

My Help

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. Book of Psalms, Psalm 121.

Psalm 121, page 516 in the Church Bible. Now, we're going to look at the whole psalm.

Psalm 121. As I said, we're going to look at the whole psalm, but just read again from the beginning. A song of ascents. I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven. Heaven and earth. Over the past few months, and even in the past month, I've found that the hardest thing about preaching is not preparing what you preach or even preaching what you preach, but practicing what you preach.

[1 : 2 4] Practicing what you preach. Because, you know, it's all good and well to be praying and planning and preparing and preaching sermons. But unless you actually practice what you preach, unless you apply God's Word first and foremost to yourself as a preacher, unless you learn from your sermon and live out your sermon, then you receive no blessing or benefit from it.

And of course, that doesn't mean that a preacher has to encounter and experience every circumstance and every situation in life in order that he has empathy with everyone in his congregation.

But it does mean that the preacher must practice what he preaches. The preacher must practice what he preaches. And in the past month, I've been reminded of that very fact.

Because I doubt you remember, and I don't expect you to remember, but the last time I preached from this pulpit was a month ago. It was the 31st of March. It was Easter Sunday.

And I began that Easter Sunday sermon at 11 a.m., as we usually do. But I began the sermon with a statement, We don't know what a day nor an hour will bring in our lives.

[2 : 3 9] Because things can change so swiftly and suddenly without a word of warning. And by 9 p.m. that night, I was being taught, Murdo, practice what you preach, as Finley was being flown to Glasgow in an ambulance plane.

And as you know, I often preach to you, I often say to you, that the God we worship is sovereign. He's superior. He is supreme in our lives.

I often preach to you that His perfect providence assures us and affirms to us that He has seen everything beforehand. I often preach to you that He knows all the twists and all the turns of all the trials and all the tribulations of our lives, because He has written the story of our lives.

I often seek to remind you that our Bible calls us and commands us to cast all our cares and concerns upon the Lord, simply because He cares for us.

Murdo, practice what you preach. And you know, it's for that reason, over the past month and number of months, in my experience, I've kept coming back to the same question that the psalmist asks here in this well-known psalm.

[3 : 57] Where does my help come from? Where does my help come from? And so I want us to think about this question this morning, a great question. I want us to think about this question under three headings.

We see, first of all, the pilgrim's prayer. Then the pilgrim's progress. Then the pilgrim's promise. The pilgrim's prayer, the pilgrim's progress, the pilgrim's promise.

It begins with the pilgrim's prayer. He says, I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Now, the reason all of our headings are about the pilgrim is because Psalm 121 is the pilgrim's psalm. It's the sojourner's psalm. It's the psalm that depicts and describes the pilgrim's progress or the Christian life.

And as you know, one of my favorite books is John Bunyan's classic, The Pilgrim's Progress. If you've never read The Pilgrim's Progress, or if you haven't read it for a while, I'd encourage you to read it because next to the Bible, The Pilgrim's Progress is one of the best books to read and enjoy.

[5 : 08] In fact, the well-known preacher, as you have mentioned before, Spurgeon, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, he used to encourage his congregation to read The Pilgrim's Progress at least once a year.

Because in doing so, in reading it every year, Spurgeon believed that his congregation would be reminded of where they've come from, where they now are, and where they're going as they journey through this life.

Where they've come from, where they are, where they're going. And if you've read The Pilgrim's Progress, or if you've watched the movie, it's a great movie, the animation of The Pilgrim's Progress. If you've read the book or watched the movie, you'll know that in the book, the author, John Bunyan, he paints the picture, or the portrait, of a man who became a Christian by reading his Bible.

You know, you want to be a Christian? Read your Bible. The Pilgrim's Progress is all about this story of a man who's on a journey. He's a sojourner. He's a pilgrim.

But you know, what always amazes me about Pilgrim's Progress is that the main character in the story, when the main character, when he meets someone new in the narrative, and they ask him his name, what's your name?

[6 : 24] The main character, he would often reply and say, at first I was called Graceless, but now my name is Christian. I have come from the city of destruction.

I am going to Mount Zion. I am a pilgrim. I am going to the celestial city. At first I was called Graceless, but now my name is Christian.

And of course, that's what John Bunyan sought to convey to us, convey to us that Christian's confession is the confession of all Christians. At first I was called Graceless, but now my name is Christian.

It's the confession of every pilgrim who is journeying on towards the celestial city. That's the image, that's the illustration which has been pictured and portrayed to us in this psalm.

Because as we said, Psalm 121, it's the pilgrim psalm, it's the sojourner's psalm. But you know, it's not actually a psalm. It's a song.

[7 : 27] The title tells us that it's a song, a song of ascents. It's because the book of Psalms is actually made up of 150 psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

The only reason it's actually called the book of Psalms is simply because there's more psalms in it than hymns or spiritual songs. And so Psalm 121 is a song. It's a spiritual song.

