

**HELP**  
**Psalm 124**  
**June 21, 2009 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

*God will not allow His people to be consumed but will deliver them from danger and judgment.*

**I. Our Journey Is a Dangerous Journey (124:1-5)**

The psalmist begins by pondering what Steve Lawson calls “a hypothetical, provocative statement,”<sup>1</sup> or what life would be like without God. **“Had it not been the LORD who was on our side,”** let Israel now say, **“Had it not been the LORD who was on our side...”** What if, the psalmist asks, God had not been our defender and deliverer? What if they had been left to themselves to fight the battles? The outcome would have been very different.

The psalmist proclaims, **“When men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger was kindled against us.”** If left to their enemies, they had no hope of survival. Destruction was certain. Consider these people, the nation of Israel. What if they had been left to their enemies? What if Moses had been left to Pharaoh and his host? What if Joshua had been left to the Canaanites? What if Gideon had been left to the Midianites? What if David had been left to Saul or the Philistines or his own sons? And after the kingdom was divided, which by the way is in itself a testimony of what will happen if man is left to himself, what if Judah had been left to their enemies? What if Hezekiah had been left to the Assyrians? The psalmist’s conclusion, **“Then they would have swallowed us alive.”** If God had not intervened in each of those situations, they would have been devoured by a fierce foe. But, the battle is the Lord’s!

Further, if the Lord was not on their side, they would have drowned in the waters of the sea. The flood is a prevalent symbol in the Old Testament for sudden life threatening dangers, of the overwhelming torrents that rush in upon us. Here the psalmist’s mind turned to the mountains of Palestine and the torrid natural storms that could quickly rise up and engulf a person. Jesus and the disciples faced storms such as those on a couple of occasions. What if these had been left to themselves in the midst of the storm? What if we are left to ourselves in the midst of our own afflictions? This is where we must stop and praise God that these are hypothetical questions because we have the promise that God will never leave us nor forsake us. **“Had it not been the LORD who was on our side”** is stated positively by Paul in Romans 8:31, “If God is for us, who is against us?” a rhetorical question to reinforce the truth that “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.”

However, while we should find the greatest contentment in those words, in the midst of the turmoil we often forget these promises. Let’s face it—we live in a real world, a world that is fallen and full of enemies. God leaves us in this world to live out a life of faith, hope and love before those who oppose us. And it is often difficult.

Every day we put our *faith* on the line. When we face the storms of life, faith is a risky position to take. Standing firm in the face of the enemy is risky business. But it is only risky when we try to face it alone. You remember each and every time the disciples faced a storm, it

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<sup>1</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76-150*, 276.

was a test of their faith, which proved to be little. But these storms came to grow their faith and trust in Christ.

**Daniel 6:16-23** – <sup>16</sup> Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, ***“Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you.”*** <sup>17</sup> A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel. <sup>18</sup> Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him. <sup>19</sup> Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions, den. <sup>20</sup> When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, ***“Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?”*** <sup>21</sup> Then Daniel spoke to the king, “O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime.” <sup>23</sup> Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. ***So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.***

Every day we put our *faith* on the line. Every day we face the enemy. Why? **1 Peter 1:7**, “So that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Every day we put our *hope* on the line. We don't really know one thing about the future. We don't even know what the next hour will bring. There may be sickness, whether it be ours or a loved one. There may be personal or natural catastrophe. Who went to bed on 9/10 with any thought of 9/11? Before the day is over we may face death. We can't be certain of even our next breath or heartbeat. We may face loss of our jobs or rejection of a friend. We don't know what the future holds for us personally, for those we love, our nation, our world. Every day we put our hope on the line. Why? Because, as Eugene Petersen suggests, despite our ignorance and though surrounded by tinny optimists and cowardly pessimists, we believe that God will accomplish His will and we cheerfully persist in living in the hope we have in Christ.<sup>2</sup> **1 Peter 1:3-4**, “According to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,<sup>4</sup> to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”

Every day we put our *love* on the line. Every day we open ourselves up to the frustrations and disappointments of others. Why?

**Deuteronomy 6:5** – You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

**John 15:12-13, 17** – <sup>12</sup> “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends... <sup>17</sup> This I command you, that you love one another.”

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Petersen, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 72.

**Deuteronomy 7:7-8** – <sup>7</sup> The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup> but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

**1 John 4:7-8, 10, 11 19** – <sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love... <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>19</sup> We love, because He first loved us.

**Romans 5:6** – For while we were still helpless, the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Our journey is a dangerous journey. *Where would you be if God had not intervened in your life? What would it be like without God?*

## II. Our Journey Is an Aided Journey (124:6-8)

What is the reason that we have not been devoured or engulfed?

### 1. Negatively

**“Blessed be the LORD, Who has not given us...”**

**Romans 1:16-32** – <sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. <sup>24</sup> Therefore **God gave them over** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. <sup>26</sup> For this reason **God gave them over** to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, <sup>27</sup> and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. <sup>28</sup> And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, **God gave them over** to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, <sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant,

boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;<sup>32</sup> and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

**BUT...**

**Psalm 124:7-8 – Who has not given us to be torn by their teeth. Our soul has *escaped* as a bird out of the snare of the trapper; the snare is broken and we have *escaped*.** Here we have the language of deliverance, of rescue. In Christ, God has not given you over. Your soul has escaped the snare of the evil one and the bondage of sin. Charles Wesley put it this way,

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
 fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
 Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,  
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
 My chains fell off, my heart was free;  
 I rose, went forth and followed Thee.<sup>3</sup>

Where the desire of the enemy is to “**swallow us alive,**” the purpose of God is to save us alive!

