

A Psalm for the New Year

Psalm 121

Christ is Mine Forevermore

4MIN

- **Psalm 121** (Page 516 in Pew Bible)

- It's a real privilege to be able to gather for worship on the last day of 2023. 1st day of the year was a Sunday, and now the last day of the year is a Sunday. We have bookended our year worshipping the Lord together!

- I'd like to end this year with a similar focus that we started it with – we started 2023 with a sermon series that walked through the famous hymn, “Amazing Grace”

- This year marked the 250th anniversary of the writing of that hymn; when John Newton originally wrote that hymn on this day in 1773, he was sitting in his study on a cold, wintry day in the small town of Olney, England.

- He wrote that hymn as a New Year's hymn; original title was not 'Amazing Grace' but 'Faith's Review and Expectation'.

- Not as catchy, but Newton would take time at the end of each year to look back (review) on the year and look forward (expectation) to the new year. He said that he would reflect on “past mercies and future hopes”.

- Like John Newton did with his church 250 years ago, I would like us to spend some time looking back on 2023 and looking forward to 2024 – with faith in the Lord as our guide.

- Use Psalm 121 to guide us in this, give us a few truths to hold onto as we do so.

- This psalm gives us a truth to look through as we look back and forward: **Trust the untiring, sheltering, everlasting presence of the Lord.**

- *Psalm written in pairs, each pair shows us something different about God's presence in our lives*

5MIN

WHERE GOD'S PRESENCE MEETS OUR PRESENT

- Psalm 121 is part of a collection of psalms that the people of Israel would sing and pray as they journeyed from wherever they lived to Jerusalem for major feasts and festivals.

- Title: "A Song of Ascents" (just like Psalm 120, 122, and others); traveling songs for the Israelites on the road up to Jerusalem.

- This was not an easy journey – many travelled by foot, parts that were dangerous and unpredictable, exposed to intense heat, robbers hid along the way.

- Though this journey was one that all Israelites knew they had to make, they also knew that it was a journey that could leave you vulnerable and weak and insecure.

- God's people today do not have to travel to Jerusalem on a regular basis, but we are still on a journey. Every Christian is traveling through this life toward Heaven, the new Jerusalem.

- This journey can make you feel just as vulnerable and weak and insecure – life is uncertain, temptation can strike at any time, trials can seem to ambush us and those around us, a crisis can come without warning

- It's this kind of uncertainty that leads the psalmist to ask, **Psalm 121:1**

- Do you hear the insecurity in that question? Whatever the author saw in front of him signaled trouble and fear and worry. Where does my help come from = where is my hope? My security?

- As you look back on 2023 and forward to 2024, where does your help come from? Who/what do you look to give you a sense of security? Plans, achievements, other person

- Psalm 121 puts before us that there are only 2 options: the Lord or everything else – goes on to explain why the Lord can be our only source of help/security, **Psalm 121:2**

- *Help* – not the kind of help you need when you're putting together IKEA furniture but the kind of help you need when you're drowning in the ocean; not assistance but rescue!

- *the LORD who made heaven and earth* – when looking to the hills makes you anxious or afraid, remember Who made the hills; the Creator of all things who is full of steadfast love and faithfulness and always keeps His promises to His people

- **Trust the Lord's presence, Acts 4:24** – threatened but prayed 'Sovereign Lord who made...'

- Remembering all that the past year brought and wondering all the next year could bring can stir up a wide range of emotions – remember how powerful our God is, made all, sustains, rules over all...if the Lord created the universe, He can take care of us...*starts unpacking different truths to assure us of this (take a few moments on each adjective)*

5MIN

HIS UNTIRING PRESENCE

- You'll notice the psalm switches here from first person (I/my) to second (you/your). The author is encouraging us with these truths, explaining why the Lord and only the Lord can be our help/security/refuge; next pair of verses, **121:3-4**

- *He will not let your foot be moved* – the Lord will give you stability, the Lord who made heaven and earth will put your soul on solid ground

- Costa Rica trip, repelling down waterfalls – slippery/shaky rocks vs. giant boulder at the bottom

- The difference for your soul between having the Lord as your help and any other source – only the Lord can put your feet on the rock, can give the “peace that passes understanding”, only He can give you the spiritual stability to keep journeying forward in this life

- *he who keeps you will not slumber...* **121:4** – (will come back to the word ‘keep’ next verse)

- Repeated for emphasis here; Behold – call to attention, look at this, trust this

- The Lord never slumbers or sleeps.

- Elijah – Baal never answers, Elijah mocks their god, “Maybe your god is asleep and you need to wake him up!” The Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, never has to be woken up.

