

Psalm 124

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Date: 24 May 2020

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening and a warm welcome to the service this evening.

We'll begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise in Psalm 124. We have been continuing through the Psalms over these past weeks and we come to Psalm 124 this evening.

We'll read this Psalm, we'll study this Psalm and we'll begin this time of worship by singing the Psalm. Had not the Lord been on our side, may Israel now say, had not the Lord been on our side when men rose up to slay, they had us swallowed quick when as their wrath against us did flame, waters had covered us, our soul had sunk beneath the stream.

Then had the water swelling high, over our souls made way, blessed be the Lord, who to their teeth gave us not as prey. Our soul escaped as a bird out of the fowler's snare, the snare asunder broken us and we escaped our.

Our sure and all sufficient help is in Jehovah's name, his name who did the heavens create and who the earth did frame.

[1 : 31] These verses, the whole Psalm, we sing to God's praise. Had not the Lord been on our side, may Israel now say, Had not the Lord been on our side, when men rose up to slay?

They had us swallowed quick when as their wrath against us did flame, Waters had covered us, our soul had sunk beneath the stream.

Then had the water swelling high, over our soul made way, Blessed be the Lord, who to their teeth us gave not for a prey.

Our souls escaped as a bird out of the fowler's snare, the snare asunder broken is, and we escaped our.

Our sure and all sufficient help is in Jehovah's name, his name who did the heaven create and who the earth did frame.

[4 : 03] Let's unite our hearts in prayer. Let's unite our hearts in prayer. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the last stanza that we sang.

Our sure and all sufficient help is in Jehovah's name, his name who did the heavens create and who the earth did frame. We thank you, Lord, for who you are, that you are God, that you are the God who made the heavens and the earth, who framed everything that we look up and see.

We thank you for the majesty of your creation that we see with such clarity in a place like this. We thank you for the hills and the seas and the clear skies and so many evidences of your creative power and your majesty.

And we pray that we would day by day lift our eyes to the hills and beyond the hills to the maker of heaven and earth.

We thank you, Lord God, that we who are so small and so insignificant in the grand scale of things, we thank you that we are given significance in the fact that we are created and we are created in your image.

[5 : 26] We are created with a desire to worship you. That's our purpose. That's our chief end to glorify God. And we thank you for the joy that there is in bringing glory to the name of God.

You are the glorious God. You have made us in your image. You have made us for yourself. And we pray that you would help us, Lord, as we look around us. Help us as we open your word and as we sing it and as we read it and as we meditate upon it.

To see more of who you are. And Lord, to have hearts that are more and more tuned to sing your praise. We confess, Lord, that our hearts have been infected by sin.

We confess, Lord, that our hearts so often are turned in on ourselves. We were made to glorify your name. But so often, Lord, our ambitions and aims are to glorify ourself, to exalt ourselves.

And we recognize, Lord, that that is sin. It's a sin to exalt ourselves or anyone or anything to the place that is above you.

[6 : 39] You are the God whose place is the place of all honor. Lord, we are called to put you first, to seek first the kingdom of God.

And we confess, Lord, that often we fail to do that. And we pray for your forgiveness. And we pray that you would help us day by day to seek, to lift up the name of Jesus, the one in whom there is salvation.

So we ask, Lord, that you would help us in this short time of worship, that we would fix our eyes upon you, Lord, that you would reveal more of yourself to us, that you would speak to us, that you would strengthen us, that you would give us nourishment as we meditate upon your word.

And, Lord, that you would touch our souls. We thank you that we come to you for help. And we come to the maker of heaven and earth for help. When we are struggling, Lord, and when we are weary, when we are confused, when we are needing guidance, when we may feel low within ourselves, we thank you that we come to the God who is all-powerful, the one who has promised that his strength is made perfect in our weakness.

So we confess, Lord, our weakness. And we pray that as we wait upon you, that you would renew our strength, that you would cause us to rise up on wings like eels, to run and not grow weary, and to walk and not to faint.

