounce ? Will you remember that your Father is by your side, for He is thy shade upon thy right hand ? (a) And,

(b) WE ARE VULNERABLE AT ALL SEASONS:

But God is able to keep us by day or by night it makes no difference to Him. Now this does not mean that obedient Christians never find themselves in difficulty and danger, or that they will never feel physical and emotional pain. My the things that God permits to happen to us in His will may hurt us but they will not harm us.

1. The Lord will keep us by Day:

For “ *the sun shall not strike thee by day.*” So often the trials that we go through are fiery trials. Peter explicitly warns us in his letter “ *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.*”

(1 Pet 4:12) Sometimes it gets hot in the kitchen of life. But God never puts you in the kitchen where you cannot stand the heat. You see, God is our shade. 1.

2. The Lord will keep us by Night:

Have you ever heard of being “ *moonstruck* ?” When this psalm was written there were all kinds of superstitions circulating concerning the moon ? People believed that moon light brought dangers, and the moon could be as deadly as the sun. But the psalmist says day and night our Father is with us to shelter us from that which would harm us. My do you suffer from night fears ? Have you come to fear the night ? Does the darkness and loneliness of it all, hold special terrors for you ? Well, the message is this. God is great, and He will protect you in the heat of the day, and in the terrors of the night He will never leave your side, for the Lord is your protector. So the Lord (1) (2)

(3) THE LORD IS MY PRESERVER

For do you see how the psalm ends ? “ *the Lord for evermore.*” (21:7-8) Now the word translated “ *preserve,*” is the same Hebrew word used for the word “ *keep.*” But it is still a good alternative translation. Because God does more than just protect us, He preserves us. We need Him to do both. Isn't it fascinating to watch the massive security that surrounds the President of the U.S.A. ? The massive numbers of secret service agents who surround the President. Now the secret service has one job, and that is to protect the President. But even the secret service cannot prevent a heckler from standing up when the President speaks to shout out derogatory epithets toward the President. No amount of effort can always prevent an assassination attempt on a President's life. You see, likewise, God does not always prevent us from trouble, but He does

promise to protect us in trouble, and preserve us through trouble. The psalmist says,

(a) The Lord will Preserve us SPIRITUALLY:

Look at (121:7) if you will. Now the word evil here in the Hebrew language does not refer to evil that is done to us. *It refers rather to evil that is done by us.* The Lord promises us that if we will follow Him, love Him, serve Him, and obey Him, He will not lead us into temptation, but He will deliver us from evil, that which is wicked or injurious. I heard about a young man one time that was asked to go to a place, where quite frankly a Christian had no business going. He said, “ *I would like to, but I have a friend who loves me, and whom I love very much, and he would not want to go with me. I will not go without him.*” His friend said, “ *Well, let's go meet him and we'll ask him to go.*” The man said, “ *Oh, it's no use. I can tell you right now he won't go.*” “ *Well, let's try it. You never know, maybe he'll go.*” He said, “ *Listen, I know this friend. We've been friends for a long time. I am telling you, he will not go.*”

He said, “ *Well just who is this friend of yours ?*” He answered, “ *My friend is the Lord Jesus Christ.*” My listen, Jesus Christ was a friend to sinners, but He was an enemy to sin. And any man who is a friend of the Lord Jesus will also be an enemy of sin. And the Lord will preserve you (a)

(b) The Lord will Preserve us CONTINUALLY:

“ *Thy going out and thy coming in,*” is a wonderful O.T. idiom that describes the regular routines of life. Do you ever feel that you are a slave to the demands of each day ? Do you ever feel that way ? Go out, come in, go out come in, go out, come in. And in your darker moments, you begin to wonder, “ *Is the Lord involved in all of this ? Does He care at all about the endless treadmill of my life ? Yes ! He preserves you in your going out and in your coming in.* (a) (b)

(c) The Lord will Preserve us ETERNALLY:

“ *And even for evermore,*” (21:8) That is one of the greatest one-sentence statements of eternal security found in the Word of God. From the very moment that a person is saved and born into the kingdom of God, throughout time and eternity, God promises to preserve and protect his soul. Someone says, “ *Well what about those times when I am not faithful to God ?*” Let me give you some good news. Even when you are not faithful to God, He is always faithful to you. It is His faithfulness that matters. Some few years ago a man left England and went to America. He was an Englishman but he became an American citizen. After a few years he decided to go to Cuba to see if he could find his fortune. After he had been in Cuba a little while, civil war broke out there. This was in 1867. *This man somehow was accidentally arrested by the Spanish government as a spy, though he was not a spy.* He was tried by court martial, found guilty and ordered to be shot. The entire trial was conducted in Spanish, and the poor man, not understanding Spanish, had no

idea what was going on. When they told him the verdict, that he had been found guilty of espionage and condemned to die, he sent for the American Consul and the English Consul and laid the whole case before them, proving his innocence and asked them to protect him. After examining the case they found that this man whom the Spanish officers had condemned to be shot was perfectly innocent.

So they went to the Spanish general and they said, “ *This man whom you have condemned to death is an innocent man. We demand he be released.*” But the Spanish general said, “ *He has been tried by our law. He has been found guilty and he must die.*” This was back in the days when there was no electric cable, no modern communication system whatsoever. These men could not consult with their governments. Well, the morning came on which this man was to be executed. He was brought out sitting on his own coffin in a cart and taken to the place where he was to be shot. A grave was dug. They took the coffin out of that cart, placed the young man upon it, took a black cap and pulled it down over his face, and he was awaiting the order for those Spanish soldiers to fire. But about that time the American and English Consuls rode up. The English Consul sprang out of that carriage and took the Union Jack, and wrapped it around that man, and the American Consul jumped out, ran up to him and wrapped the Stars and Stripes around him, and then turning to the Spanish officers they said, “ *Fire upon those flags if you dare.*” They lowered their guns and refused to fire because they knew that behind those flags were the two

most powerful governments on earth. My I want to tell you today God has wrapped us in the flags of his grace and his love. *When friends abandon you, remember God is your Provider. When foes attack you, remember God is your Protector. When fears assail you, remember God is your Preserver.* **Help is on the way !**