



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 124-128

Monday 5th October - Psalm 124

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side—
let Israel now say—
2 if it had not been the Lord who was on our side
when people rose up against us,
3 then they would have swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;
4 then the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us;
5 then over us would have gone
the raging waters.
6 Blessed be the Lord,
who has not given us
as prey to their teeth!
7 We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken,
and we have escaped!
8 Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

You may notice in your Bible that in this section of the book of Psalms, many are titled 'A song of ascents'. The city of Jerusalem in terms of its altitude is higher than its surrounds. This was the normal practice in the ancient world; cities built up high were easier to defend. It also meant that whenever a person went to Jerusalem, they went 'up' to Jerusalem, because going to Jerusalem always meant walking uphill!

These Psalms, therefore, are designed to be sung on the way up the hill to Jerusalem. These are songs for pilgrims, travelling to the temple. They are songs that prepare the hearts of God's people to go to the place that Yahweh had chosen for His dwelling. They prepare the people to worship.

And worship begins with an honest assessment of who God is and who we are.

The truth of this Psalm is a simple yet profound one: without God, Israel would be dead. Without God's help, Israel would have been destroyed on all sides. Yahweh is on their side (v. 1-2), He is their help (v. 8) and therefore their hope.

Isn't the same true of us?

Apart from God's help, we would still be dead in our sins and transgressions (Ephesians 2:10). Apart from God's help, we would still be walking in rebellion and sin. We'd be indulging in all manner of sin: some respectable and some less so.

Like Israel, our story is not that we picked ourselves up, dusted ourselves off and managed to earn life eternal. God picked us up out of the grave. We are dust that he breathed life into. Christ earned eternal life for us.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made the heaven and earth. Pray and reflect on this glorious truth.

James

Tuesday 6th October - Psalm 125

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the Lord surrounds his people,
from this time forth and forevermore.

3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest
on the land allotted to the righteous,
lest the righteous stretch out
their hands to do wrong.

4 Do good, O Lord, to those who are good,
and to those who are upright in their hearts!

5 But those who turn aside to their crooked ways
the Lord will lead away with evildoers!
Peace be upon Israel!

The emphasis in this Psalm is on the sturdiness and strength of the Christian life. Some think the Christian life is like walking on a tightrope without a net, but this Psalm tells us the reality is exactly the opposite. Geographically the city of Jerusalem is naturally protected by the surrounding mountains, and in the same way, the Lord is around his people.

Even though the Psalm says the people of God cannot be moved, we often feel like we can be moved by almost anything in our lives: failure, joy, success, sadness. Our lives are so often like the characters throughout the bible, one day up, the next day down, one day praising God for his presence, the next day feeling very apart from God. However, the God who redeems his people is constantly there in both mercy and judgement, unexpectedly gracious. As we continue to learn and remember this, we can learn to live by the facts about God rather than our feelings about God. My security comes from the God who is, and these images of security are from geology ("As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people"), not psychology. All the Christians I know are sinners and doubters, however, we are secure not because we trust in our performance, morals, holiness – but because we "trust in the Lord."

Father God, thank you that you are from everlasting to everlasting and that you are good. Help me to trust in your goodness no matter what the circumstances. Amen.

Martin

Wednesday 7th October - Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then they said among the nations,
"The Lord has done great things for them."

3 The Lord has done great things for us;
we are glad.

4 Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like streams in the Negeb!

5 Those who sow in tears
shall reap with shouts of joy!

6 He who goes out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.

One of the most crippling experiences that we can experience is grief. Jesus called the things that rob, kill and destroy as thieves that come into our lives. So much of life's experiences steal from us. The power of hope can be liberating. The power of hope is a place of comfort when grief can take us. When we lose relationships as death or divorce comes. Illness can restrict how our lives can function. Not to mention when we lose jobs or our superannuation falls. Expectations in marriage become more difficult than we expect and the strain of work, study and home life become too much to bear.

As the people of Israel travel back to Jerusalem, on their pilgrimages, see how the possibility of restoration gives them hope. This song would have given a young Jesus hope as He came to know that tears would come his way as 'A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'.

What thief has come to take from you?

What hope would Jesus have taken from this psalm as grief came to Him?

What comfort might hope bring to you today as you grieve?

Phil

Thursday 8th October - Psalm 127

Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
2 It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.
3 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,
the fruit of the womb a reward.
4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one's youth.
5 Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!
He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

As Christians, we are called to abound in good works (1 Corinthians 15:58), but it's essential we also understand that no matter how much we are doing, we are never doing as much as God does! I'm so glad this psalm DOESN'T say "unless those who labour build the house, the Lord builds in vain." We need God, but he doesn't need us, He is sovereign.

The Psalmist basically asks, what's the point of the great house if you don't have God? He gives a picture of a blessed life relying on God (v5), because we don't flourish apart from God. The premise of the Psalm for our work is that God works. The bible gives us pictures of his work: creation, help, compassion, redemption. Our work goes wrong when we lose touch with the "God who works in you to will and act in order to fulfil his good purpose." (Philippians 2:13) Knowing that God works in and through us doesn't make us lazy but motivates us with greater boldness and courage. Work goes wrong for us when we become frantic and compulsive or lazy. Jesus said, "apart from me you can do nothing."

Father God, thank you everything you have given me, even my accomplishments are a gift from you! Thank you for the way your work on our behalf in Jesus' life death and resurrection, liberates us to work for your glory with enduring joy. Amen.

Martin

Friday 9th October - Psalm 128

Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord,
who walks in his ways!

2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.

3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.

4 Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the Lord.

5 The Lord bless you from Zion!
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life!

6 May you see your children's children!
Peace be upon Israel!

If you're anything like me you've probably got a handbook for your car stashed somewhere in the glove box, only referring to it when all else fails. However, if I'd bothered to read it carefully, I'd have a much better idea of what to expect from the car and how to use it appropriately. The handbook was written by those who designed the car for the owner's benefit.

How much more important then, is it for us to read what our designer has written for us! To fear God and walk in His ways will surely be of benefit to us, why? Because He is our Father, He loves us and knows what's best for us.

So how do we respond when we see Godly people who don't have enough food or whose children have rejected God? Are the verses in Psalm 128 ironclad promises? Are they just generally true statements like "a stitch in time saves nine" a generally true statement that we all know has exceptions?

Firstly, imagine how much messier our lives would be if we were to not walk in His ways.

Secondly, we will always have struggles when living in a fallen world. Perhaps we need to recognise God's blessings in the midst of the struggles and to see how in our difficulties God can use us to be a blessing to others.

Thirdly, no matter what this world throws at us we will ultimately be blessed when our inheritance is fully realised. An inheritance that was paid for by Christ's blood.

Take comfort, God has not forgotten us in times of trial. To walk in His ways will generally benefit us, but will always glorify Him.

Danny