[8 : 13] We pray, Father, for your help, not just for ourselves, but for many who are struggling. Each time we meet, we remember those who are sick, those who are sad, those whose hearts are sore from sorrow, those who are suffering under the chains of addiction.

We pray for places like Heb Alpha. And we ask, Lord, for those who are finding this period of lockdown particularly tough and who have fallen back into old habits, perhaps.

And we thank you that they are able to call out to you and we are able to carry them to you in prayer. And so those that we think of, Lord, we bring them to you and we ask that you would do for them what we cannot do for them.

And we pray that you would do for them what they cannot do for themselves. You are the God who is able to break the chains of sin, the chains of addiction that sometimes blind us. So we bring such as those to you, Lord.

We pray for those that you have allowed to be an authority over us. For those in government, in Westminster, in Holyrood, Lord, we ask that you would give to them wisdom.

[9 : 27] And as we take steps to have this phased release from lockdown, we pray for wisdom and for patience and for perseverance through this difficult time.

Help us, Lord, we pray, to be wise. And we recognize that wisdom comes from heaven. We pray for those who are Christians in these positions of influence.

We think of Kate Forbes especially. And we ask, Lord, that you would help her, that you would give her strength, that you would give her wisdom and that she would be salt and light in the place that you have put her for such a time as this.

We pray also, Lord, for our local community. We think of the school. And as we hear of changes impending in the school with the retirement of Mrs. McSween and other teachers, we ask, Lord, for your hand to be upon that school, for wisdom to be given to those who will make the decisions.

And we pray that it would continue to be a place where our children are able to go to receive education. But more than that, Lord, we pray that it would be a place where your word is read and heard and where the light of the gospel is seen.

[10 : 43] We ask, Lord, for the scripture union there. We thank you for those who lead it. And we pray that you would encourage them and that you would be with the young ones who attend it, Lord, that even though they're not able to meet physically just now, that they would be encouraged as they connect with each other.

We pray for the youth fellowship that meets after this as well. And we ask, Lord, that you would continue to have your hand upon these young people. And we ask that they would grow up to know you, to trust you, and to glorify you with their lives.

So hear our prayers. Take away our sin. Lead us and guide us, we pray, in the power of the Holy Spirit. We recognize, Lord, that apart from you we can do nothing. But we thank you that you are the God who is on our side.

You are the God who has promised that you will draw near to us when we seek to draw near to you. And so we do so. In Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake. Amen. We will read God's word now. We'll read the psalm that we sang. Just a short psalm. Psalm 124. This is God's word. A song of ascents of David.

[11 : 54] If the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel say. If the Lord had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive.

The flood would have engulfed us. The torrent would have swept over us. The raging waters would have swept us away. Praise be to the Lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare. The snare has been broken. And we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. Well, if you could turn back to the psalm that we read. And we'll spend just a few moments this evening meditating upon the psalm.

Most of us, I expect, who are watching or who are listening in, are pretty familiar with the landscape in Tarbird and the things that are going on in the village that we meet in and live in.

[13 : 09] And as you drive around the village, you see different things. And one thing that we see each time we do the loop in the village is the building site. Works have been going on in the harbour for a period.

They've stopped meantime. But the R.J. McLeod cabin was set up. And I couldn't help but noticing on the front of the cabin, there's a sign, obviously, put up by the health and safety people.

And it tells us how many days that there have been on site since there have been any reportable accidents. I can't remember what the number was. 180, maybe.

But in construction, you have to report accidents when they happen. And in construction, you don't only have to report accidents, but where there are near misses, where there are situations that could have been catastrophic, that could have brought injury and danger.

These things have to be reported as well, because a lot can be learned, not just from an accident after it happens, but a lot can be learned from a near miss.

[14 : 16] And for the psalmist, if you've got the psalm in front of you, we know the psalmist here is David. And even if we were to look singularly at this psalm, there seems to have been a lot of near misses that David speaks of.