It's a sojourner's song. And as you can see from the title, and if you look at all the other psalms around it, you'll see that they all have the same title, a song of ascents.

They're all part of a group of 15 songs called the songs of ascents. Psalms numbered 120 to 134.

And they're all called the songs of ascents because they were sung by the Lord's people. And they were sung as the Lord's people ascended and assembled in the city of Jerusalem for all the annual feasts and festivals that were held there.

[8 : 24] But what's interesting about this song, this spiritual song, is that the title, when you read it in its original language, it literally reads, a song for the ascent.

It's not a song of ascents. It's a song for the ascent, implying that this spiritual song is the sojourner's song. It's the pilgrim's song.

And we can see that because it begins with the pilgrim's prayer. I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? I lift up my eyes to the hills.

Where does my help come from? And you can almost imagine this pilgrim plodding along the path towards the city of Jerusalem. And he would have had to walk for miles and miles, traveling days and days through all the locations and all the landscapes of Israel.

You could say that all the terrain of Israel was such that he would have had to walk long and difficult distances over mountains, alongside rivers, and even through valleys.

[9 : 32] And it seems here that as the psalmist begins this pilgrim's song, it seems that he's walking through a valley because he says that there are all these hills around him.

All these hills are around him on either side. And he's looking up to the hills and he's saying, I will lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from?

But you know, the thing is, the psalmist was looking up to the hills because these hills that surrounded him, these hills were actually the high places and high spaces that were used as shrines and sacrifice centers to worship false gods and bowed down to idols.

That's where you often found a false altar. It was on the top of a hill. These high places, they were where all the ideologies and all the idolatry of the day was paraded and promoted by the people.

The high places were where all the sacrifices were offered to dead and dumb idols. The high places were where all the popular falsehoods, all the fallacies of the day were then advanced and applauded by the nation.

[10 : 46] And you know, for the psalmist, I'm sure there was a day in his life when he was up there. I'm sure there was a day in his life when he ascended and assembled at these high places and high spaces.

I'm sure there was a day when he worshipped at these shrines and sacrificed on these altars. I'm sure that there was a day in his ignorance where he followed all the popular ideologies and idolatry that was being paraded and promoted throughout the nation of Israel.

I'm sure there was a day, my friend, in his life when he was a stranger to grace and to God just like there was a day in your life and a day in my life when we could confess with McShane I once was a stranger to grace and to God.

I knew not my danger and felt not my load. Though friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree Jehovah said Kenu was nothing nothing to me.

But the wonder of wonders is that as McShane goes on to say when free grace awoke me by light from on high then legal fear shook me I trembled to die no refuge no safety in self could I see.

[12 : 04] Jehovah said Kenu my saviour must be. And it's then that we began praying the pilgrim's prayer I lift up my eyes to these hills of idolatry and I look at them and ask well where does my help come from?

Not from these hills not from these high places not from these ideologies and places of idolatry not from these falsehoods and fallacies of people not from the applause and approval of others not even from within myself where does my help come from?

Verse 2 my help comes from the Lord the maker of heaven and earth he looks beyond the hills and he's asking where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord seated enthroned on high where heaven is his throne and the earth is his footstool my help comes from there the maker of heaven and earth that brings us secondly to the pilgrim's progress the pilgrim's progress so we see the pilgrim's prayer in verses 1 and 2 then the pilgrim's progress he says where does my help come from?

it comes from the maker of heaven and earth then he says verse 3 he will not let your foot be moved he who keeps you will not slumber behold he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep now I mentioned earlier that one of my favorite books is the pilgrim's progress because it's all about the Christian life it's about this man Christian he's fled from the city of destruction and he flees with a book in his hand the bible and a burden on his back which is his sin and he journeys as you follow the narrative he journeys first of all to the cross and then on towards the celestial city but one of my favorite moments in the pilgrim's progress is when Christian has slipped into this swamp it's called the slough of despond and Christian you read he's stuck he's struggling he's sinking deeper and deeper in the slough of despond and as Christian shouts he's shouting for help as he shouts for help a man comes along and the amazing thing about

[14 : 29] John Bunyan's pilgrim's progress here they have all these fascinating names and the man who's going to give him some help is called help and help says to Christian give me your hand give me your hand so what does Christian do Christian reaches up out he reaches out his hand and help grabs him and he draws him out of the mire Bunyan says he draws him out of the mire and sets his feet on solid ground help did for Christian just what we were singing earlier in Psalm 40 help did for Christian what we were singing in Psalm 40 he took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay and on a rock he set my feet establishing my way and that's what the psalmist is singing here in the pilgrim's song he's he's not just singing about the pilgrim's prayer he's singing about the pilgrim's progress and he's saying

