

The Traveler's Psalm

Psalm 121

Introduction:

1. Some chapters in the Bible are so special that they have their own title
 - a. We call 1Cor 13 – “The Love Chapter”
 - b. Heb 11 is called “The Faith Chapter”
 - c. Ps 23 is called “The Shepherd Psalm”
 - d. 1Cor 15 is called “The Resurrection Chapter of the Bible”
 - e. Ps 121 is often called “The Traveler's Psalm”
2. This is the second of the 15 “Psalms of Degrees” – Psalms 120-134
 - a. These might have been composed by Hezekiah to commemorate his recovery from a fatal illness and the extension of life God gave him
 - b. God moved the shadow on the sundial back 15 degrees
3. This is a psalm for anyone setting out on a pilgrimage and for anyone who is leaving home or traveling
 - a. The 15 psalms of degrees were sung by Jews as they traveled to Jerusalem to worship at the temple
 - b. These psalms were probably sung by Jews returning from Babylonian Captivity
 - c. I can picture Jesus, as a boy, singing this psalm with others as they went to Jerusalem yearly to worship
4. The structure of this psalm
 - a. In vs 1-2 the psalmist is lifting up his eyes to God in the first person
 - b. In vs 3-8 he switches to the 3rd person
 - c. In vs 1-2 the psalmist is speaking about what God has done for him and in the rest of the psalm he is telling us what God will do for us
 - d. In vs 1-2 the psalmist reassures himself and in vs 3-8 he reassures us

I. Keep Your Eyes on God – vs 1-2

1 A Song of degrees. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. 2 My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

A. The Hills

1. Here is the traveler beginning his journey
2. As he looks out to the horizon, he sees those distant hills
3. They present quite a challenge
4. They are steep, and sometimes the trails are dangerous.
5. Many travelers have had disastrous falls when their feet have slipped on the rocky pathways.

6. There are thieves and bandits in the mountains around Jerusalem, as we see in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan.
7. The path is steep and uphill, and perhaps our traveler is older and he's worried that he might not have the strength to make it.
8. He lifts up his eyes to the hills and there he sees challenges, danger, and adversity.
9. It is a rigorous, dangerous journey.

B. The Help

1. So it is with life's pilgrimage.
2. We're going to encounter much difficulty and danger along the way.
3. Where will our help come from?
4. Where do we find someone to give us safety and strength for the mountains of life?
5. The Psalmist said: "I lift up my eyes and see the dangers and difficulties of the mountains?"
6. Where can I find strength and security to face them?
7. My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.
 - a) *It took a lot of power to make heaven / earth*
 - b) *He can use that power to watch out for us*
 - c) *The One who could create me, could watch out for me*

II. God Keeps His Eyes on Us – vs 3-8

- It is easy to uncover the dominant theme of these six verses
- The psalmist uses the same word 6x in these 6 verses – "shamar"
- "keepeth" in vs 3, 4, 5
- "preserve" in vs 7, 7, 8
- "keepeth" = to keep a close watch on something – to exercise great care over
- God promises to keep a close eye on his children

A. He Keeps an Eye on Our Ups and Downs – vs 3

3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

1. He keeps us from slipping
 - a) *"moved" = "slip"*
 - b) *He will not allow your foot to slip.*
 - c) *The picture is of a traveler going through the mountains, over a rocky pathway.*
 - d) *A false step could send you into the gorge below*
 - e) *In the mountains, losing your foothold could be fatal*
 - f) *Some day I want to go to the Grand Canyon and hike down into the canyon. The footpath is only a yard or so wide, and there are places where a false step could send one over the edge.*

2. But it's a picture of life.
 - a) *Sometimes we're going uphill, we have an uphill journey with our finances, for example, or with our jobs or with our marriages or with our kids.*
 - b) *Other times, we're going downhill and things are a little easier.*
 - c) *We may slip and slide a little bit, and the gravel may roll under our feet.*
 - d) *This psalm says that God's eyes are on His children, and He isn't going to let us go over the edge.*
3. Couple who miscarried ←

B. He Keeps and Eye on Our Days and Nights – vs 3-4

4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

1. There's an old and famous story about a woman who was too worried one night to sleep. She had a great problem, and it was keeping her awake. Finally she opened her Bible in the wee hours and it fell open to this verse. Having read it, she closed her Bible and said, "Well, Lord, if you're going to stay awake, I'm going to bed. There's no need in us both staying up."
2. I think she understood very well what the Psalmist was saying here.
3. How wonderful to know that we have a Faithful Guard whose eyes are always watching out for us day and night.
4. One man said that he had been out of the army for 30 yrs. He didn't mean to do it, but there were a couple of times when his eyes got heavy and he slept a little on guard duty. He wasn't the first or last to do that.
 - a) *God doesn't take a nap*
 - b) *God doesn't take a vacation*
 - c) *He is conscientious*
5. God is a great keeper
 - a) *He has the power of omniscience*
 - b) *He has kept us when we were in danger*
 - c) *He had kept us when finances were low*
 - d) *He has kept us during times of sickness and health*
6. How many times have we heard a parent say – "I just turned my head for a moment"
 - a) *The toddler went out the back door and drowned in the pool*
 - b) *The toddler walked out the door into the road and was hit*
7. God never turns his head

