

September 6, 2020

“Our Help Is in the Lord”
Psalm 124

FCF: Feeling abandoned

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Our help is in the LORD.
(anchor) We need not fear.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

I have never been a lifeguard but I took the Senior Lifesaving course when I was in high school. The exam included not just a long distance swim but a simulated rescue. Our instructor (about twice my size) was floating in the deep end of the pool. Each of us had to swim under him, come up from behind, put him in a modified choke hold, and bring him back to the side. “Why the indirect route?” you ask. Well, because in real life, when someone is drowning, they tend to panic. Which causes them to flail about, grasping for anything to keep them afloat.

Not unlike what many of us do everyday in reaction to our fears outside the pool. But there is another way and the Lord would have us to see it in Psalm 124 - another in these Songs of Ascents, the songs sung by the pilgrims as they made their way to the Temple for the festivals.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Psalm 124](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Here’s an observation from Jerry Seinfeld that’s worthy noting ([READ quote](#)):

According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.

Obviously, that’s good for a laugh and a diversion. But where do we get relief from our fears? Perhaps we could look to the behavioral sciences. Intrigued and saddened by the misery that worry brings into so many of our lives, Lucas LaFreniere decided to look at this from a scientific perspective. Dr. LaFreniere is a clinical psychology researcher at Penn State ([READ quote](#)):

In his study on worry, participants were asked to record their worries and how they caused distress and interfered with their lives. Each night at 10 pm, they reported how much time they spent thinking on each specific worry throughout the day. Then, 20 days after that period, they reviewed each entry and reported whether any of the worries had become true. The good news is, LaFreniere’s [study](#) found that in his survey of worrisome people, 91.4 percent of their worries never actually happened.

Now 91.4 percent sounds good. Until you realize you could be in that 8.6 percent. What then?

We need something besides statistical studies. We need an unshakable promise. Which brings us to our text. These psalms had a real historical setting in that time but they are also meant to give guidance for us in our own time. There are many dangers, toils, and snares on the journey of faith. Our help is in the LORD. Our help is in the LORD. And so we need not fear.

How do we see this help? First, in the great distress. Second, in the greater deliverance.

I. A GREAT DISTRESS

The first way we see this fear-breaking help is in a great distress ([READ Psalm 124:1-5](#)).

A) Enemies Rising

1. What we don’t know

The enemies were rising. We don't know when this was. There are several possibilities. Nor do we know who this was. Likely non-Israelites, Gentiles, people of the surrounding nations.

2. What we do know

What we do know is the source of the hostility. You wonder, "How can you say that, given what you just said we don't know?" This was not a fight over land rights, water access, or mineral deposits. This was far more than that. The "us" here is Israel, God's chosen people, the vehicle through whom would come the Messiah. Whatever presenting issues there were, the real source of the hate was Satan himself. This was an eternal drama playing out on an earthly stage.

B) Possibilities Looming

Enemies were rising and possibilities were looming. We then read this terrifying series of "What If...?" scenarios. All of which harkens back and echoes the events of the great exodus.

1. Swallowed alive

They were nearly swallowed alive. Perhaps into the crevices from an earthquake. Perhaps into the jaws of great monster. Perhaps, as we read elsewhere, this is an allusion to death itself.

2. Swept away

They were nearly swallowed alive. And nearly swept away by torrential rains. Such waters were often an image of chaos. Flash floods could easily overtake travelers in desert wadis, the deceptively dry riverbeds in the region. That sort of thing still happens today. It's a real danger.

These pictures of great distress all point to the need for and reality of the LORD's help.

Application:

The idea being, "As you look ahead, look at what He's saved you from." We need to do the same. We know, as we look at the full story that, as real as Israel's plight was in the times of Moses and David, it ultimately points to a greater plight - our bondage to sin and the power of death. From which, in Christ, we are free. So, as you look ahead to whatever it is that fills your heart with fear and dread, we can say all the more, "Look at what He's saved you from."

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II. A GREATER DELIVERANCE

The focus shifts from a great distress to a greater deliverance ([READ Psalm 124:6-8](#)).

A) His Protection

1. The snare

David describes being trapped in the snare of a fowler. Fowlers often used a net or a cage, luring their prey with decoys or bait. Once caught, the bird really has no way of escape. It's hopeless.

2. The escape

Except here. The snare is broken. The bird is free. That's the LORD's protection of His people.

B) His Presence

How can this be? How could the storyline shift so dramatically? ([READ Psalm 124:8](#))

1. How He has revealed Himself

Think of how God has revealed Himself. As the Lord of creation. Everything owes its existence to Him. What can stand opposed to Him? Nothing. He is the Lord of creation and the God of the covenant. Four times in this psalm we read His name “the LORD”. He is a covenant making and keeping God, moving towards us not because of anything in us but everything in Him.

2. What He then promises us

This is how He has revealed Himself. What then does He promise us? (READ Psalm 124:1-2a) You hear the repetition here, the intended emphasis, what we desperately need to know. For Him to be on our side - not in terms of political causes or partisan positions but personal relationship. In that sense, the LORD is on our side. This is “God with us,” the Immanuel promise, working itself out in the past. Meaning not just “He will be with us” but “He has been with us.”

So the great distress is outmatched and overcome by the greater deliverance.

Application:

He is the LORD. His love toward us is locked upon us with an unending devotion and commitment. He is always with us and always for us. Just as the plight pointed to something beyond itself, we see the same with this rescue and Rescuer, this deliverance and Deliverer.

Friend, if you have given and entrusted your life to Christ, your sins cannot condemn you. Why? The finished work of Christ. He has absorbed and taken on all that condemnation already. He is your great help. And that has consequences (READ Romans 8:1, 31-35, 38-39). Christian, name your fear, the roots of your worry. Name it. And take this psalm to heart.

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CONCLUSION:

Fear can make us do strange things. It spins up our desire to control. It is what drives so much of our anger. But fear can do something else. It makes us withdraw. It happens in our relationships with one another. When we don't understand the story, the culture, the experience of another, we tend to ignore and marginalize. When we don't know what to say or how to think about their pain, we tend to avoid and trivialize it. We pull back and stand off. We withdraw.

We can do this in our relationship with God. We look around and wonder what's going on. There are times no one seems to be on the bridge. No one seems to be running the ship. All we see are our circumstances. But to see only our circumstances is to really see only half the equation. We don't see God. But not to see God is to then not see our circumstances or anything else, at least not truly. To see without seeing God is to see through a warped and cracked lens. Which is really not to see at all. Fear does that. It blinds. It can make us do strange things.

Which is why Psalm 124 is such good news. Our help is in the LORD. We need not fear.

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