

Psalm 121

August 16, 2015

Seven Songs

Introduction

- Why we've explored the Psalms and how we can continue.
 - The Psalms express it all and in the best direction.
 - The Psalms tether us to God's character by his word.
 - And so they are a great prayer guide, along with the Lord's Prayer.

Introduction to Psalm 121

- A Psalm of Ascent.
- Known as the traveler or pilgrim's Psalm.
- Possibly sung en-route up to Jerusalem.
- This song is meant to be sung by people on a journey, toward a holy experience.

A) First we hear a personal decree about God and his nature:

*1 I look up to the mountains—
does my help come from there?*

*2 My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth!*

- Imagine the journey to Jerusalem.
- God's people have always had a unique view of things.
 - God made us along with everything else.
 - God is concerned with us and help us.
 - These two were never coupled in the ancient world.
- The Psalmist further ruminates on this Creator / Helper God.

B) The next strophe sings of God's immediate concern for his people:

*3 He will not let you stumble;
the one who watches over you will not slumber.*

*4 Indeed, he who watches over Israel
never slumbers or sleeps.*

- God is alert and attentive. God's people have his full time focus.

- This is comforting but also raises questions.

C) The Psalm then emphasizes the depth and manner of concern:

5 The Lord himself watches over you!

The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade.

*6 The sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon at night.*

- “The Lord himself” – God sends no proxy. He personally intervenes on our behalf. This God gets involved, culminating with Christmas and Easter.
- God is a covering, depicted by physical protection.
- Sun and moon – all the time!
- If God watches over his people to protect and provide for them, there must be reason he needs to do so. Things to protect them from. Needs to be met.
- Can you imagine the journey to Jerusalem, upon reflection of Israel’s history?

D) Finally we’re reminded God’s concern and provision beyond the immediate and into the infinite.

*7 The Lord keeps you from all harm
and watches over your life.*

*8 The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go,
both now and forever.*

- This Psalm does what all great Psalms do – simultaneously bringing comfort about God’s nature whilst expanding our perspective toward eternity. Hope for right now and for the ever after. *Let us not take for granted the forever in this song.*

Conclusion

- This Psalm doesn’t answer for us the questions of pain and suffering. We’d need a broader biblical scope to delve into the “why” the world can hurt sometimes.

- But maybe this Psalm gives us something better than the answer to *why* do we suffer – if we could ever fully comprehend that. Who can fully answer these questions anyway?
- Maybe this Psalm offers something *more* than an answer or explanation. Something better than an answer or explanation. What could be better than that?
- Well, relationship with a person. Not an idea, or a solution, but a personal God who is the source of all these things.
- This is what that Psalm does for us. It is a prayer, a song, and reach of trust and hope on the journey, in the midst of the struggle, looking into the mountains, into the unknown and future, and singing in spite of it.
- It's an appeal to God's good nature and care for us, his people, his children.
 - This Psalm gives us a sometimes confident, sometimes trembling voice to God – an expression of need and trust.
- And this is our big hope: For God's people life is not a solitary arduous hike but a watched-over saunter.
- John Muir and his conversation with Albert Palmer about the word "hike".

"I don't like either the word or the thing. People ought to saunter in the mountains - not hike! Do you know the origin of that word 'saunter?' It's a beautiful word. Away back in the Middle Ages people used to go on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and when people in the villages through which they passed asked where they were going, they would reply, 'A la sainte terre,' 'To the Holy Land.' And so they became known as sainte-terre-ers or saunterers. Now these mountains are our Holy Land, and we ought to saunter through them reverently, not 'hike' through them."

(John Muir, as quoted by Albert W. Palmer, *The Mountain Trail and its Message* (1911) pages 27-28 - excerpted in *A Parable of Sauntering*)

- God's great hope for us is that life is not a hike, even if it can feel like it. That our life is a saunter, full of sacred interaction and dependence on him, come

what may – where we will experience both pain and healing, loss and recovery, lows and highs, the ugly and the beautiful.

- So, let us sing as we saunter and remember the nature of the one who is both our Creator and Helper along the Way.

1 *I look up to the mountains—
does my help come from there?*

2 *My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth!*