

Psalm 124 – A Song of Hope

Open: The story of Maddi my daughter's dog, and the screaming rabbit in her mouth (v.6 *"He didn't abandon us defenseless, helpless as a rabbit in a pack of snarling dogs."*)

124 ¹⁻⁵ If GOD hadn't been for us
—all together now, Israel, sing out!—
If GOD hadn't been for us
when everyone went against us,
We would have been swallowed alive
by their violent anger,
Swept away by the flood of rage,
drowned in the torrent;
We would have lost our lives
in the wild, raging water.

⁶ Oh, blessed be GOD!
He didn't go off and leave us.
He didn't abandon us defenseless,
helpless as a rabbit in a pack of snarling dogs.

⁷ We've flown free from their fangs,
free of their traps, free as a bird.
Their grip is broken;
we're free as a bird in flight.

⁸ GOD's strong name is our help,
the same GOD who made heaven and earth.

C.S. Lewis said, *"Emphatically, the psalms must be read as poems, with all formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than the logical connection, which are proper to lyric poetry. Otherwise we will miss what's in them. Fortunately, this survives in translation."*

If we have any taste for poetry we will enjoy this feature of the psalms. Our Lord soaked in the poetic tradition of His country, and was delighted to use it.

For example, Mat 7:2 *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

Or *“Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened.*

When Jesus died on the cross, he quoted psalm 22,

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The Jewish people knew the psalm, and in their mind could recite it...all the way to the last verse that says, *“They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!”*

Israel lived and breathed these songs. It would be like us knowing Amazing Grace...but 150 versions of that song.

- By giving truths which are immeasurably worth remembering... using the rhythmic, incantatory expressions, God made these truths difficult to forget. The Lord truly used this tool of communication. Our creator was, in fact, creative.

Growing up, Jesus would have learned this style from his mother and father.

- For the psalms were sung daily in Jewish life.
- Israel had them all memorized. It was a part of their lives for many centuries.
- All that is true, but I really never understood until later years in my Christian life, that these were used as worship. And, that it was and is usually worship that God communicates His presence to men.
- It is not of course the only way. But even in Judaism, the idea and essence of sacrifice was not really that men gave bulls and goats to God, but in so doing **God gave Himself to men.**

Notice the 1st verse of Psalm 124.

“If GOD hadn’t been for us

—all together now, Israel, sing out!—

If GOD hadn’t been for us” ...

It's repeated rhythmically so we wouldn't forget. Then the psalm is couched between the last line.

*"GOD's strong name is our help,
the same GOD who made heaven and earth".*

Red flags to be sure.... "If God is for us, why did a tsunami erase 20,000 people in a few minutes?" Why are some many close to us killed? It is estimated 138,000 people were killed in auto accidents in India last year. USA follows second in per capita auto deaths.

- Why do we see such disappointment and sickness?

I was recently approached Sunday by a couple, and asked,

- " Why does God continue to let us struggle with so many problems with our son?" They confided in my wife and me their struggle with their son..probably because they did not want the Church body to know about the difficulties.

Then another person asked me last week,

- "Why doesn't God hear my prayer?" Is he there? Isn't what I want the best for my daughter?

I am put on the spot often...Imagine what a pastor goes through with such challenging questions?

Psalm 124 is a reminder – an excellent model for us.

It reminds us that our proper work for a Christian is witness-

- Not apology.
- There is no argument for Gods help.
- There is no explanation for Gods help.
- God does not need to "protected".
- This psalm is simply a testimony of Gods help in the form of a song.

The song is Vigorous, confident...

- It is loaded with reality.

- It changes our approach, and it changes our question.
- No longer do we ask, “why did this happen to me?” “Why am I the one left stumbling?”

Now, with this psalm, instead we ask...

- “How can these people sing with such confidence?”

What is profound here is that we know the historical data; the suffering they endured.

- Compare this psalm to the other things we hear during the day, and it forces us to think before we go on complaining..
- This psalm is by far much more interesting to think about.
- One person can announce this, but everyone would then join in song.

We all remember that Gods help is not a private experience...not an exception that occurs among isolated people.

- The norm is exposed in His community, and communicated.

What is the norm?

The norm is as Psalm 124 says :

- *“everyone went against us”*

The norm as psalm 124 says

- *“when we are swept away by the flood of rage.”*

The norm...

“we are swallowed alive.”

They are singing about everything being ruined except for something immaterial, mighty and indestructible.

- This is a song of faith.

- At that time, it would be difficult living w/o faith.
- At this time it is difficult living w/o faith.
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Why do we need faith?

- What is the answer to such tragedy in our lives? What is the witness in struggle?
 - Faith is important because only a person who believes that there is a God who rules over us can endure such challenges and losses.

My life has had an abundance of misfortunes and suffering. It continues to this day. But if someone said to me right now, do you want to remain the same way you were before the challenges in your life, I would say no. I think I speak for many of you here also.

Once we are thrown off our habitual paths, we think for a time that all is lost. But, it is only then that the new begins. Good begins. As long as there is life and faith, purpose can be found in God.

- After you go through a trial, it is like becoming somehow clean and fresh...a moral bathhouse if you please. (Eugene Peterson)

The psalmist is not talking about the good life here... or how God has kept him out of difficulty. The writer has gone through the worst...

"Praise be to the Lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth".

The poem, prayer, song, survives not because it is nice, or beautifully written. The psalm, like the scriptures as a whole, survived because it is true, accurate and honest.

The psalm is not about challenges, tragedy, and hazards.

It's about help.

- *"He didn't abandon us. We've escaped like a bird, free."*

God's strong name is our help.

In our lives, we often times see danger. All the facts add up, don't they? Doom, "*like a bird trapped*". There is no way out, but then...

- ...there is a way out.
- deliverance ...is a surprise.
- we are rescued...a miracle, "Oh, blessed is God".
- ...He did not abandon us...defenseless.

The person of faith is not a person who has been born with a bubble around them protecting them, creating a *sunny disposition*.

- There is an assumption by outsiders that Christians are naïve, protected.
- It is the opposite reality.
- We know the deep struggles..the ugliness, sin.
- Our faith often develops out of the most difficult aspects of our existence. Not the easiest aspects of our existence.

Our WITNESS is seen in a world that is messy.

Our story is lived among people who neither understand nor encourage us.

- We know God.
- He is rich in mercy....
- He is Strong to save.

Christ defines our lives, our culture does not.

- It is the help we experience, not the hazards.
- This defines who we are in Christ Jesus.

Pray.