- He calls our attention to this because he knows there are times when, from our perspective, God seems to be dozing off or asleep. There were times in 2023 you likely felt that way, and there will be times in 2024 where you'll think that's the case.

- Your circumstances or relationships or praying and praying will make you think, “Has the Lord dozed off on me? Has He fallen asleep and let go of the controls of my life?”

- He reminds us of God's track record with the phrase, “He who keeps Israel.” – He's reminding us of God's faithfulness to His people throughout history.

- HBC: The Lord is the night watchman of the universe – His care for your life is untiring. You never have to wake him; He is always with you, guiding you. *Another truth about God's presence in our lives...*

5MIN

HIS SHELTERING PRESENCE

- We are coming to the center of Psalm 121, and I think it spotlights the central truth, **Psalm 121:5a**

- Very middle of the psalm and one of the most important sentences

- This word 'keep' shows up 6 times in 6 verses; keyword for the writer because he is traveling a difficult path to Jerusalem, and protection is what he needs to make it to the end of his journey

- To keep is to protect and care for – *goalkeeper* protects the goal, *zookeeper* protects and cares for the animals

- The Lord has protected you, and He will protect you. The Lord has cared for you, and He will continue to care for you.

- The LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth, the One who keeps Israel, the God who never slumbers nor sleeps – He is your keeper/protector.

- Gives us a picture to explain this means, **Psalm 121:5b-6**

- If you're walking the long road to Jerusalem, shade is a valuable thing. The hot sun beats down on you step after step, day after day, and to find shade means protection from the sun, rest and relief from the elements.

- *Sun by day, moon by night* – the Lord will protect you from whatever the day may bring and whatever threatens you at night.

- It doesn't promise that the Lord takes away the scorching heat or gets rid of the threats of night, but it does promise that His sheltering presence is with you in it. (*Ps. 23, 'Even though...'*)

- The author is saying, 'The Lord is your keeper, and there's never a moment when He's not your keeper.' At all times and in all circumstances, the Lord watches over you and protects you.

- There is no force stronger than the Lord's protection. There is nothing in your past, present, or future that can keep God from keeping you. He can never be overwhelmed or overcome; He always shelters His people with His presence.

- How would it change the way you see the past of 2023 or the future of 2024 if you held this banner over the year: The LORD is your keeper? What would it cause you to thank Him for? What would it cause you to ask Him for? **Trust His untiring, sheltering, and...**

5MIN

HIS EVERLASTING PRESENCE

- Come to last pair of verses; start with **Psalm 121:7**

- We know, from other verses in the Bible and our own experience, that this verse is not guaranteeing a life of perfect health, wealth, and success.

- It's a further promise of the Lord's protection; notice the scope – 'all evil' – as our keeper, the Lord will guard us from the evil around us and the evil within our own hearts and minds
- But what does this look like exactly? I think that is explained by the 2nd line in this verse, **Psalm 121:7**
 - *The Lord will keep your life* – also, the Lord will keep your soul.
 - Evil can and will harm us in this life, BUT it can only harm us to a certain point. God's people are not immune to suffering and temptation and sorrow, but because of the power of our heavenly Father our rescued souls are untouchable.
 - Segal: "Satan can make months or years or even decades miserable for us, but his leash is short and eternity is long."
 - We know this is true because we remember what the Lord did, through His Son Jesus Christ, to rescue our souls. Jesus came into this world, the writer of Hebrews says, "to destroy the works of the devil". He came to defeat evil. And through His perfectly obedient life, His sacrificial death, and His victorious resurrection – He did!
- Jesus endured evil and defeated evil to accomplish the truth of this verse; echoed in **Romans 8:35, 37-39** – The Lord will keep your soul; we will experience pain and hardship and uncertainty, but our souls are perfectly safe and protected in the love of Christ.
- Even better news, this is not temporary; it's eternal, **Psalm 121:8**
 - *Going out and coming in* – daily activity, all the details, day after day
 - *From this time forth* – whatever happened in 2023 and whatever is going on in your life right now, the Lord is keeping you; *and forevermore* – He will keep you thru 2024 and for all eternity
- See 2023 and 2024 in light of eternity; the NT version of this promise: **Jude 24-25**, "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."
- We cannot go back and change 2023, but we can see God's mercy and faithfulness. We cannot predict 2024, but we can trust His goodness and power. **Rely on the untiring, sheltering, everlasting presence...**
- Newton in AG: Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.
- Reflection: 1) What truth from Psalm 121 do you need to keep in mind as you look back on 2023? 2) What truth do you need to carry with you as you look forward to 2024?

He Will Hold Me Fast + Sending: Kurt (Gather and Go)