

All Along My Pilgrim Journey
Psalm 121

The heading to Psalm 121 says, "A song of ascents." This means it is a Pilgrim Psalm; this means it is was sung by Jewish pilgrims as they made their way to the holy city, Jerusalem.

A pilgrimage to Jerusalem was an ambition and even an obligation of those faithful Jews who did not return to Canaan after the Babylonian exile. In fact, God commanded that three times a year all the men were to appear before the Lord. They were to gather in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover and other feasts.

That word "pilgrim" perfectly describes the Christian; and that word "pilgrimage" perfectly describes the Christian life. A pilgrim is someone who is traveling somewhere; a pilgrim is someone who stays in a place as a stranger or visitor. The Apostle Peter put it this way: "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world ... (1 Pt 2:11)"

Christians are pilgrims. The Christian life is a pilgrimage. Our final citizenship is in heaven and we are but temporary dwellers on earth. Our life is a pilgrim journey to the place where we really belong. Let me tell you a story makes the point for me:

Late last century, an American tourist paid a visit to a renowned Polish rabbi, Hofetz Chaim. He was astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a cot.

The tourist asked, "Rabbi, where is your furniture?" Hofetz Chaim replied, "Where is yours?" The puzzled American asked, "Mine? But I'm only a visitor here. I'm only passing through." The rabbi replied, "So am I."

That's true for all of us – all Christians know that on this earth and in this body they are but pilgrims passing through on the way to eternal glory.

Now, I want to ask you, how is your pilgrimage going today.

Are you making progress on your pilgrim journey? Are you come closer to God? Or, have you moved away from Him? Has your faith increased? Or, has your faith wavered before the struggles and realities of life? Are you growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ? Did you make peace with your Maker and with your family and neighbors?

What is your pilgrim going? No matter you answer this is a fact: we all need help in our pilgrim journey.

The psalmist knew that the pilgrim journey was not easy. To get to Jerusalem he had to cross mountains and hills, valleys and deserts. Along the way he would run into steep paths, deep ravines, overhanging cliffs, falling rocks, wild and hungry beasts, cold nights, hot days, and robbers. So on his pilgrim journey he lifts his eyes to the hills or mountains that stand in his path

and asks, "where does my help come from?"

Usually this first verse of Psalm 121 has been misunderstood. Too often the hills or mountains are understood as Mount Zion and seen as a symbol of security, comfort, and strength. This interpretation, however, does not fit the psalm. For one thing, there is nothing in the psalm to indicate that the pilgrim is even looking at Mount Zion. For another, the rest of the psalm indicates that the mountains represent the danger and hardship of the journey.

The realistic pilgrim looks at those mountains that stand between him and Jerusalem. As he considers the dangerous journey that awaits him as he crosses those mountains, it is only natural that he asks, "Will I get across? Will I be able to make it safely to Jerusalem? Where will I get the help and strength I need to cross those mountains?" Says the Psalmist, "I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from?"

This pilgrimage is a perfect picture of life. Life, as I said, is a pilgrimage, a journey. We all are on a journey through life. And, like the Psalmist, we face many dangerous mountains and difficulties along the way. Let me name some of them:

- sickness and disease, either in your own life or in the life of a loved one
- major surgery
- the death of a loved one
- the agony and pain of separation and divorce
- an unfaithful marriage partner
- an abusive marriage partner
- a loved one with an alcohol or drug problem
- dear ones with physical or mental disabilities
- children who cause much heartache and pain
- financial stress
- loss of a job or position
- bankruptcy
- sin, temptation, and evil
- painful consequences of misguided actions
- cancer

These, and more, are the dangers and difficulties we face as we may make our way through life. So with the Psalmist we ask, "I lift up my eyes to the mountains (to the dangers and difficulties along life's journey) -- where does my help come from?"

And like the psalmist we can only cry out, "My help comes for the Lord."

This much, though, we do know: to participate in the pilgrimage we needed help; we know we could not make it on our own. So, as we look back it is important to know "where does my help come from."

Our Help Comes from the Lord

Where does our help come from as we journey through life? Some people are self-reliant, they depend upon themselves, they look within themselves for all that they need. Others look to doctors or insurance or science or the President. But another Psalmist says to us, (Ps 146:3-4) Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. (4) When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. It is foolish to depend upon yourself or on any man or man-made thing. For man is mortal and imperfect. All that we do, all that we have, all that we are is stained with sin and imperfection.