I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence doth come mine aid where does my help come from where does my help come from and you know you know my friend with all the sins sicknesses sufferings and sorrows of life it's a great question it's a great question to stop and think about you know when I'm worried about the future where does my help come from when I encounter opposition at work where does my help come from when I receive bad news where does my help come from when I lose my job where does my help come from when my marriage breaks down where does my help come from when there's a diagnosis I didn't expect where does my help come from when someone I love and I've looked to all my life when they're suddenly taken from me where does my help come from when life takes that unexpected twist or turn where does my help come from and you look here in this wonderful psalm the psalmist is in no doubt as to where his help came from my help comes from the Lord the maker of heaven and earth

I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence doth come mine aid and as we were singing in our opening item of praise psalm 100 the psalmist says our aid our aid comes from the one who made us without our aid our aid comes from the one who made us without our aid and you know that statement alone should blow our mind that's what we should leave church with this morning where does my help come from my help comes from him the maker of heaven and earth my help comes from the God who spoke this world into being at its very genesis my help comes from the God who brought everything into being in the space of six days and all very good my help comes from the God who upholds this world every day by the word of his power my help comes from the God in whose hand my very breath is where does my help come from and you know my friend you should look outside look around you and see that my help comes from the God who causes the skies to sing and the stars to be counted by him my help comes from the God who has placed all the planets and he is the one who calms all the waves my help comes from the God who protects the animals and even provides for the little birds my help comes from the God who determines the seas and even designs the snowflake where does my help come from where does it come from it comes from the

God in whose image and likeness I have been fearfully and wonderfully made where does it come from the maker of heaven and earth not these high places no it comes from above outside of ourselves our help comes from the maker of heaven and earth and you know my friend what ought to amaze you what ought to leave you in awe is that the maker of heaven and earth he looks at you this morning and loves you as his creation he looks at you and loves you as his creation but more than that he has given to you his word and in his word he calls you to come to him and you're to come to him even if you're weary even if you're broken you're to come to him if you're sad and if you're struggling you're to come to him with all your burdens and all your baggage and it says there you're to cast every care upon him every concern you have you're to bring it to him why because he cares for you and he's committed to you he cares for you and he's committed to you and you know the psalmist here he's so certain so sure that the lord is someone who calls you and cares for you and is committed to you that he says there in verse three he will not let your foot be moved he will not allow your foot to slip or slide or stagger he's committed to caring for you he's committed to watching over you he's committed to guarding your life my friend this is the beauty of the gospel that the maker of heaven and earth will not let you be separated from him you commit yourself to him and Paul shows us there in

Romans 8 he asks that question great question who shall separate us from the love of Christ he says shall tribulation no distress no persecution no famine no nakedness no peril no sword no no he says in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us and Paul writes there right at the end of Romans 8 read it for yourself I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor even things to come neither height nor depth nor any other creature is able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord my friend the maker of heaven and earth is committed to you why because you are far too precious to allow anyone or anything else to watch over you so much so we're told as we go on in the psalm he will not slumber and he will not sleep verse 3 he will not let your foot be moved he who keeps you will not slumber behold he who keeps

[22 : 00] Israel will neither slumber nor sleep I'm sure I'm sure that everyone hates night time children hate it especially and especially when they're unwell because at night as you know everything's quiet everything's in darkness everyone's asleep and the night it seems so long you'll know that from yourself if you've ever been unwell it's so long and it's so lonely we found that when Finley was in hospital everything seemed to get worse at night because his temperature increased his coughing increased his worry increased everything seemed to get worse at night but every night Alison would ask Finley who's on the night shift who's on the night shift and she wasn't referring to herself Finley would say God is on the night shift God is on the night shift because that's the pilgrim's promise that's what it says here in Psalm 121 the maker of heaven and earth will not slumber and he will not sleep he's on duty and look he's on duty day and night 24 hours a day 7 days a week 365 and 6 days a year he's on duty he's there day and night you are too precious far too precious to allow anyone or anything else to watch over you that's how good the maker of heaven and earth is but you know there's more promises for the pilgrim because as we bring this song to a conclusion we see another couple of promises we've seen in this song the pilgrim's prayer we've seen the pilgrim's progress then lastly we see the pilgrim's promise the pilgrim's promise look at verse 5 the lord is your keeper the lord is your shade on your right hand the sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night the lord will keep you from all evil he will keep your life the lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever more there are two words that are repeated throughout this pilgrim's song the first word is who makes the pilgrim's promise the second word is the pilgrim's promise the first word you know as we study this song and as we'll sing it later on the first word we've seen is that it's the one who makes the pilgrim's promise and that is the lord that's something the psalmist he emphasizes and explains again and again throughout the pilgrim's song he says my help comes from the lord then he goes on to say the lord is your keeper the lord is your shade the lord will keep your life the lord will keep your going out and your coming in the one who makes the pilgrim's promise is the lord and you'll notice we see it so often in the psalms the title lord is in capital letters I-o-r-d capital letters which should immediately remind us that this is the title of a king it's the title of the covenant king it's the title of the one who keeps covenant it's the title of the one who makes promises and keeps his promises the lord is the one who is trustworthy and true he is sure and steadfast he is loyal and loving he's faithful and will never forsake you the lord is the one who makes the pilgrim's promise because he is the lord Jesus Christ where does my help come from it comes from him him

