

Psalm 124

Our Help is in the name of the LORD

Tampa Covenant Church

02 July 2023

Proposition: Because the LORD is our sovereign creator and sustainer, we live with assurance that he's on our side, he's worthy of our praise and all of our help comes from him.

FCF: Failure to trust in the LORD as our divine helper.

RHF: God's steadfast love and faithfulness to us has been revealed through the person and work of Jesus Christ; therefore, we can trust him as our divine helper.

(#1) Introduction:

For those of us in the congregation who've faced real adversity and came through it, we can fill in these blanks, right? (#2) *"If it had not been for parents, spouses, friends and even strangers who were on our side then then we have no idea where we'd be.* And this is absolutely true in the natural. But as we unpack today's Psalm, we'll discover it's teaching us to think spiritually and look beyond parents, spouses, friends and strangers in beholding our true deliverer who works all things according to the counsel of his will and for (#3 Blank) his glory in our lives. Last week, Bill unpacked how the Psalmist lifted his eyes to the one enthroned in the heavens, seeking a type of mercy that could only come from such a lofty place. And the call was to see ourselves as faithful bondservants who fix our eyes on the LORD until he has mercy on us. Today we'll see how Psalm 124 calls us to live with assurance that the LORD is on our side; therefore, he's worthy of our praise because all of our help comes from him.

The LORD is on our side: *Not a feeling but a fact*

This Psalm is attributed to David. Some commentators cite the context of 2 Sam 5 as the occasion for writing.¹ So, we close the book of 1 Samuel and the Philistines have crushed the Israelites in battle, Saul is dead and succeeded as king by David. When the Philistines heard David was anointed as king, they assembled all their forces to go out and capture him but he sought refuge in a "stronghold" somewhere in Jerusalem. And it's there he inquired of (#4) the LORD... *"Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?"* The LORD says, *"Go up for I will certainly give them into your hand?"* And David defeated his enemies. (#5) Later the Philistines assembled once again against Israel. And David once more inquired of the LORD. But this time the LORD tells him to attack the army from the rear...why? *"for the LORD has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines."*

(#6 Blank) In the aftermath of victory, can you imagine the celebration taking place throughout Israel? "We've defeated our enemies!" And what does David do? He doesn't relish their victory rather he uses the opportunity to sober up the people by pointing them to (#7) their true deliverer: *"If it had not been the LORD who was on our side...Now lemme hear it come out of your mouth... "Let Israel now say..." "If it had not been the LORD who was on our side."* The LORD didn't just deliver David, he delivered all of Israel; therefore, all of Israel needed to acknowledge if the LORD wasn't on their side, they would've been annihilated!

(#8) Here in vv.2b-3, we get a vivid picture of what it would've looked like, *"When people rose up against us, then they would've swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us."* (#9) Our children's director, Mary Lynch has a 13-year-old corn snake named Maize. And once a month Maize receives a meal, consisting of 3 little mice. Now, when Mary delivers the mice, Maize isn't angry at them...she's hungry and she satisfies her hunger by suffocating the mice then swallowing them whole. That's pure animal instinct and acceptable in the animal world but not in the human world. David is saying these people wouldn't have been as humane as Maize, they would've swallowed us up alive in anger. (#10) And this anger is further likened to a flood and a torrent of raging waters that would've engulfed them. In

other words, God's people would've been buried alive in the sea of their enemy's fury had not the LORD been on their side.

(#11 Blank) So, what does it mean the LORD is on our side? It simply means he fights for his people and this is a fact we witness in the pages of scripture. However, we can become forgetful of this truth when adversity strikes because it opens the door for us to feel that God is not on our side. That's what happens when we allow our emotions to trump the truth of scripture. Our emotions are complex because they've been hard wired into our human nature and we don't rid ourselves of them once the LORD regenerates our hearts. Therefore, the enemy has no problem using them against us... causing us to be overcome by fear, excessive worry, and despair without hope in seasons of adversity. Instead of putting our faith in the truth of scripture, we let our emotions get the last word.