He speaks in verse 2 of how he could have been overcome by attackers. He speaks in verse 3 of how he could have been swallowed alive. Verse 4, he could have been engulfed by the flood.

Verse 5, he could have been swept away by raging waters. He could have been torn apart. Verse 6, he could have been ensnared.

In fact, he was for a period, it seems, in verse 7, ensnared and captured before there was escape.

And in any of these situations that David alludes to here in this psalm, they could have been the end of him.

These are serious situations that he writes of. This is a case of acute danger. Any of these things could have been the end for the psalmist. But it seems that none of these things actually were the end of him.

[15 : 31] He had close shaves that he speaks of. He has near misses. But he's lived to tell the tale. Now, was that because he was lucky? Well, of course, that's not the case.

No such thing as luck. Was he like a cat with nine lives? No. He knows the reason that he's still living and breathing and has the desire and determination to write these psalms.

In fact, it's the whole motivation for him writing these psalms. He writes this psalm of testimony. He writes this psalm of praise.

And he writes this psalm to help us and to help those who are with him to remember that the Lord was on his side. So this is a psalm that highlights for us right from the beginning that the Lord is on the side of his people.

And David the psalmist, to help him as he meditates upon the Lord and to help those who are with him, because he's calling out to a great company we can hear in this psalm, and to help us to realize and enjoy the blessing of this truth.

[16 : 50] In a sense, he says to us, let's in this psalm take a moment and think about what might have happened if the Lord was not on our side.

Let's think through for a moment, he says, the what-if scenarios. And that's the first point for this evening. First point is what-if. And sometimes we do that, don't we?

We think through the what-if scenarios. We might have been in the car. We've had a narrow escape. We've skidded on ice. And we come to a safe position when we stop.

We turn to the person with us and we say, how fortunate we are to be in this position. What if the car had rolled? What if I had gone over the side of that hill? Or we might have that nagging doubt when we're halfway to the store now.

Did I put that pan off? And we turn around and we head back home. And when we head home, we go into the kitchen. The pan's boiling over. The smoke alarm's going off. And we say to each other, that was close.

[17 : 55] What if we hadn't turned back? We tend to think through sometimes the what-if scenarios.

That's actually what the health and safety guys do on the sites. With the near-miss reports. They gather the team around. And they say, yes, we're all safe and we can be thankful for that.

But let's think through what could have happened. What might have happened if when these rocks fell, you weren't wearing a hard hat? What might have happened if when you slipped on that scaffold, you hadn't been attached to the scaffolding by the safety harness?

They tend to think through the what-ifs. And David here, he goes through a couple of what-ifs scenarios. There's two scenarios, broadly speaking. The first scenario we see is in verse 1 to verse 3.

If the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel say, if the Lord had not been on our side, when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive.

[19 : 06] Now what's going on in David's life at this point that prompts him to write this psalm? We don't know. We don't know for sure. A lot of the commentators speculate that this could have been David's psalm that connects with 2 Samuel chapter 5.

One of the commentators says, when David began his reign in Jerusalem, the Philistines attacked him twice, and the Lord gave him great deliverance. And so it may be that this psalm is grounded in that scenario.

So maybe let's just go for a moment to 2 Samuel 5, and we'll read from verses 17 to 25. And it says there, When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they went up in full force to search for him.

But David heard about it and went down to the stronghold. Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the valley of Rephaim. So David inquired of the Lord, Shall I go and attack the Philistines?

Will you hand them over to me? The Lord answered him, Go, for I will surely hand the Philistines over to you. So David went to Baal-perazin, and there he defeated them.

[20 : 27] He said, As waters break out, the Lord has broken out against my enemies before me. So the place, that place, was called Baal-perazin.

The Philistines abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them off. And once more, verse 22, The Philistines came up and spread out in the valley of Rephaim.

So David inquired of the Lord, and he answered, Do not go straight up, but circle round behind them, and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.

