

Your Protector • Psalm 121

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Protection*

1. During an outbreak of persecution in North Africa some years ago, a man was fleeing from some who were seeking to kill him.
2. They pursued him over a hill and through a valley in which there seemed no place to hide
3. Finally, he found a cave and ran into it, exhausted.
4. Fully expecting to be caught, he just lay on the ground trying to catch his breath
5. As he lay there, he looked back at the opening expecting to see his persecutors at any moment
6. Instead he saw a spider weaving a web.
 - a. within minutes, the spider had woven a beautiful web across the mouth of the cave.
 - b. when the pursuers arrived, they saw the unbroken web and assumed it impossible for him to have entered the cave.
7. In later days when retelling this story he said, "Where God is, a spider's web is like a wall. Where God is not, a wall is like a spider's web."

B. *Today*

1. I want to talk with you today about the Lord's protection
2. We have a wonderful Psalm before us which describes God's care of us
3. The problem many have when they read it is to say, "Yeah, but . . . "
 - a. when we read something that promises the Lord's protection -
 - b. we immediately ask about those whose lives seem to defy what we read here
 - c. how do we account for those good and godly men, women and children who suffer and die?
 - d. where is God when bad things happen?
4. Good question, and one we'll take a look at
5. But first - our text . . .

II. TEXT

A. *Vs. 1-2*

{1} I will lift up my eyes to the hills; From whence comes my help?

{2} My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.

1. When *we* look at the hills today, we see little more than their subtle majesty
 - a. if we're looking at the hills above Camarillo or Ventura, we see prime real estate and think what a great place to build a house - what a view
 - b. if we're looking at the hills around Santa Paula & Ojai- and it's late

- Summer or early Fall, and they are covered with dry, brown bush, we see them for the fire hazard they presents
- c. if we look a bit further, we see Topa Topa and we are a bit awed by its lofty grandeur
 - d. but the hills are little more to us than large piles of rock and dirt
2. The ancients looked at the hills as much more
 - a. because hilltops were closer to the sky,
 - b. they considered them the dwelling places of the gods
 - c. Mt. Olympus is the most obvious example
 - d. but *every* hill was considered sacred
 - e. so shrines to the lesser and greater deities were set up on most every hilltop
 - f. and the power of the god was seen as endowing the ground with special energy
 3. The Psalmist is in trouble and needs help
 - a. so he looks to the hills
 - b. he turns his eyes to the place that everyone else goes to when they are in need
 - c. is that where he will find help?
 - d. is the solution to be found at the hilltop shrine of Baal or Molech?
 - e. does Asherah hold the answer?
 - f. should he go to their hills and ask for assistance?
 4. No! His help does not come from these idols
 5. His help comes from the Lord!
 - a. the one who made the heaven and earth and all that is in them
 - b. He is not bound to some hilltop
 - c. all the hills and mountains are His - the depths of the sea are in His sight
 - d. and He holds the skies in the palm of his hand
 6. When you're in need of help - where do you turn?
 - a. do you turn to the hills of *modern* help?
 - b. the *exalted* ones - the *experts* who write their self help books and hold their weekend seminars on how to take control of your life?
 - c. or do you turn to the Lord -
 - d. who not only made heaven and earth but made YOU and knows exactly how life works and has all the solutions to all your needs?
 - e. Oprah has a constant stream of gurus touting this and that as the latest and greatest help for what ails ya'

B. Vs. 3-4

{3} He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.

{4} Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

1. The Psalmist, who begins at a place of personal need now moves to the place of *teacher*
2. The lessons he has learned by experience he now passes on
3. Over the years, men and women have set up schools, colleges, and seminaries to train people how to minister.
 - a. whether you're taking classes in theology or history or how to preach,

- whatever -
- b. these are all schools designed to equip the *mind* with facts
 - c. but there is a school God Himself has established that educates the *heart*
 - 1) that school is called "Life"
 - 2) God's method of instruction is not to sit in some classroom listening to some gray-headed professor while he waxes eloquent on the fine points of the doctrine of angelology
 - 3) God's method is *practical ministry training*
 - 4) The Holy Spirit is giving every one of us on the job training
 - 5) our classroom is our homes, and workplaces, campuses, and the mall!
 4. So the Psalmist, who begins the psalm in a place of need, moves to a place of ministry as God has heard His request, supplied what was needed and brought him out into a new day
 5. Friend, the lessons you are learning, are not only working to conform you to the image of Christ, but they are also ordained by the Lord to equip you so you can help others when they are going through the same thing
 6. in 2 Corinthians 1: 3-4 we read