So, what's the antidote? Allow our emotions to be governed and guided by the truth of **(#12) scripture.**² We read in Ps. 9:9, The LORD is our stronghold when we face oppression and our stronghold in times of trouble. In Ps 32:7, he's our hiding place, preserves us from trouble and surrounds us with shouts of deliverance. And in Ps. 46:1, he's our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. **(#13 Blank)** Church when we face trouble on every side and feel as if there's no hope for us in this world; even still the LORD is still on our side! He has not abandoned us in any way. If you've bowed the knee to his reign and rule in your life, he keeps his covenant promises and fights for you according to his plan and purpose for your life. This is the truth that scripture teaches and on this truth, we take our stand.

Transition: When this fact becomes a reality in our hearts and minds then we realize he's the one truly worthy of our praise for his mighty acts of deliverance in our lives.

The LORD is Worthy of our Praise: *Living in total dependence on the LORD*

(#14) In v.6-7, *"Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth! We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers, the snare is broken, and we have escaped!"* The metaphors employed here are also vivid. God's people were like vulnerable prey ready to be devoured. And like a helpless bird, trapped in a snare with no hope of escape. But the LORD didn't give them over as prey and it's the LORD who broke the snare. It tells us apart from God's powerful intervention, they were destined for destruction.

(#15 Blank) Ok, let's make this really real this morning. When we escape an adverse situation in life, who gets the praise? I guess the answer depends on the nature of our relationship with the LORD. There may be some here, who truly believe they can live independently of God. Meaning, you don't see him as the creator and sustainer of your life rather you're in control. So, when you escape adversity, all the praise and honor go to you because you were clever, crafty and shrewd enough to figure your way out. That's the problem with pride; it's the root of man's rebellion against God for a reason. Because it doesn't look back and realize it was once prey ready to be devoured. And pride never sees itself trapped in a snare with no hope of escape. Therefore, if one is full of sinful pride, it follows, why trust in God when you can trust in self? This should not be the Christian's response in times of difficulty. And unless the prideful surrender their will to God; they'll continue to live under the folly of self-reliance; leading to ruin.

The better option is to live in total dependence on God because as created beings, we're frail and needy: We need air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, clothing to wear, shelter to protect and rest to rejuvenate. Without these things, we wouldn't last long in this world. The relationships we enjoy in this world reveal our dependence: we see it in the home, the workplace and also in the church. Bottomline, our lives are characterized by dependency but that's not the case with our LORD. Recall in Acts 17, Paul is brought before the Areopagus council and he uses the opportunity to proclaim the excellencies of the one **(#16) true God,** *"The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not*

live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." We walk away from this verse and verses like these in scripture and we must conclude that living in total dependence on God has to be the better option because he's the one who's truly independent; not us.

This is what Paul is unpacking for us. He extols God as the sovereign creator of the world and everything in it. And as Lord over all, it's unthinkable he would share space with idols in manmade temples. And he's not dependent on human hands to supply his needs because he doesn't need anything; he's complete in and of himself. And he's the giver of life, breath and everything to all mankind. This means our divine Lord is not only source and sustainer of all things because he's self-existent and self-sufficient.³

(#17 Blank) Therefore, he's the one we are to depend on in every adverse circumstance we face in this life. And the truth is this... the extent of our dependence on him speaks to the extent of our praise to him for his mighty deliverance. No dependence; no praise! Partial dependence; partial praise! Total dependence; total praise!

Transition: When we repent and forsake independence for dependence in our relationship with God, we're able to live with confidence that our only help is in the name of the LORD.

Our Help is in the name of the LORD: *Because we've been Redeemed for the sake of his name*

(#18) We arrive at v.8 and this Psalm of Thanksgiving ends with a bold declaration, *"Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth."* Gabe declared these very words to us in our call to worship and Rich did so faithfully during his tenure. This particular call to worship, reminds where our help comes from in times of trouble; it's from the LORD. **(#19 Blank) Many** among us are going through some turbulent seasons right now: Some are contending with sickness and disease; some are standing in the gap for family members who've been stricken with all sorts of maladies. Some are dealing with the reality of aging, others are shut in and unable to worship with us, some are dealing with ongoing issues in their personal lives, at home, and at work. And when we gather for worship, those problems don't go away... So, *"good morning, how are you guys doing out there?"* is useless as a call to worship, considering the burdens we're carrying. We need to hear this declaration spoken **(#20) over us,** *"our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth."* When we receive these words, it may not instantly change our circumstances but it keeps the doors of hope wide open and allows us to remain steadfast in God's will for our future no matter the seeming outcome.