So David did as the Lord commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines, all the way from Gibeon to Gezer. So a lot of the commentators of you, if you do your own reading, will see that they take you to this passage where David, he's been anointed as king, and yet he has enemies who are constantly seeking to attack him.

And yet, although he's dealing with that on a day-to-day basis almost, he knows, and we see the demonstration of it here, that the Lord was on his side.

[21 : 49] He wasn't on his own. It's God who placed him in the position, who anointed him as king, and it's the Lord who was with him. He was going before him. He was giving the protection to David that he needed.

The Lord was on his side. And this psalm may have been his song of thanksgiving to the Lord.

That's one possibility. But that's one possibility of many possibilities, because if we know anything much about David's life, we know that he was forever under attack.

There were many times when he was under attack. There were many occasions where the odds were stacked against him. But the Lord was on his side and rescued him.

We could go all the way through this altar and see so many occasions where that was his testimony. The Lord was on his side and rescued him. And the fact that we don't know exactly what the scenario was connected to this psalm is actually helpful to us.

[23 : 01] the details of what was going on are deliberately omitted. And that's to encourage us, I believe. Because when we are under attack, when we are going through difficult times, when we are oppressed and we are feeling an attack coming in of any kind, whether it's spiritual, whether it's personal, even whether it's a physical, a medical thing, then we have the encouragement in psalms like this to look to the Lord for help, to ask him to be at our side and to be on our side.

So we see there the first scenario, these attacks that were coming in on David. And yet the fact that the Lord was on his side, if the Lord was not on his side, they would have, they would have been swallowed up alive, he says.

And the second scenario here is in verses 4 and 5. So let's just look at these verses now. Verse 1 and 2, if the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel say, if the Lord had not been on our side, verse 4, the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away.

A friend of mine on social media the other day shared a video. He lives in Torridon, one of the areas that I used to be a minister in.

And he lives just at the bottom of this huge mountain that overlooks the village of Torridon. And where he was, at ground level, everything was dry.

[24 : 49] But at high level, the mountain was engulfed in clouds and it was raining heavily at the high level. And it was raining so heavily that it caused a landslide.

And so you were hearing the rain coming down and then you were hearing this movement, this rumbling. And he captures this on this amazing video where you see the rocks and you see the water coming cascading down the hill.

And that's the kind of scenario that David writes of here. It's similar. Eveson, the commentator, says, Some of the dry wadi beds of Judea are very steep-sided.

If there is a thunderstorm in the mountains, a raging torrent can quickly rush down, giving anyone in the wadi very little chance of escaping. Worsby paints the same picture.

He says, During the rainy season and when the mountain snow melts, the dry riverbeds in Israel quickly become filled with water and flash floods threaten houses and people.

[25 : 59] Their situation, says one commentator, without God's help, would have been as dangerous as being in a dry riverbed suddenly overwhelmed with a deluge of water.

You can see these things online if you search them. One moment, people can be walking along a dry riverbed and the next moment there's a roar and a whole river comes cascading down and engulfs people.

So, David gives us this picture here of the torrent sweeping over them, the floods engulfing them, the raging waters that could have swept them away.

Now, is he talking here about a literal flash flood and being saved in that scenario? Well, it's not impossible that might have been part of his thinking. He probably saw it if not experienced it.

He may also be thinking about the Exodus, Exodus 14, when the Lord drove back the waters of the Red Sea so that his people could safely cross before the water engulfed the Egyptians who were in pursuit and swallowed them up.

[27 : 08] His mind may have been going in that direction. Or it may be that David is just using more pictures, another metaphor, to describe the attacks that he endured.

Jeremiah is another writer in the Old Testament who compares enemy attacks to floods. Jeremiah 47, verses 1 to 1 and 2, says, this is the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah, the prophet, concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh attacked Gaza.

This is what the Lord says. See how the waters are rising in the north. They will become an overflowing torrent. They will overflow the land and everything in it, the towns and those who live in them.

And then Job, in that dark book, he compares his own personal sufferings to that of a flood that comes, that came rushing into his life.

