

PSALM 121—OUR SECURITY IN CHRIST

INTRO: All of us try to prevent harm from happening to us. That's why we have 401Ks, wear our seat belts, try to eat better, quit smoking, and do all the other things we do to protect ourselves. But none of it is perfect. We still get in accidents, get sick (maybe cancer), get laid off, get divorced, and will die. Is there any hope for real security? Psalm 121 tells us that there is. We can access this security. Having it can change our lives for the better. **[READ]**

PROP: This psalm is telling us: **our only real, lasting security is in Jesus Christ.** You may think that strange, since the psalm was written hundreds of years before Christ came into the world and does not name him—but stick around, and we will see!

O/S: We are going to look at **Psalm 121** section-by-section and then see its implications for our lives.

First a little background: **Psalms 120-134** are known as *songs of ascent*, because they were sung by worshippers as they ascended the road to Jerusalem to attend the three mandatory festivals or sung by the Levite singers as they ascended the fifteen steps to minister at the Temple in Jerusalem. They are all relatively short and tend to be hopeful. **Psalm 121** is not ascribed to anyone in particular.

This psalm is organized in four two-verse couplets, each based on a particular word or concept that is repeated in each of the verses: **vv. 1-2:** “help”; **vv. 3-4:** “keeps” and “slumber”; **vv. 5-6:** “shade”/“sun” and “moon”; **vv. 7-8:** the concept of complete protection: “keep” and talks about “all evil,” “*your going out and coming in*” “*from this time forth forever.*” The first half of the psalm (**vv. 1-4**) focuses on God’s *ability* to help, protect, and keep us: **v. 2** talks about his *power* to keep us because he is the creator of heaven and earth; **vv. 3-4** tell us he is *alert* to our situation because he never sleeps. The last half of the psalm (**vv. 5-8**) focus on the *comprehensiveness* of God’s keeping of us at any time, from any cause, in any location, forever. This is even indicated by the movement of the psalm which begins at creation in **v. 2** and ends at eternity in **v. 8**.

Verses 1-2 (read): These verses ask the question we all ask: From where shall my help come? Where can I find lasting security? The answer is: our only lasting security is in the Lord. Although he is not named in this psalm, these verses point us to who the Lord is: Jesus Christ. He has the power to give us all the help we need.

How do we know that? **v. 1** says, “**I lift up my eyes to the hills.**” **Psalm 2** helps to identify what is going on here; **psalm 2** largely relates to Jesus. **Ps 2:6** picks up on the theme of “**the hills.**” There God says, “**I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.**” Jesus is that king. He is the “Son” of **Ps 2:7**, and **Ps 2:8** says he has been given “**the very ends of the earth as his possession.**” Jesus is the one who is over everything.

v. 2 of our psalm speaks of “**the Lord who made heaven and earth.**” Multiple biblical passages specifically identify Jesus as the Lord. Remember the apostle Thomas to whom Jesus said, after the resurrection, “**Put your finger in my hands and your hand in my side,**” and Thomas could only reply, “**My Lord and my God.**” And creation: **Col 1:15-17** says that Jesus “**is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible. . . . All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.**” So yes, from where does my help come? It comes from the Lord Jesus, who created all things and who has all power and authority on heaven and on earth.

Verses 3-4 (read): These verses are telling us that he not only has all power, but he knows our needs; he knows our situation, because he never slumbers or sleeps. What about our foot being moved or slipping? Bad things do happen to us. But as John Newton one said, “**Everything is needful that he sends; nothing can be needful that he withholds.**” IOW, what is happening to us is happening for a reason. That is an important, and we will return to it when we look at the implications of this psalm for our lives.

Verses 5-6 (read): These verses and **vv. 7-8** show us the comprehensiveness of our security in Christ. Nothing in nature can separate us from being kept safe in the arms of the Lord. The book of Revelation picks up on this thought. **Rev 7:16-17** says that God’s people “**will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd.**” **Rev**

21:23 adds, “**And the city [New Jerusalem] has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.**”

Revelation is pointing us to the fact that the protection that we find in Christ is not just temporary but is eternal. It is pointing us to the new heavens and the new earth—IOW New Jerusalem—which will last forever. This again has implications for us which we will discuss in a few minutes.

Verses 7-8 (read): These verses tell us that the Lord will keep us from “all evil,” regardless of cause (since it is “all” evil). They also talk about the Lord keeping our life wherever we are located (“**your going out and your coming in**”); and temporally for all eternity (“**from this time forth and forever**”). When v. 7 says, “**he will keep your life,**” the word translated “life” by the ESV is actually deeper than just our physical lives. The Hebrew word is *nephesh*, which can refer to your “self,” or your “soul,” which is how the NASB translates it. IOW, he keeps the “real you.”