(#21 Blank) Now when we hear the word "help", it's tempting for a second to think of an assistant or subordinate, responsible for the menial tasks that chew up our valuable time. The Hebrew word for help has many sense meanings in scripture; so context is key. When used with God in mind, we've got to reorient our thinking because he's not our assistant or subordinate; he's the maker of heaven and earth. And when we connect the dots, it changes the landscape where we recognize the help he provides is that which we're totally incapable of providing for ourselves. It's a supernatural and divine help that defies logic.

To put it another way, the help he provides is in keeping with his name, which is holy, thus separated from that which is common. And we confess this each week when we recite Lord's Prayer together, *"Our Father who art heaven, hallowed be your name."* Corporately, we're saying we greatly desire the LORD's name to be revered, respected and revered in a manner that's suitable with his glory, power and majesty.

(#22) Because as John Frame put it, *when we're dealing with God's name, we're dealing with God himself and where the name is; he is.*⁴ And since God has put his name on us, his covenant people, we respond to this reality of his ongoing presence in worship: We praise his name, give glory to his name, trust in his name and confidently declare our help is in his name. The reason why we these benefits are ours is because of the relationship we enjoy with our Covenant LORD. And it's all made possible because we

have been delivered from sin and eternal death not because of our good name but for the sake of his good name.

The Apostle John is writing to believers in his 1st letter and he reminds them in the 2nd chapter that unlike those who are walking in darkness, they have been saved from this darkness, (#23) In v.12, he says, *"I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake."* And the forgiveness of sins they've experienced in the Christian life is not because they went to church each LORD's Day, prayed a couple times of week and read their bibles every now and again. No, they're sins were forgiven and remained forgiven for the sake of God's name as revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. What a beautiful name it is... (#24) In Acts 4, Peter declared, *"there is salvation in no one else, for there no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Conclusion:

(#25 Blank) And this is how we can say with confidence come what may that our help is in the name of the LORD. Because he did not spare his only Son in rescuing us from the jaws of sin and eternal death. Instead, he allowed him to be swallowed up as prey while the raging flood waters of pain and agony swept over him. Our savior hung on that cross like a helpless bird caught in a fowler's snare and suffered a gruesome death in paying the penalty for our sin and rebellion against God. But that's not the end of the story, because through his glorious resurrection from the dead, the snare of death was broken. And he didn't just escape, no death was dealt a death blow and soundly defeated.

This is the gospel and as it flows from our lips; it must remain deeply in our hearts. And the only way this happens is through worship. Because he's the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the shelter that protects and the rest that rejuvenates. So, we constantly call on and draw near to the name of our LORD in prayer, thanksgiving and praise....in seasons of joy and calamity. And we remind ourselves and each other of his faithfulness: His past faithfulness that has come to us in the gospel. His present faithfulness in never leaving nor forsaking us. And his future faithfulness in preserving our very souls from all evil as we continue our sojourn to into his eternal presence. And so, we sing this song anew with full assurance that our LORD is truly on our side, he's worthy of our praise and our help is found in him alone through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

(#26) If it had not been the LORD who was on our
side—
let Israel now say—
2 if it had not been the LORD who was on our side
when people rose up against us,
3 then they would have swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;
4 then the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us; (#27)
5 then over us would have gone
the raging waters.

6 Blessed be the LORD,
who has not given us
as prey to their teeth!
7 We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken,
and we have escaped! (#28)
8 Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth. (#29 Blank)

¹ Derek Kidner, [*Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 472.

² See article written by Joe Thorn, entitled “Don’t Pursue Feelings, Pursue Christ.”

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/dont-pursue-feelings-pursue-christ> (Accessed 25 June 2023)

³ This is known in Reformed Theology as the doctrine of Aseity. Which speaks to the self-existence and self-sufficiency of God.

⁴ John Frame, *A Theology of Lordship, The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co, 2008), 490-91.