

Who Will Help Me?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 February 2020

Preacher: Shawn Woo

- [0 : 0 0] Let me pray for the reading, preaching of God's Word. I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from?
- God, we lift up our eyes to you because we need your help. We need your help to understand your Word.
- We need your help to internalize your Word. We need your help for us to persevere to the end in faith and obedience.
- We need your help to be faithful today. Amen. So, Lord, reveal to us more of yourself this evening.
- Increase our faith in you. Bring greater conviction and deeper comfort in Christ our Savior.
- [1 : 1 8] In His precious name we pray. Amen. Amen. Psalm 121. 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. 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. 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 forevermore. God's holy and authoritative word.
- [2 : 2 4] Amen. Amen. As we're getting ready for another baby, I'm just kind of looking back and remembering when our first two daughters were growing up.
- As infants grow up, they go through a stage, sometime before when they're two years old, where they experience separation anxiety. Basically, they just are terrified of being separated from their parents.
- And so, it happens, it's like a natural stage in their development because they're old enough to recognize that not everybody is their parents.
- Which, like, real infants, like, don't even know that. But then they're not quite old enough to know that when their parents leave, like, they come back. And then, like, they can, and that it's not like they're abandoning them.
- And so, when they, when the parents are out of their size, so, for example, if they put them to bed, but then in the middle of the night they wake up and they're not there, they're terrified. They're like, my parents have abandoned me. Kind of, it's like they feel separated and they cry.
- [3 : 3 0] And obviously, it's, like, an exhausting time for parents, you know, because that means, you know, you can never really be apart from them. And in some bad cases, like, parents can't even go to the bathroom, like, without the kids.
- And apparently, that's what I did to my mom. But then it's also a really, like, sweet time, too, because they're totally dependent on you and entrusted to you.

And it's like, and, like, there's a lot of, you know, comforts you can offer them and a lot of cuddle times and things that, like, happen. So, like, a lot of intimacy and affection that, you know, you really never experience again after that.

Because the more they, independent they get, the more they grow, they don't really need that or seek that from you. And so, it's like, this Psalm 121 is really an invitation to enjoy that kind of deep intimacy and affection with our Lord, with God.

And the main point of it is that we should entrust ourselves to the Lord who keeps us. And so, it's kind of, it's got four couplets.

[4 : 42] So, every two verses is like a unit. And it has, it has kind of recurring themes, words, and then it kind of has that terrace structure, that staircase structure that I mentioned last week about just every, I guess, pair of verse depends, advances the idea of the one that preceded it.

And in the first pair, we see that the God is, God is the one who helps us. In the second one, in verse 3 to 4, we said that God is the one who watches us. And then verses 5 to 6 tells that God is the one who shields us.

And then verses 7 to 8 tells that God is the one who keeps us. So, let's just go through and turn, starting with verses 1 to 2, which tells us that God is the one who helps us. It begins with the psalmist's question.

It really introduces the entire psalm. It says, I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come from? From where does my help come? The hills, which is sometimes translated mountains.

It's the same Hebrew word. The hills represent the dwelling place of God. Sometimes it uses the plural to refer to the dwelling place of God.

[5 : 52] So, Psalm 133, verse 3 says, It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion, or the hills of Zion. For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

It's the place where God dwells. He gives life to his people, eternal life. Similarly, Psalm 125, verse 2 says, As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people from this time forth and forevermore.

So, there's a powerful effect, right, of seeing a mountain range that surrounds a city, and then seeing in that God's surrounding protection over his people. And so, that's kind of the view here.

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? And so, this Psalm is really for anyone seeking God's help. People who are asking themselves, who is going to help me?

Right? I need help. Who is going to help me? Where are you, God? And the psalmist answers his own question in verse 2. My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

[6 : 55] Ah, such a powerful, right, powerful introduction to who our helper is. I mean, it's like when we ask someone for help, we ask someone that's in a better position than we are, right?

A position from which they can help. So, if you're in a pit, like, you don't ask someone that's in the pit with you to help you. You've got to ask someone who's up on higher ground to lift you up, right?

And so, if, like, I need help, I mean, I'm not a student anymore, but if someone needs help with their physics problem set, right? I mean, there's a whole bunch of physicists in our church, like, with PhDs that can ask, right?

And so, they ask because they are qualified to help. And in a similar way, we want to know if people who are going to help us are capable of helping us, if they're qualified to help us.

And this verse tells us that the Lord is qualified to help us. My help comes from the Lord, who is he, who made heaven and earth. It's his qualification. It's a merism, right?

[7 : 58] It's a literary device where you use two extremes of a spectrum in order to denote the entire thing, the entire spectrum. So, when someone says young and old, like, young and old can come to this meeting, that doesn't mean only youth and the elderly can come, right?

It also includes the middle-aged people, right? It means everyone can come. So, when it says heaven and earth, that means not just the sky and the land, but all creation. The Lord made all of creation.

That's who he is. And so, he's sufficient to be our helper. I mean, if you think about it, it's really mind-boggling, right? The brightest minds in our world have devoted their entire lives to study and discover maybe something new about just tiny slice of creation, right?

Of reality. And God made the heaven and the earth. And it's such a strengthening and reassuring thing that the creator of the cosmos is the God who helps us.

Where is your helper? Where does your help come from? The God who made heaven and earth. Man, I just wish I could tell everybody that. Like, who helps you? The God who made heaven and earth. That's my helper.

[9 : 08] And so, he's the one who helps us. And then we see that God's the one who also watches us, watches over us, verses 3 to 4. And he's now, you could notice, he says, I lift my eyes to the hills from those where does my help come from?

