

Who Do You Trust?

Psalm 121

Matthew 6:25-34

How many of you sang hymns or choruses on the way to church this morning? I remember, when my children were young, we would try to keep them entertained by singing songs – everything from Mary Had a Little Lamb to Jesus Loves Me. That was to keep them busy while we traveled. But, how about singing in the car to worship God?

In Old Testament times, the Hebrew people would sing the Psalms. As a matter of fact, it wasn't that many years ago that the hymnal in the Presbyterian church was the Psalter. It consisted of the Psalms set to music. That's what the Psalms are, songs to God – sometimes happy songs, sometimes sad songs, sometimes expressing their anger or worry or disappointment or confusion.

Psalm 121 is one of a group called Songs of Ascent. The people sang them as they ascended, or climbed the hills, to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. As they climbed those hills, some may have thought about the possibility of robbers hiding among the trees. Many think someone returning from this pilgrimage was what Jesus had in mind when he told the parable of the Good Samaritan. Others may have thought about the pagan gods that people thought lived on those hills. Those who followed the pagan gods had built shrines and temples to their gods in these hills.

Whatever thoughts may have been in the mind of the author, it is clear that he recognizes what the only true source of help is. That's why we say that this is a Psalm of trust. The writer is clear about that when he says: "My help comes from the Lord, maker of Heaven and earth."

Today, I want to look at three aspects of that help: why we need it, how strong His help is and how broad and deep His strength is.

We all need help from time to time. I realize there are some folks who think they are able to do anything and everything themselves. I read about some of the country's most famous millionaires and billionaires. Most of them said they had more worries than they did when they were not wealthy. Henry Ford said he was happier as a mechanic than as the owner of Ford Motor Company.

The other extreme, of course, is the person who worries about everything and thinks they can't do anything without someone else's help. Let's face it, we all

worry about things from time to time. The popular televangelist, Joyce Meyer, says she likes to teach about worry while sitting in a rocking chair. That chair, she says, suggests the futility of worry – it creates a lot of activity but it gets you nowhere.

I know some of you have very important things that you do worry about. Things like health problems, financial problems, family problems, the list could go on and on.

I read a story about a sweet grandmother who telephoned her local hospital. She timidly asked, “Is it possible to speak to someone who can tell me how a patient is doing? The operator said “I’ll be glad to help, Dear. What’s the name and room number?” The grandmother in her weak tremulous voice said, “Holly Finkel in room 302.” The Operator replied, “Let me check. Oh, good news. Her records say that Holly is doing very well. Her blood pressure is fine; her blood work just came back as normal and her physician, Dr. Cohen, has scheduled her to be discharged on Tuesday.” The Grandmother said, “Thank you. That’s wonderful! I was so worried! God bless you for the good news.” The operator replied, “You’re more than welcome. Is Holly your daughter?” The Grandmother said, “No, I’m Holly Finkel in 302. Dr.Cohen doesn’t tell me anything!”

Then there was the very worried driver who took his car to the shop and complained about a clunking sound every time he went around a corner. A mechanic was given the repair order and took the car to check it out. After making a couple of turns, and each time hearing a loud clunk, he returned the car to the service manager. On the repair order was this note: “Removed bowling ball from trunk.”

All too often we find ourselves worrying about material things. Solomon, who was considered the richest man to ever live, saw the futility of trying to satisfy ourselves with things. In Ecclesiastes 2 he wrote this: *“I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.”*

I read these statistics about worry the other day:

- Forty percent of what we worry about never comes to pass.
- Thirty percent of what we worry about happened in the past and can’t be

changed.

- Ten percent of what we worry about relates to health. (What's both funny and sad is that researchers have proven that worry actually makes your health worse not better!)
- Eight percent of worry is legitimate, but even then, your worrying about it won't change it!

Many of the Biblical leaders had reason to worry. Moses felt that he was not qualified to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. He worried about the people not following him. When they got into the wilderness, the people started worrying about what they were going to eat. Each time, the Lord handled the situation. The people did follow Moses. Then, when they complained to him about the food, God provided manna and quail. They had to learn to trust God.

Joseph certainly had reason to worry. First, his jealous brothers threw him into a pit and were going to leave him there to die. Then they got this better idea: sell him to an Egyptian as a slave. Knowing the outcome of that move, do you think that idea might have been a God thing? With the Lord's leading Joseph became so wise and such a great helper to the King, he became second only to the king in power. That, as we know, saved Joseph's entire family, not to mention the entire kingdom of Egypt.

You see, friends, you can't always see the big picture. You tend to get caught up in your piece of the world and you worry and fret over the small things. God sees the whole picture. He knows your needs far better than you do.

David understood this. In Psalm 27 he says: *"The Lord is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid? The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble."* (Psalm 27:1 NLT) In Psalm 122, another Psalm of ascent, we find David singing the words that we use to open each (traditional) worship service: *"I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord."* (Psalm 122:1 NLT)

So, first of all, we hear the Psalmist asking a rhetorical question: "Where does my help come from?" Then he answers with a resounding proclamation: "My help comes from the Lord, maker of Heaven and earth."

Now, I realize I have spent much of our time so far speaking about worries. That is something we all do – far too often. We worry about material things, about relationships, about the future, about health, about finances. And, many other things. The Psalmist is saying here that we don't need to worry about things. That is what Jesus was saying in the Gospel lesson I read this morning. Don't worry about the things of this life, keep your focus on God. If we can keep our mind and

heart fixed on Him, we will find that life will go much better for us. We may not like the way some things work out, because it's not what we think is best. But, keeping our focus on God is the best way to get through those worrisome and difficult times. If we focus on the problems of daily life, we will never have any peace or happiness. We will worry all the time.