C. He Keeps an Eye on Our Sunshine and Shadows – vs 5-6

5 The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. 6 The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

1. Our Father keeps an eye on our sunshine and shadows.
2. In the deserts of the Negev, it could become dangerously hot during the day and bitterly cold at night.
 - a) *The desert is a strange place, a place of extremes, and a place of discomfort and danger.*
 - b) *God did not promise to adjust the temperature so that His people would always live in a pleasant 72-degrees environment.*
 - c) *We're bound to have some uncomfortable days, but there will never be a day however hot or a night however cold in which the watchful, loving eye of the Lord will not be upon His children.*
6. The captain and the daughter ←

D. He Keeps an Eye on our Comings and Goings – vs 7-8

7 The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. 8 The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

1. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul
 - a) *What a comfort this is.*
 - b) *One traveler said, "Someone asked me recently if I was afraid of flying. I said, "You mean am I ever nervous about being stuffed in a little cigar-shaped metal tube and hurled 550 miles an hour thousands of feet above the ground from one continent to another? Why should that make me nervous?" The answer is yes—I'm always a little nervous about flying. But I frequently remind myself of these verses. This is, after all, the Traveler's Psalm"*
2. There are so many things that can happen to us - dangers, toils, snares
 - a) *But this psalm says that God watches over the travels—over the comings and goings—of His children.*
 - b) *Does that mean that Christians whose eyes are on the Lord—Christians who are in God's will—will never have accidents? That's right. Christians are never involved in accidents.*
 - c) *That doesn't mean Christians won't have wrecks.*
 - d) *There are no accidents for those whom God is over-watching.*
 - e) *As A. W. Tozer puts it, "To the child of God, there is not such thing as an accident. He travels an appointed way.... Accidents may indeed appear to befall him and misfortune stalk his way; but these evils will be so in appearance only and will seem evils only because we cannot read the secret script of God's hidden providence."*

E. He Keeps and Eye on Us Now and Forever – vs 8b

8 The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

1. Look at the glorious way this Psalm ends
2. This Psalm ends very much like [Psalm 23](#) - Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
3. Blessings both now and forever.
 - a) *This Travelers Psalm never expires.*
 - b) *It doesn't expire with old age.*
 - c) *It doesn't expire with death.*
 - d) *It doesn't expire with the end of human history.*
 - e) *It is always going to be in effect.*
 - f) *The promises in this Psalm will still be working on our behalf 100 years from now, 1000 years from now, a million years from now, a billion years from now.*
 - g) *Both now and forevermore.*

Conclusion:

1. When Rod Cooper was growing up the family raised pigs on the family farm. They raised about a thousand pigs a year. In one field they had two or three hundred little oinkers running around. Every day, at four in the morning, as Rod would walk into the field to feed those guys, they'd scatter. Once a little pig came up and began to chew on his foot, so he picked him up and began to pet him. Soon he wanted down. He said, "No, I'll let you down when I'm ready." At that moment, he let out an unbelievable squeal. In about two seconds, thirty mama pigs weighing five to six hundred pounds each were headed Rod's way. He put the pig down and headed for the fence. He barely made it over, and all the mama pigs were snorting and walking back and forth, daring him to come back over and bother one of their kids. Cooper says, "I look back at that and realize the little rascal wasn't intimidated. He was out of control, but he wasn't intimidated. Why? Because one squeal away he had resources. "Now let me ask you something. If one of God's creatures is that sensitive to the cry of its own, how much more sensitive is the heavenly Father to the cry of his own? Just one squeal away we have resources.
2. This is a Psalm for God's people—for those who have Jesus Christ as their Savior.
2. Have you done that? Are you His child?

One pastor said, "I had breakfast this week with a dear friend, a young man, who told me that he and his wife had encountered difficulty in conceiving; but finally they were successful and expecting a child. But then she miscarried, and the child was lost. They were devastated, but they chose to trust God with it. They felt enormous pain. I remember calling him the day it happened, and the two of them were hurting very deeply. But this week my friend said that one morning sometime afterward they both just woke up with a sense of peace. They couldn't explain it, but they could experience it. They knew God was exercising great care over them, keeping a close eye on them, and they were able to trust His peace. There are still some tough days, and occasionally they'll shed tears or have to talk through things again, but that peace has never left them. They didn't fall over the edge of grief. They didn't fall over the edge of bitterness. They didn't fall over the edge of depression. He didn't allow their foot to slip."

A number of years ago Captain D. commanded a vessel sailing from Liverpool to New York, and on one voyage he had all his family with him on board the ship. One night, when all were quietly asleep, there arose a sudden squall of wind, which came sweeping over the waters until it struck the vessel, and instantly threw her on her side, tumbling and crashing everything that was moveable, and awakening the passengers to a consciousness that they were in imminent peril. Everyone on board was alarmed and uneasy, and some sprang from their berths and began to dress, that they might be ready for the worst. Captain D. had a little girl on board, just eight years old, who, of course, awoke with the rest. "What's the matter?" said the frightened child. They told her a squall had struck the ship. "Is father on deck?" said she. "Yes; father's on deck." The little thing dropped herself on her pillow again without a fear, and in a few moments was sleeping sweetly in spite of winds or waves. Fear not the windy tempests wild, Thy bark they shall not wreck; Lie down and sleep, O helpless child!. Thy Father's on the deck. --*"The Biblical Treasury"*, 1873.