And then, my help comes from those who made heaven and earth. And now, starting in verse 3, he starts addressing others. So, from that place of conviction and faith in God as his helper, he's now turning to comfort other pilgrims on the way, other saints.

And so, he says, 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.

You can see kind of how it's continuing that idea here. The kind of theme that ties this pair together, a pair of verses together is the language of slumbering and sleeping. And it's telling us that God is our sentinel.

He's our watchman. He guards over us. And even the bravest and most robust and honorable soldier is going to doze off eventually if they're waiting, watch standing guard long enough, right?

[10 : 23] Even the most devoted helicopter parent can't possibly ever watch his or her child all the time.

They can't. It's limited. But God never sleeps. He never sleeps. He doesn't need to rest. He doesn't need to sleep. And he never dozes off. Like, there's never a time when he's just not paying attention.

And you can just catch him off guard and something happens to you. Like, that's happened to my kids so many times, right? You just, like, turn your eyes away for a second, and they're like, boom! Like, you know, bang your head in the corner of a table, and like, ah, like crying, and you're crying their eyes out.

It's like that never happens to God. Like, you know? And how comforting is that? Like, you know, when something happens to you, you're like, man, like, my life is just, like, what is happening to my life? And then just remembering, no, God has never let his gaze off of you.

He doesn't slumber. Never dozes off. He's not sleeping. He watches us. And then verse 5 and 6 tells us that he shields us. It says, the Lord is your keeper.

[11 : 28] The Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. In the middle of our long New England winter, it's probably hard to associate the sun with anything other than endorphins and vitamin D and happiness, you know?

But you've got to remember that this psalm is written in a context where people are living in the, you know, withering heat of the Middle Eastern desert, where people literally die of heat strokes, you know?

Sometimes, you know, it's like a... And so a shade is such a respite, right? It's something that shields you from that oppressive heat. And it's a welcome sight when you find it in this culture.

And so... And not only that, in the ancient world, there's also this idea of being moonstruck. So the Greek word for epilepsy... Epilepsy, actually, the word comes from the Greek word that literally means moonstruck.

So not that the moon actually causes it, but that's how they basically described illnesses that had no apparent, you know, physical cause or source.

[12 : 38] And actually, people still can't explain epilepsy, right? So it's like they think it's something to do with the brain, but they don't know how it happens. Yeah. And it's like a certain type... There are two types of epilepsies, right?

I think there's many. I don't know if you know. But one kind is like they know it's like something to do with the brain. The other kind, I don't think they know. And then... And so they had his moonstruck. So here, I think the psalmist is using it a little more figurative way.

Basically, anything that can harm you by day, anything that can harm you by night. All day long. There's nothing that you are not shielded from by God. He's our shade. And then finally, in verses 7 to 8, it tells us that God is the one who keeps us, which is kind of the keep, the word keep occurs again and again and again throughout this psalm.

It's the main idea. 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 forevermore.

There's two more merisms here in this last verse, right? So going out and coming in. That means all of our, every part of our journey of life, every leg of our journey, wherever you're going, whenever you're coming back in, God is with us.

[13 : 50] And then this time forth from now and forevermore. That means all time, for all time, he is guarding us and protecting us and shielding us. And so it's really speaking of God's ultimate preservation and protection.

And the fact that he uses forevermore, I think, suggests that the psalmist is already on to something, that it's God not only protects us in this life, rather that this points to an ultimate reality of God's preservation and protection.

And I think that it's echoed in Jude 1, 24 to 25. It says, Amen.

It's God who keeps us in this journey of life until we arrive at our eternal destiny and are presented blameless before God with God's glory, with great joy.

And that eternal life that redounds to God's eternal glory, it happens through Jesus Christ. He is the one who saves us, and then he's the one who keeps us and preserves us.

[15 : 02] And let's turn to John 10 briefly to see how Jesus does this. John 10, verses 14 to 18.

It says, I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me. Just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father.

And I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I might take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

Wait, sorry. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I received from my Father. And if you go down a little bit more, he says in verse 27 to 29, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

[16 : 17] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

I and the Father are one. And it's such a comforting promise. And I don't know if I'm just getting more fatigued with life or just old, but I used to be much more exuberant about, like, hey, I'm going to kind of conquer the world for Christ kind of thing and just, like, not, you know, like, don't, and, you know, I'm going to, I don't know.

And then now, like, I think the more, it's like, and so this kind of passage didn't mean as much to me back then. It's like God's going to preserve you, like, protect you. It's like I felt invincible, you know, like, I don't need protection.

I'm just going to go, you know, it's like a, and then, like, and then, like, the more, it's like, I think the more and more, like, these kind of passages are comforting to me and assuring to me, it's like I, in my own strength, cannot, cannot persevere to the end, but Christ preserves me.

Dan said the same thing on Sunday. Really? Oh, really? He had such a strong zeal and energy and how, like, now it's just he has more humility, but he's kind of in the same state. That's really funny.

[17 : 49] I kind of listen to that sermon still, yeah, but it's like, yeah, yeah, it's just so grateful because our helper is the creator of the heavens and the earth, and he's keeping us, and who's going to dare snatch you out of his hand, right?

And he's keeping you. He's got you, and that's the hope that we have. Because of Jesus, we're in his hands. Because of Jesus, we've been rescued, and we're in the flock of God. And I hope that really functions in our lives to encourage us, comfort us, and help us, spur us on to continue on and to persevere for Christ's glory.