And if you know the story of Job, you know how real that was. Job 27, verse 20, it says, terrors overtake him like a flood.

[28 : 18] So the language that's employed in this psalm and the pictures that David paints are pictures and words that caused God's people whom he was leading to think back to times of trouble.

We don't see in detail what the trouble was, but we know from the descriptions here, this is a description of what it was like to be in trouble.

They knew what it was to be under attack. They knew what it was to be often in danger. They knew what it was to be running for their lives.

And yet they knew and were thankful on the day that this was written and they joined their voices together. They knew that they had life, they had breath, they had health, they had lived to tell the tale.

And so David leads them in this chorus of what if the Lord had not been on our side. Think back, he says.

[29 : 30] Think about all we've been through. Think about the trouble, think about the strife, think about the attacks and think about the fact that we've lived through them all.

How is that? It's because the Lord is on our side, says David. But what if the Lord had not been on our side?

How different, he says, things would have been. What if the Lord had not been on our side? We wouldn't have escaped. We wouldn't have been able to endure these attacks.

We wouldn't have been able to have the victory in battle. how dead we would now be, he is saying, if the Lord had not been on our side.

What if the Lord had not been on our side? And that may have been a chorus that rang out thousands of years ago, far from here, but we can enter into this, can't we?

[30 : 36] we've known the blessing, sometimes in the hardest of times, often in the hardest of times, of the Lord being with us.

And we should count, we should mark, we should remember, we should give thanks for these blessings, as David did.

And maybe from time to time, we should actually take this approach that David took, and think through some of the troubles that we have experienced, and think through, what if the Lord had not been on our side, when we suffered in these ways?

I can think of some people, even in our own congregation, some who've suffered personal attack, some who've suffered acutely through illness, others who've lost loved ones, and how often people have come and said to me, if the Lord had not been on our side, if the Lord had not been at our side, we couldn't have got through it.

But the thing is, they did get through it. And we've all got stories to tell of how we have been taken through difficult times.

[31 : 57] and so when we look back, as we should do, surely we can see many occasions where we can say, if the Lord had not been on our side, we just wouldn't be here today.

But we shouldn't just look back over the short span of our own lives. We need to look back much further than that. we need to look back a couple of thousand years further back in our own lives.

We need to look back to Calvary. We need to look back to Calvary every day where we see the cross and where we see the Lord Jesus, God the Son, Emmanuel, God with us.

And we see him suffering. We see him dying. We see him laying down his life so that we could be rescued from the attacks of the enemy of our soul, so that we could be rescued from the flood of sin that engulfed our soul and set upon the solid rock of Jesus, who is our salvation.

And when we think upon that, we are prompted to move from the what if the Lord had not been on our side to the praise be that the Lord is on our side.

[33 : 32] And that's the second point, it's the final point. And David under this heading that we're taking gives us two more scenarios in the second part of this psalm.

And this time, he's not saying what if the Lord had not been on our side, he's saying praise be, let's give thanks for what God has done. The first scenario is in verse 6.

He says, praise be to the Lord who has not let us be torn by their teeth. Now what's David thinking about here? Well he could be thinking quite literally about the wild beasts on the hill.

There's 12 words, interestingly, in the Hebrew language for lions. We just have the one, but there's 12 words in the Hebrew language for lion, which indicates that wild beasts were often on their minds.

And David had fought them, we know that. And God had protected him in these fights. The Lord did not let him be torn by their teeth.

[34 : 42] So David could think back to that as he wrote this. And yet we know that this verse goes a lot further than that. David had an enemy just as we have an enemy.

1 Peter chapter 5 verse 8 identifies him. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

but praise be to the Lord Jesus who on the cross defeated him. And although our enemy still prowls around, those who are trusting in Jesus cannot be torn by the devil's teeth.

At Calvary, you could say, Jesus removed the teeth of the enemy. still he roars at us, still he flies at us, but he cannot strike us with death because we are protected.