And that is important. The Lord knows the “real you,” more than we even know ourselves. An example of this is seen in the book of Judges where the “angel of the Lord” appeared to Gideon. The OT indicates that the “AOTL” is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. In **Judges 6**, Gideon was threshing wheat in a wine press to hide from the Midianites. But the AOTL appeared to him and called him “**O valiant warrior,**” even though Gideon responded, “**my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.**” IOW, “**I’m just a little, young nothing.**” But the AOTL knew who he really was and what he really could become.

The same is true for us. Jesus knows us inside and out. He knows who we are, what we are, and what we can become. That is why, in **Rev 2:17** he says that, to those who remain faithful to him, “**I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.**” He made us, he knows us, he loves us, and he will keep us. And he will keep us “**from this time forth and forevermore,**” because, as **Heb 13** reminds us, “**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever**” and “**will never leave us or forsake us.**”

So what are the implications of this for our lives?

IMPLICATIONS:

(1) To access our security in Christ, we must come to him in faith. **John 3:16** says, “**For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**” To believe in him, we need to know him. In fact, Jesus himself equates eternal life with knowing him. In **John 17:3** he said, “**This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**” WE CAN KNOW HIM. Jesus was a man, but he was more than just a man; he was God who came to earth as a man.

In essence, the gospel is this: because God is God, he is perfect and holy. And that is the standard he holds us to, as Jesus said, “**you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect**” (**Matt 5:48**). But we are not perfect, and never will be, no matter how hard we try. That is why Jesus came to earth. To live the life we should have lived, die the death we should have died, and pay the price for our sin that otherwise we would have to pay but never could. And he did that, ultimately on the cross. But when he rose from the dead and later ascended back to heaven, that verifies that Jesus is exactly who he said he is and shows that the Father accepted his sacrifice.

If you believe that, you can receive him as your Lord and Savior right now. If God has been tugging on you, then take the step. You can say to Him right now: “**Lord, I know I have been going my own way for all my life. It’s not working. Please forgive me. From right now, I’m going to live for You. Please come into my life as my Lord. I give you control over all aspects of my life: my money, my time, my actions, my relationships. I have faith in You that, by the blood of Jesus that He shed on the cross, You have changed my heart and will change my life. For it is by Jesus that I pray, and believe, and thank you for giving me new life.**” If you do that, tell someone. Tell me. **Rom 10:9** says, “**If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.**”

(2) Once we do that, we need to draw on his means of grace so that he is the center of our life. Don’t just “admire” Jesus. He neither wants nor needs “admirers.” Instead, FOLLOW HIM. *That* is the difference between life and death. He came that you would have life, and have it abundantly. How can we begin to experience that?

We can utilize the means of grace God has given us. What are they? Let me mention three: (1) He gave us his Word, the Bible—read it regularly. It is the primary means God uses to instill his values in us to change us. (2) Prayer is communicating with God, both speaking to him and listening to him. The lifeblood of any relationship is communication. So develop your relationship with him. (3) The church is his body here on earth. Get connected with this fellowship of believers or some other church where Christ is proclaimed and His Word is taught. Begin getting disciplined in the faith. This will have practical effects in our lives: in how we spend our time; our activities; our values; our priorities; how we treat people; and what we do with our money. Over time, you will be able to see how he is working in you, changing you, and making you more like himself.

So far, we have talked about how **Psalm 121** is telling us that the Lord will keep us in all circumstances, in all times, and in all places, forever. The Bible shows us that the Lord is none other than Jesus Christ. So to access his protection we need to come to him in faith and then draw on his means of grace. All that is wonderful.

(3) But there's an 800 pound gorilla in the room, isn't there? What is that? It is the fact that, although the words of **Psalm 121** sound so nice on their face, the fact is we all face adversity and hardship, illness, pain, financial problems, relationship problems, losses of many kinds, and ultimately death. Doesn't all that just contradict everything that was said in the psalm? And what does Jesus have to say about that?

The answer is, our problems do not contradict the psalm; instead, Jesus takes our problems and transforms them by transforming us. We cannot take this psalm or any verse in the Bible out of context. Jesus said he himself was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He promised us that in this life we *will* have tribulation. Those are givens. That is precisely why having an intimate relationship with Jesus is absolutely necessary. Without him, THERE IS NO HOPE.

If Christ really is the focus of our life, he will affect everything. **Heb 12:1** tells us to “**lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us.**” You can't just “lay aside” your cancer, or divorce, or financial problems as if they were only figments of your imagination. However, when Christ is our focus, he will *transform* our *attitudes* and our *responses* to the problems we face. It is true: sometimes he *does* miraculously heal us or save us from the consequences of our actions. When I was many years younger, I went too fast around a sharp corner in the countryside and my car rolled over 3 times. The top was smashed in. Yet God spared me and the person who was in the car with me. We both walked away with barely a scratch. That's grace; I did not deserve it.