When the Psalmist says, "My help comes from the Lord," he is clearly not just mouthing a proverb of some sort. He immediately states how powerful God is. He is the One who made Heaven and earth. Of course, once you've said that, need anything more be said? Probably not. But let's think about what this meant to some of the folks we meet throughout the Bible.

David came to the battlefield to deliver food and check on his family. Then he chose to go up against Goliath, but could not suit up in armor for protection – it was just too heavy for him. He called on the name of the Lord, who protected him and helped him save the Israelite people.

Peter stepped out of the boat one time. Jesus, you may remember, came walking on the water, to meet His disciples. Impetuous Peter, called to Him, "*If it is really you, command me to come to you.*" Jesus said, "*Come.*" When Peter stepped out of the boat, he was able to walk on the water, also. Then the text in Matthew 14 tells us: "*When he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus reached out and grabbed him and kept him from sinking.*" You see, Peter began to trust Jesus, God in the flesh, and was able to do the impossible. But then he began to lose trust and thought he was on his own, and he began to sink. He needed Jesus.

Let's face it, Jesus, being one with God, is the ultimate source of strength. He healed people – even a man born blind. He calmed the wind and the raging sea. The most powerful of all, He restored life to a dead friend, Lazarus; and then He himself rose from the dead.

The Psalmist wraps up this Song of Ascents by pointing to the vast scope of God's help. He says that God will "watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." Now, clearly, he is not saying that God will keep you from getting sick. He is not saying that God will somehow magically yank that banana peel out from under your foot to keep you from slipping on it. He is talking here about how God will be with you through everything that happens. The Psalmist says that God never slumbers, never sleeps. Those who believed in the pagan gods of that day believed that those gods slept sometimes and were not always available.

You may recall when Elijah challenged the worshipers of Baal. The Baal folks built their alter and called on their god to ignite the fire. Nothing happened. Elijah

suggested maybe Baal was away or asleep or otherwise detained. That was a common thought about the pagan gods of that day. Of course, when Elijah poured water on the wood in his own altar and then called upon God to ignite the fire, it happened! Elijah's God, our God, never sleeps, He doesn't doze off for a while and just let things happen. He is always there to walk through even the most difficult times of life with you.

Most of you have probably read the "footprints" poem. Briefly, it relates a story of a person looking back over their life and seeing two sets of footprints in the sand. Then in the difficult times of life, there is only one set of footprints. When the person asks God why He left him at those difficult times, God replies that is when I carried you.

The Psalmist had more problems than he could handle. What did he do? He focused on God, not on the problems. His first thought was not "How can I deal with these problems?" His first thought was "What a magnificent and powerful God I serve."

The Bible says, "*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.*" (Proverbs 23:7 NKJV) This anonymous Psalmist who wrote Psalm 121, thought of God in his heart and so he was able to depend on God. That is the first secret to learning to trust: spend your time thinking about God and drawing close to Him, rather than wasting your time thinking about the problem. In other words, ask yourself "What is God going to do about this situation?" rather than "What am I going to do about it?"

You see friends, you have the advantage over David and the others who wrote the Psalms, because you can look at God's promises and His providence through the perspective of calvary. Jesus said, "*Take heart, because I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33 NLT) When you recognize Jesus as God's Son and you call on Him to take on your problems, you can claim that promise: He has overcome the problems of this world. Psalm 94 helps us discover what we must do: proclaim your trust and faith in God. The Psalmist said it this way, "*I cried out, 'I'm slipping!' and your unfailing love, O Lord, supported me. When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer.*" (Psalm 94:18-19, NIV)

Remember what Jesus said about worrying in our Gospel lesson? The answer to your worries is not to try to produce more faith. Rather, it is to seek out God and spend time with Him – "dwell in His house." All too often, you let your problems push you away from God, when you really need to draw closer and let Him comfort and guide you. Then you can give thanks to God for using the things you worry about to drive you closer to Him.

Ultimately, once you learn to come to God, rather than push Him away, you can

join the Psalmist in his rejoicing. Isaiah put it this way, *“In that (final) day the people will proclaim, “This is our God! We trusted in him, and he saved us! This is the LORD, in whom we trusted. Let us rejoice in the salvation he brings!”* (Isaiah 25:9)

Worship songwriter Brian Doerksen’s son, Isaiah, suffers from fragile X syndrome, a genetic condition which results in physical, intellectual, emotional, and behavioral limitations. In his book *Make Love, Make War*, Brian reflects on the day he and his wife first received medical confirmation of Isaiah’s condition. In the midst of his heartache, as Brian considered turning away from worship ministry altogether, God taught Brian a lesson that instead carried him further into his ministry:

After receiving the test results, he says, I stumbled around our property weeping, confused, heartbroken. At one point I lifted my voice to heaven and handed in my resignation: “God, I am through being a worship leader and songwriter ...”

“When I was able to be quiet enough to hear, I sensed God holding out his hand and inviting me: “Will you trust me?” Will you go even with your broken heart—for who will relate to my people who are heartbroken if not those like you who are acquainted with disappointment?”

Reflecting further on this word from God, Brian writes: I used to think people were most blessed by our great victories. But now I know differently: People are just longing to hear [others] speak of how they have walked through the deepest valleys. The world lifts up the victorious and the successful, but God lifts up the brokenhearted.”

In our deepest times of pain and uncertainty and struggling with our faith is the very time we need to trust God the most. He is the only One who can help us through those difficult days.

Prayer: Lord God, come to us in the bad times as well as the good times. Make your presence known to us and help us trust you – even when it is most difficult to trust anyone, even when we question you. Thank you for the love you have shown us in the gift of your Son, Jesus. Keep us close, even when we want to turn away. Help us know you are with us through all the seasons of life. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.