Where does our help come from as we journey through life? We all should know where our help comes from: My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Our help comes from the LORD. It is He Who helps us on our life's journey. He is He Who gives us the strength and the courage to keep on going. It is He Who allows us to face death and trouble and hardship with confidence and joy.

Our help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. Imagine the might and the power to make everything in heaven and earth; imagine the might and the power to make you and me. The LORD, He is Almighty. All things are in His hands. Nothing and no one is stronger than Him. To such a God – a mighty God – we can look for help. We know He is more than able to do anything at anytime and anywhere.

What is you God like? Is he a big God or a little God.

A little girl listened attentively as her father read the family devotions. She seemed awed by her parents' talk of God's limitless power and mercy. "Daddy," she asked, placing her little hands on his knees, "how big is God." Her father thought for a moment and answered, "Honey, he is always just a little bigger than you need."

Our God, He is the Maker of heaven and earth. He is always able to give us exactly the help that we need.

Our help comes from the LORD. He is not only almighty but He is also faithful. He is not only able to do all things but He is also willing to do all things for His children. You see, in the Hebrew language that name LORD is YaHWeH. This is the name of the God Who loves us in Jesus Christ, the God Who covenants with us, the God Who promises to never leave us or forsake us.

Is the LORD, the almighty Maker of heaven and earth your help? Is the LORD, the God Who loves us in Christ, your help? Let me tell you, it is only because of the LORD that you can come through sickness, broken relationships, disabilities, surgery, death, temptation, and all the other problems and trials of 2000.

At the same time, I need to tell you that God's help is available to all, but not all draw from God's well of grace. For what ever reason, they resist God's calling grace, or they refuse to give

up control, or whatever. But, when one acknowledges his need of God and accepts God help in his son Jesus Christ does God's calling grace flow over into God's saving grace that not only gets us through the tough times, but also gets us home to God in the world to come.

This is where we cry with the psalmist: where does my help come from? The answer: my help comes from the Lord who made heaven earth.

In verses 3-8 the Psalmist lists the different ways in which the Lord is the pilgrim's help as he makes his pilgrimage over the mountains to Jerusalem. The psalmist sees God as helping the pilgrim every single step of the way.

In verse 3 the Psalmist says, "He will not let your foot slip ..." Sometimes the mountain trail took the pilgrim to narrow ledges on the side of a cliff. A single slip could mean a fall of hundreds of feet. But God keeps the pilgrim's feet upon the safety of the path.

What about night time? When it is dark outside, especially in the mountains, the pilgrim faces danger from wild animals and thieves. Even then the Lord protects:

(Ps 121:3-4) ... he who watches over you will not slumber; (4) indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Even the sun could create hardships for the pilgrim on his journey. Heat, thirst, sunstroke, and sunburn could all prevent the pilgrim from completing his journey.

The pilgrim, however, does not have to fear: (Ps 121:5-6) The LORD watches over you-- the LORD is your shade at your right hand; (6) the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

God keeps His people safe on their pilgrim journey. He sees them through the problems and trials of life: (Ps 121:7) The LORD will keep you from all harm-- he will watch over your life ...

This does not mean God keeps all dangers from us. Nor does it mean that no true Christian ever suffers in this life. The desert and mountains do not disappear. They are still there and still need to be crossed. The thought of verse 7 is that evil cannot come near us to harm us permanently. This thought is better expressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8: (Rom 8:39) neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Psalmist concludes the psalm with the encouraging words of verse 8: (Ps 121:8) the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

The Lord protects the pilgrim throughout the journey. Always and forever the pilgrim has the Lord with him. Always and forever the pilgrim can say, "My help comes from the Lord."

Our help comes from the Lord. But are we willing to let the Lord be our help?

The story is told of a Welsh woman who lived in a remote valley in Wales. She went to a great deal of trouble to have electrical power installed in her home. They noticed she didn't use very much electricity at all. In fact, her usage was minuscule. They sent a meter reader out to check on the matter. The man came to the door and said, "We've looked at the amount. Don't you use electricity?" "Oh yes" she said. "We turn it on every night to see how to light our lamps and then we switch it off again."

This sounds like the way many Christians apply the power of God in their lives. We turn to Him only occasionally, or when we have a major crisis in our life, or when we are at wit's end. Instead, we should always – again and again – be turning to Him!

Conclusion

As you think back on the pilgrim journey, I hope you can say with the Psalmist: (Ps 121:1-2) I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from? (2) My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.