That does not always, or even usually, happen. For those who know him, Jesus said he will be inside of us, will never leave us, and will work in our circumstances, in our problems, and in our lives. When Christ is our focus we will see that these problems are among the vehicles God is *using* to *transform our thinking and our character*—IOW, to make us just like Jesus. *That is what God is mainly interested in.* If we understand that, we will start seeing our problems and our circumstances as God-ordained opportunities: opportunities to see Christ at work in us; opportunities to grow in Christlikeness; and to exhibit a Christlike response in how we deal with the problems and issues we face.

I can see this clearly at work in a person I know. Heidi is the daughter of my cousin. Heidi is a Christian in her early 30s; she is married and has four children. But she has a very rare form of cancer. When she was diagnosed, her doctor said he had never seen anyone in her condition last even 8 months. She has had a bone marrow transplant, and a kidney transplant, and has lasted 3½ years, and it seemed like she was going to make it. But recently, her mom, my cousin, posted this on FB: “**Heidi's blood work today showed a hemoglobin of 4.5, the lowest ever. According to the medical staff at her appointment today, it is now low enough to begin to cause heart problems, or other organ malfunctions ... in addition to increased fatigue as less oxygen keeps her body going. She could 'go' just about 'any time', yet to look at her (except for her skin tone) she doesn't act like someone on the threshold of death. She talked about it very matter-of-factly with the kids at dinner tonight... no fear, no tears, just normal life around here! Thank you all for your continued prayers that the timing and the way it 'happens' be blessed and just right.**” What makes her response—her peace and even joy—possible, is her deep relationship with Jesus Christ. There is a sequel to this. A little over a week ago, Heidi died. She died peacefully and with no fear, because she knew where she was going, because

she knew Jesus. That grace is available to all of us, regardless of how hard our circumstances are.

Heidi did not have to face death bearing the regrets of her sins and the wrongs she had done. Remember, v. 7 of our psalm says, **“The Lord will keep you from all evil.”** He can keep us from all evil because *he bore* all evil on himself; he paid the price for that evil on the cross—the evil we have done, the evil of others, and the evil of our circumstances. If you have received Jesus as your Lord, whatever wrong you have done has been paid for; so when you stand before him in the judgment you won’t have to pay for it yourself. And the evil of others and the evil of circumstances that affect us—like what affected Heidi—he can transform for good. That is how he **“keeps us from all evil.”** It is still evil in one sense. But in another sense, it has been transformed for good—and that good will be manifested for all eternity in a transformed you. That is why this psalm is pointing us to the eternity of the New Jerusalem—where we will clearly see how God has transformed evil for ultimate good.

We may not understand what is happening to us or to those we love, or why, and we may not like it. But we know that we can trust Jesus all the way to the end. We can do that because he is trustworthy. In the Bible, the essence of hell is separation from God. When Jesus cried out from the cross, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** he was actually experiencing hell. By definition, hell lasts forever. Jesus did not just bear one eternity in hell, but millions of eternities in hell, all compressed onto him in the time he was on the cross. That is beyond my ability to comprehend. But that is what it took to redeem you and me from the penalty of our sin.

Yet Jesus did that willingly, because of his love for us. That tells me, I can trust him. He knows what is going on. If you are suffering, he knows suffering because he is the God who has suffered. He has a plan; that plan includes us; and everything that is happening he is using to bring his plan to fulfillment. The fact that I do not like or understand what is happening to a large degree is irrelevant, because my life is now in his hands, not my own. And I can trust him all the way to the end.

Remember the psalm. The psalm ultimately is pointing to our eternal security in Christ. It is pointing to the New Jerusalem when there will no longer any tears, suffering, sin, death, or evil of any sort—forever. That is one reason why vv. 7-8 of the psalm are so important. They say, **“he will keep your life—your soul, the real you—from this time forth and forevermore.”** That’s important because we may get dementia or Alzheimer’s. And we may not even remember who our loved ones are or even who we are. BUT *HE STILL KNOWS US AND WILL KEEP THE REAL US IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND.* No one and nothing else in this world gives us that security and that assurance. That is the God I want to give my life to.

CONCL: We should all add to our 401Ks, wear our seat belts, eat better, quit smoking, and do all the other things we do to protect ourselves. But we know all of those things cannot provide the real, lasting security we want and need. This psalm is telling us that our only real, lasting security is in Christ. To access the security only he can give, we first must come to him by believing him, trusting him, and giving our lives to him. When we do that, we then need to draw upon his means of grace, so that when the crises come (and they will), we can face them—not alone, but with him. Then, despite how terrible things may be, we, like Heidi, will be able to experience the peace he gives us to get safely through the storm and then enter heaven and the new earth of everlasting beauty, joy, and fulfillment beyond our ability to imagine.