{3} Blessed be the . . . God of all comfort,

{4} who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

7. Notice what lesson the Psalmist had learned . . .

{3} He will not allow your foot to be moved;

- a. there is a word picture here in Hebrew that better conveys the psalmist's idea
- b. it's the picture of someone who cannot gain a steady foothold because the ground is slippery
- c. he is slipping and sliding, like someone trying to walk across slick ice
- d. but the picture here is a bit different
 - 1) you see, the one the psalmist speaks of is one who has taken a stand
 - 2) they have come to some decision, some stand that they must take in the face of opposition
 - 3) and having taken their stand, God *secures* them
 - 4) He ensures that when the inevitable opposition comes, they will *not* slip
 - 5) they will not fall
8. What a comfort this should be to those who are this morning being impressed by the Lord to take a stand in their family or at work or school
 - a. God will uphold your cause
 - b. He will strengthen your resolve and hold you up!
9. I remember when my children were first learning how to walk
 - a. after crawling for several weeks, they would climb up some piece of furniture
 - b. till they were standing upright - then they would stand there and weave all over the place

- c. then they would try to walk, but their steps were unsure and they would fall
 - d. I could see their desire to walk, so I would come alongside them and hold them under the arms and take the weight off their legs so they could stay upright.
 - e. we'd walk all over the house and yard that way
10. God does that for us when we are new to the faith
- a. He comes alongside us and holds us up
 - b. He helps us develop a walk
 - c. but eventually, He releases more and more weight onto our spiritual legs
 - d. today - I don't hold my children up - that would look silly and would be sad if they couldn't walk on their own
 - e. but when they take a stand today - or move into new territory of their growth as individuals, I am there as their father to encourage and help in any way they need me to
 - f. so it is with our spiritual Father
 - g. He provides whatever is needed to make sure we are solid and secure and have a good footing to live in Him

He who keeps you will not slumber.

{4} Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

- 11. Anyone here get tired now and then?
 - a. how many of you take naps?
 - b. how many here don't but wish they could?
- 12. We sleep because we have too - we get tired - life wears us out
- 13. Listen - this is a great truth - GOD NEVER GETS TIRED!!!
 - a. He never gets worn out
 - b. He never reaches the end of His rope
 - c. He doesn't battle fatigue
 - d. He never nods off
 - e. even more, He never gets bored
 - f. and He never loses concentration!
- 14. The point is, nothing interferes with God's diligent oversight of our lives
- 15. There isn't one moment of one day in which He isn't infinitely more aware of what is going on in your life than you are

C. Vs. 5-6

{5} The LORD is your keeper;

- 1. The word "keeper" is better understood as "Protector"
- 2. Hollywood has come out with a whole slew of movies with titles like, *My Bodyguard*, *The Body Guard*, *My Giant*, and so on
- 3. They all tell the story of some little guy who is protected by someone who is large of size & strength
- 4. Well, under the words, "Holy Bible" we could put a subtitle in parenthesis (My Protector)
- 5. This books tells us all about Our Bodyguard - our keeper, the One who is our Protector

The LORD is your shade at your right hand.

{6} The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night.