The Lord has not, does not, will not let us be torn by the teeth of Satan. The second scenario, the final scenario here, we see in verse 7.

[36 : 03] David says, we have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare. The snare has been broken and we have escaped. Calvin, in his commentary on the psalm, says, the trapped bird escaping from the fowler's net points to the helplessness of the godly, who besieged by many deaths, would have perished without miraculous intervention.

So this again, it's a picture for us. It's a picture of our salvation. we were ensnared in sin. We can think back even to the morning, to Romans chapter 1 and chapter 2, to see how far we were ensnared in sin.

We had no hope of being able to escape in our own strength, not by our good works, not by our religion. There was no way of escaping the clutch that sin had on us, but the Lord intervened. through the blood of Jesus, we know and we are thankful for the fact that through the blood of Jesus, we are released. Yes, we were ensnared in sin, but through the blood of Christ, we are released.

Through the finished work of Jesus, we can escape the clutches of sin and Satan and death and hell.

[37 : 30] Jesus has broken the snare that we were caught in. And if we're trusting that, we have escaped. So what if the Lord had not been on our side?

If the Lord had not been on our side, we'd have no hope. We'd have no breath in our lungs. We would have nothing to sing about, even with the breath in our lungs.

We'd be stuck in Romans chapter 2. deep in sin. But praise be the Lord is on our side.

Verse 8, our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He is the one who's taken us from sin to salvation.

He is the one who's taken us from the place of attack and danger to safety in Christ. He's the one who has taken us from that captivity to freedom in the gospel.

[38 : 41] So this is a sound that prompts us to reflect on that and to praise him. God is for us.

And I want to finish with the words of Romans chapter 8. And when we read this passage, I think we can see the threads that go all the way back to psalms like the psalm that we're studying.

Romans chapter 8, the apostle Paul says in verse 31, what then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, which is just another way of saying, if God is on our side, if God is for us, who can be against us?

Paul actually takes this psalm and he runs with it and takes it from the shadows of the Old Testament to the high definition of the gospel. If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

[39 : 58] It is God who justifies, who is he that condemns Christ Jesus, who died more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword, as is written, he takes us back to the Psalms in the quotation, for your sake we face death all day long, we are considered a sheep to be slaughtered, and he says in verse 37, no, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us, for I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us

from the love of

God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. What if the Lord had not been on our side? He would have no hope.

but because the Lord is on our side, we can say with the psalmist, we can say with the apostle Paul, praise be.

And that is a hymn that will ring eternally. Praise be to the Lord who is on our side, the Lord who is our salvation.

We'll pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We ask that you would help us to often think upon where we would have been if you had not intervened in our lives.

[41 : 51] Help us to think back into situations where you have delivered us, when you have rescued us in our own experiences in the day-to-day of life.

help us to think also about the huge issues of eternity. If the Lord had not been on our side, we would be sinners who were destined for hell.

And yet, because the Lord is on our side, if we are trusting in him, we have the assurance of safety, security, and glory for eternity with Christ.

Enable us, we pray, to look to him, to trust in him, and to praise him with all that you give to us. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. We'll sing to finish the words of the hymn, which is a paraphrase of Psalm 23. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want, and I will trust in you alone.

[42 : 57] Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want, makes me like pastures green, he leads me by the still, still waters, us.

Goodness restores my soul. I will trust in you alone. I will trust in you alone.

For your endless mercy follows me, goodness restores my soul.

he guides my way in righteousness and he anoints my head with oil and my carpet overflows with joy.

I feast on his pure delights and I will trust in you alone. I will trust in you alone.

[44 : 29] And your endless message follows me, goodness will lead me home.

And though I walk the darkest path, I will not fear the evil one.

For you are with me and your rod and staff, comfort I need to know.

I will trust in you alone. I will trust in you alone. for your endless blessing follows me, goodness will lead me home.

For your endless blessing follows me, goodness will lead me home.

[45 : 40] home. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all both now and forever more.

Amen.