and him alone because he is the maker of heaven and earth but more than that he's the only savior of sinners and his promise the pilgrim's promise is that he will keep you he will keep you that's the other word that's repeated throughout the pilgrim's song that the lord keeps you the lord is your keeper and that you are kept by him as your journey through life and you know we often hear it on the news don't we we hear people on the news or public figures or even celebrities and they say things like this is my journey this is the journey I'm on this is my journey but you know the Christian pilgrim they can say that on my journey I'm being kept on my journey I'm being kept and the bible teaches us that we are being kept by the power of god and the prayers of god's people we're being kept by the power of god and the prayers of god's people and you know there's nothing like it there's nothing like it when you know that you're being kept by the power of god and the prayers of god's people there's nothing like it when you know and something has happened in your life and you know that you are being kept by the power of god and the prayers of god's people and you know it because you are being given as the bible promises us you're giving grace to help in your time of need. And what I always find amazing is that you're not given that grace when you don't need it. The Bible says it's grace to help in time of need. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Time has gone, but you know,

I'll conclude with this. You know, this word, keep, repeated throughout the psalm, I often say that Psalm 121 is the keeper, Psalm. Because that word keep also means to watch or to guard or to preserve or to protect. It's the language of the shepherd. It's the language of the shepherd.

It's the language of the good shepherd. Because as you know, it's the good shepherd who keeps his sheep. It's the good shepherd who watches over his sheep. It's the good shepherd who guards and protects and preserves his sheep. It's the language of the shepherd.

But you know the amazing thing about being kept? He probably won't like me mentioning his name, but I'm going to say it in a way. Our elder, Kenny Mitchell, he often says the first step after being saved is being kept.

[28 : 56] The first step after following the good shepherd is being kept by the good shepherd.

The first step after following the good shepherd is being kept by the good shepherd. And you know, my friend, if you're not following this good shepherd yet, if you're not following him yet, I mean, why not? But if you're not following this good shepherd yet, then you need to take that step of faith. Because the first step after being saved is being kept. And you don't keep yourself. It's the Lord who keeps you. That's his promise.

The Lord promises to keep you. The first step after seeking the Lord and coming out on the side of the Lord, the first step after committing your life to the Lord is that you are being kept.

And the pilgrim song is showing us this morning that when you take that step, and for many of you, it's about time you took that step. But when you make that step, verse 8, here's your promise. The Lord will keep. You're going out this morning and you're coming in from this time forth, from today and forevermore. Not only in this life, but for all eternity.

This psalm ends here looking beyond the end of life into glory itself. The promise of the pilgrim is that when you take that step of faith, the Lord will keep. You're going out and you're coming in from this time forth and even forevermore. My friend, where does your help come from?

[30 : 57] My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, we give thanks this morning for that beautiful psalm, a psalm that we have often sung, a psalm that we have often read. But Lord, we pray that it might be old to us, but ever new, speaking to us afresh of the Lord who is our keeper and who promises to keep us every step of the way.

We confess, O Lord, how often we faint and we fail, how often we trip and we let the Lord down. But we give thanks that today he reminds us that he will keep our going out. He will keep our coming in from this time forth and even forevermore. We pray for those, Lord, who have not taken that first step. We plead that they would, that they would see how wonderful it is to follow the Lord and to know that we are kept day by day through every trial and tribulation of life, that whatever comes our way, the Lord remains our keeper and he is there for us. He is watching over us and he never slumbers and he never sleeps. Keep us, Lord, we pray, for we know that we cannot keep ourselves.

Do us good, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning. We're going to sing in that psalm, Psalm 121. Psalm 121, page 416 in the blue psalm book.

Psalm 121. Remind you there's tea and coffee after the service in the hall, so out the door to your right. You're warmly invited to stay if you can and if you're able and you might get a piece of chocolate if the children have left any for you. Psalm 121. We're going to sing the whole psalm.

[33 : 19] I to the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come my need. My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. We'll sing the whole psalm and we'll stand to sing if you're able to God's praise.

Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. My food he'll not let side nor will. His hunger at thee keeps.

Be worthy that keeps his fire He's humberged, no door sleeps The Lord he keeps, the Lord I shade All thy white hand does seem The man by night thee shall not spite Nor yet the sun by day The Lord shall keep thy soul

He shall preserve thee from all hell As for thy going out and in God keep forever well The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father The fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all now and forevermore Amen Amen