6. Perhaps this is a blessing lost on us here in Ventura County with our temperate climate
7. But it was something that expressed a far reaching blessing to those who live in the desert
 - a. you see, in the desert, there is precious little that provides shade
 - b. and the noon day sun can be so intense, it can burn the life right out of you
 - c. if you've ever suffered with sunstroke, you know how serious this can be
8. The moon presented another problem to people in the ancient world
 - a. they believed that prolonged exposure to moonlight caused a person to go insane!
 - b. the word *lunatic* derives from the Latin word for moon - *luna*
 - c. now of course today, we know this is mere superstition
 - d. but the point the Psalmist was making was this . . .
 - e. no matter what the season or the time of day
 - f. God is at your side to protect you from both *physical* and *spiritual* danger
9. Have you ever noticed how fear tends to run more keenly at night?
 - a. the little creaks and groans the house makes as it cools and settles -
 - b. the wind blowing outside
 - c. you're just about to fall asleep and there is some strange sound that wakes you
 - 1) and you're not sure if you really heard it or just dreamt it
 - 2) so you wake up and find that your heart is in your throat and racing at about 150 beats per second
 - 3) then you break out in a cold sweat
 - 4) and try as you might, you just cannot go back to sleep because your imagination starts poking you with the thought that someone has broken in and even now is rummaging around your living room
10. These thoughts seem to only come to us in the dead and dark of night
 - a. and you can be sure they are encouraged by spiritual hosts of wickedness
 - b. their whole aim is disturb your sleep, to wear you down
 - c. and create confusion and doubt as to God's love and protection
 - d. so how do resist - how do we fight back?

{5} The LORD is [my] keeper; The LORD is [my] shade at [my] right hand.

{6} The sun shall not strike [me] by day, Nor the moon by night.

D. Vs. 7-8

{7} The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul.

1. As we've been reading through this psalm, I know most, if not all of us have asked,
 - a. "What about those godly men, women and children who have died of sunstroke and heat exhaustion?"
 - b. "What about those saints who did go insane?"
 - c. "Where was God when evil *did* befall Peter, the Apostle Paul, and a bit later

- Origen and Clement?"
- d. "Was God asleep when John was immersed in a vat of boiling oil or stuck on the prison island of Patmos?"
 - e. "Did God nod off when the villages of the Christian Tutsis were slaughtered by the thousands at the hands of the Hutus in Rwanda a few years ago?"
2. How can the psalmist say that God will preserve us from all evil when it is obvious that bad things happen to good, godly people?
 3. I want to venture an answer to that question which I realize will not be completely satisfactory for some - But it's nevertheless true!
 4. As always, what the Psalmist says here is *really* the truth while it is *our* perspective and judgment that is in error
 - a. you see, we look at things from the human perspective
 - b. all we see is the *means* of trouble
 - c. we see someone suffering - we do not see what the suffering is *producing*
 - d. we see the pain - we do not see what the pain is *affecting*
 5. To us, the worse thing that can happen to someone is to be tortured cruelly and then die
 6. But try to look at this from the heavenly perspective
 - a. when a saint dies - what happens to them?
 - b. they go to heaven! Where is the evil in that?
 - c. when a believer is tortured, certainly there is great pain and torment
 - d. but how long does that pain endure in light of eternity?
 - e. and understand something as well, when the child of God is being tortured, nothing happens to them that the Holy Spirit doesn't in that hour give them the strength and grace to endure with boldness and charity
 - f. consider Stephen the first martyr of the Church
 - 1) in his death we see the Lord giving the prototype of all suffering
 - 2) Stephen forgave those who stoned him
 - 3) and was lifted out of himself in that moment to see the glories of heaven
 - 4) as the stones crushed the life out of him, I doubt very much that he even felt them because his vision was transfixed with the glory of heaven
 7. My beloved brothers and sisters, we have a promise from our God that nothing can happen to us that doesn't first have to pass through Him
- {1 Cor 10:13} No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.**
8. Nothing genuinely evil can *really* touch us!
 9. Oh sure, it will look like evil and it's source is the evil one
 10. But God takes the evil the evil one does and turns it around to his own undoing
 11. The ultimate proof of that is the cross!
-
- {8} The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in From this time forth, and even forevermore.**
12. In other words - God will protect you in all your ways - IF all your ways are committed to Him

13. God is not bound to protect us if we are going our *own* way

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Difficult Days Ahead*

1. All indicators seem to point to the fact that Christians are headed for some difficult times
2. Our entire nation and world may soon be plunged into some of the darkest days in history
3. And if so, it will be especially difficult for believers
4. So we need to steel our hearts and minds with the comfort of the scripture
5. We need to gain that heavenly perspective and remember - come what may, nothing evil can *really happen to us* because the ever-vigilant God protects us

B. *For Believers*

1. But I want to end with this warning: The promises of this Psalm are for those who are the people of God -
2. They are not for those who are going their own way
3. It is God's way that He safeguards
4. And it is only those upon that way that know His protection
5. What way are you going? What path are you on?