

Psalm 120-121

1. Introduction

Winter 1979-80

Ran out lamb milk in the snow – had to walk into town to get more
Easy bits – shallow snow on fields
V hard bits - Snow drifted against hedges
Heading out – adventure, coming home long, hard, night approaching
One occasion slipped down a slope – stuck under vegetation, blanket of snow.

The Christian life is a journey

Hard, boring, long, arduous, joyful, sad, fast slow.
A pilgrimage – a long walk to our eternal destination – start well, finish well

Hence Psalms 120-134 are useful

Ancient Israel made three pilgrimages a year
To Jerusalem, the temple

Psalms 120-134 – are pilgrim Psalms

They recount, assess, discuss, their faith

Summer

Great time to take stock of our spiritual life.

Three ways

1. These sermons
2. Homegroups
3. A booklet for summer reflection

Psalms 120-122

Triplet about setting out

2. Psalm 120 – Do not love the world

We are not called to hate everything about the world
But we are called to hate its fallenness

The distress of the Psalmist

He lives among lies – v2
He lives among violence – vv6-7

Not difficult to relate to this:
MPs expenses and inquiry into Iraq war!
What we don't see is how profoundly lies and violence are built into this world

3. Psalm 121 – Do not be afraid

I lift my eyes to the hills – v1

The hills as a source of fear - Robbers, etc

The hills as a source of help - The high places – pagan worship

May have been both but fear seems to dominate

We don't recognise how much of life is quietly shaped by fear
Teenager – conforms to group for fear of being different
Teenager terrified of not being attractive to opposite sex – the Lynx effect
Single people – the fear of loneliness, fear of being tied down!
Adult – fear of job insecurity, fear of failure, fear of exposure
Middle aged – fear of aging “anti-ageing cream” not “anti-wrinkle”
Elderly – fear of dying and particularly the process – euthanasia driven by fear
I – always had a real fear of my sinfulness – fear I will mess up.
Life is **ESSENTIALLY UNCONTROLLABLE**... finally sealed in death
“all our lives held in slavery by our fear of death” – Heb 2:15
Reaction – panic
Reaction – take control
Reaction – entrust ourselves to God

☞ *Where does our help come from?*

The Lord! – v2 Because

- *He is the maker of heaven and earth – v2*
- *He is alert – “he watches over” x6*



V3b, V4, v5, v7 (x2), v8

God is sovereignly in control of all things
In all places – v8 “your coming and going”
At all times – v8 “now and forevermore”

☞ *What protection does God offer?*

What protection does he offer?

- *Falling away from our faith – v3*
 - “foot slip” – implies stumbling in faith
- *Natural disaster – v6a*
 - “the sun” – source of destruction
- *Madness (?) – v6b*
 - “the moon” – source of madness
- *From all harm – v7*

This is strong medicine – can taste bitter in our mouths

Preacher preached in a church did not know – a person had been killed in a car crash
We know counter-examples
The person who fell away
The natural disaster which devastated
The person who is dogged by a mental illness

False solution – God is not as much in control as some claim

Easy but removes all real comfort

True solution – God is in control, but he has chosen to curb the full force of evil not immediately eliminate it.

Bad things do happen but God uses them for the good of his people

“In all things God works for the good of those who love him” – Rom 8:28

GOD’S AGENDA IS NOT THE SAME AS OUR AGENDA

God is determined that we will complete the pilgrimage

“to be conformed to the likeness of Christ” – Rom 8:29

Example: Old friend, Christian leader, deeply flawed especially pride
God brought him down – but I see green shoots of humility
Example: another old friend – husband left her – I saw God deepen her immeasurably
“on a good day I can be glad this happened”
Many other situations we will not see what God is doing.

Two biblical truths to remember

For believers God never allows harm to come as a simple penalty for sins

Christ has taken the penalty – we don’t pay for our sins

Discipline, correction

To God nothing is more important than completing the journey

1 Corinthians 11:27-32 – turn it up

Some had died because of their sin – v 30

But this was to SAVE THEM – v 32

Return to Psalm 121

This psalm is not some fatuous, platitudinous affirmation which bears no relation to the real world. It is not even a statement which is generally true but with exceptions. It is a profound statement of truth about all circumstances, at all times, for God’s people.

“Whatever is good for God’s children, they shall have it, for all is theirs to further them to heaven. If crosses be good, they shall have them; if disgrace be good, they shall have it; for all is ours, to serve our main good.” Richard Sibbes

☞ *How should we respond?*

Joy

Risk taking