## 2. Positively

“**Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth,**” a phrase found two other times in the Ascent Psalms (121:2; 134:3).

### (1) God's covenant name (v. 8a)

“**Our help is in the name of the LORD,**” *Yahweh*. God gave this name, His personal name, in Exodus 3. You remember the promise that God gave to Moses. God called upon Moses to bring the people out of Egypt and promised in Exodus 3:12, “Certainly I will be with you.” And in the next verse, Moses asks, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” (3:13). Do you remember what God says by way of reply? He gives for the first time His covenant name, translated as “*I am Who I am,*” or perhaps better “*I will be what I will be.*”

“I will be” what? This was not simply a testimony of His existence, “I am,” which you have been taught is always in the present, He always exists in the now. It is that, but it is more than that. “I will be”—you remember the promise in v. 12?—“I will be *with you.*” What is implied?—“wherever you go.” And it’s as though God is giving us in theological shorthand a name that was meant to evoke in the mind of the people of God that very promise which is at the heart of the covenant: “Certainly I will be with you.” And here it’s that name that reassures the psalmist when he looks up into the hills and he asks the question, “Where is my help going to come from? My help is going to come from the One who is always with me and never forsakes me.”

It is interesting what the Lord tells Isaiah concerning His covenant and these very hills that the psalmist lifts up his eyes. **Isaiah 54:10** – “For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will

<sup>3</sup> Charles Wesley, *And Can It Be*, v. 4.

not be shaken,' says the LORD who has compassion on you." This is in the context of judgment and affliction, and God promised His steadfast covenant love for His people. It is Yahweh, "I will be what I will be," "Certainly I will be with you," that the psalmist trusts.

## (2) God as Creator (v. 8b)

The psalmist moves from the name of God to God's primary work, "**Who made heaven and earth.**" This should sound familiar to those who have been present in our study on the Apostles' Creed, which opens with the words, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Where did Paul begin in Acts 17 before the pagan philosophers to show that Yahweh alone is the one true God? God as Creator! When Yahweh made promise of any blessing to His people, with a view of confirming their faith in His ability to perform what He had promised, He often affixed to His name Almighty, "the Lord that created the heaven and the earth," so that all could know that there exists nothing so great or impossible for God to perform.

**Psalm 115:1-7** – <sup>1</sup> Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth. <sup>2</sup> Why should the nations say, "Where, now, is their God?" <sup>3</sup> But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. <sup>4</sup> Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man's hands. <sup>5</sup> They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they cannot see; <sup>6</sup> they have ears, but they cannot hear; they have noses, but they cannot smell; <sup>7</sup> they have hands, but they cannot feel; they have feet, but they cannot walk; they cannot make a sound with their throat.

**Jeremiah 10:10-11** – <sup>10</sup> The LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation. <sup>11</sup> Thus you shall say to them, "The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens."

**Psalm 146:5-10** – <sup>5</sup> How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, <sup>6</sup> *Who made heaven and earth*, the sea and all that is in them; **THEN:** Who keeps faith forever; <sup>7</sup> Who executes justice for the oppressed; Who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free. <sup>8</sup> The LORD opens *the eyes of* the blind; the LORD raises up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous; <sup>9</sup> the LORD protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He thwarts the way of the wicked. <sup>10</sup> **The LORD will reign forever**, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!

Here the psalmist moves his eyes from the hills to the universe; from beyond the universe to its Maker who is eternal and infinite; from the gods of nature, which are nothing more than idols, to nature's God. He is the sovereign Creator of all that is. And it is He alone Who delivers His people.

What does this mean for us? Do you rejoice in the gospel that what God has appointed in the redemption of His people Jesus has accomplished and the Holy Spirit has applied? Are you amazed when we consider the grace of God in the propitiation for our sins, that His wrath that you deserved has been satisfied in Christ Jesus and that you have been delivered from sin and death? Do you pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," believing that His "is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" and that He today rules over that kingdom with that power and with that glory?

**2 Corinthians 1:8-10** – <sup>8</sup> For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; <sup>9</sup> indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; <sup>10</sup> who delivered us from so great a *peril of death*, and will deliver *us*, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us...

**Matthew 28:17-20** – <sup>17</sup> When they saw Him, they worshiped *Him*; but some were doubtful. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

## Conclusion

1. You need to remember the God who is on your side. Faith is developed and strengthened in times of difficulty. **1 Peter 5:6-7** – <sup>6</sup> Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

We speak our words of praise in a world that is hellish; we sing our songs of joy among people who neither understand nor encourage us. *But the content of our lives is God, not man.* We are not scavenging in the dark alleys of the world, poking in its garbage cans for bare subsistence. We are traveling in the light, toward God who is rich in mercy and strong to save. It is Christ, not culture, that defines our lives. It is the help we experience, not the hazards we risk, that shape our days.<sup>4</sup>

What is shaping you?

**Romans 8:28-31** – <sup>28</sup> And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined **to become conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. <sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? ***If God is for us, who is against us?***

**“Had it not been the LORD who was on our side!”**

2. Praise God for his protection and deliverance from overwhelming enemies and circumstances, inspiring confidence in God’s people as a result.

3. Remember you are not in it alone. **“Had it not been the LORD who was on *our* side,” “*Our help is in the name of the LORD.*”**

4. Has God intervened in your life?

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<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Petersen, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 75 (emphasis mine)