

Psalm 121

Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 121 as the children exit for children's worship and to those who stay here, we're glad that you're here. The Lord invites us to bring the children before him, and so we don't want to hold them back. So whether you go on to children's worship or you stay with your parents in the pews, our prayer for you is that you would like us like your parents see Jesus. Now we're looking to Psalm 121 - It's the last of our Psalms in this Psalm series. It's the second of the Psalms in a series of psalms called the Psalms of Ascents, which is a little collection of psalms within the Psalter. And so we're going to talk a little bit about what that might mean, and then we'll delve into this one as a representative psalm for all of the Psalms of Ascents. So this is Psalm 121, and you notice it says there at the very beginning a song of ascents. That just means a going up. Verse one.

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord who made the heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated. Well, it's only fitting that we finish this Psalm series on one of the Psalms of Ascents. It's one of the only other collections within the whole Psalter of Psalms. And actually, some have pointed out, you know, all of the theology of the Bible can be found in the Psalms themselves. And there's another argument to be made that all of the theology of the Psalter can be found in the Psalms of ascents. These are fifteen Psalms. They go from Psalm one twenty to Psalm one thirty four. So we're reading one twenty one today. So it's the second of the Psalms of Ascents. But it raises an interesting question what is the ascent? What is the literally the going up that these songs are talking about? And over the course of church history, there's been a lot of guesses because the Bible doesn't actually tell us why they're called Psalms of Ascents. As a matter of fact, John Calvin argues that the ascent is an ascending meter or pitch of the Psalms. It's kind of ascending. It's either getting faster as it goes or it's ascending in pitch. And that does make a little bit of sense, because we know that many of the other superscripts that we find in the Scripture, like Haggith and the other kind of instructions, are instructions to the musicians, the Levitical musicians who would be playing these things. And so it's possible that that's what's going on. This is kind of a sense of meter or some other kind of musicological aspect, some phonological aspect in the song itself. Now others say, actually, no, this is an ascending of the steps up to the temple. And the idea here is that the background to these songs is that with each song, uh, the priesthood during festivals would step another step up toward the temple. So you have fifteen songs of ascents and lo and behold, guess what? There are fifteen steps going up to the portico of Solomon. That's the porch of Solomon, which is the front door to the temple. And so that's quite possible too. It also makes sense because they're so short. You can imagine that during a feast, you know how the priests are stepping up each step and they read a psalm of

ascent with each one. They're pretty short. You could actually imagine this happening, and it's not taking all day. So that's possible. Another argument is that these are songs of return from exile. These are songs about the people leaving the nations to which they've been scattered, and returning to Zion in the hope of restoration. And that, of course, is possible, too. As a matter of fact, if you read closely the Songs of Ascent, you'll notice that there's three cycles in them, about five songs each and each cycle begins like one twenty does, because that's the beginning, right? That's the first of the songs of ascent begin outside of the land. If you actually notice in Psalm one twenty, he says, I'm in Kedar, I'm in Meshach. I'm not exactly sure where those places are, but they're outside of the land. And then what happens? They all move inevitably across a journey to being in Zion, being in Jerusalem. So the idea here is that these are songs of ascending out of the nations back to the place of the Lord. Okay. Lastly, the fourth option that we have available to us here is that these are songs that are sung by pilgrims who are doing the major festivals of the Israelite liturgical calendar, and they're returning to Jerusalem to participate in the festival, as all men were called to do. And so these songs are said on the road. And again, this makes sense because we do know that for people, whether they're in the diaspora or around the land, when they return to Jerusalem to do the Passover feast and the other great feasts, as they return for those holy days, they would be coming in groups from their towns, elsewhere in the in the Psalms of Ascents, He'll talk about his brothers and his companions, and he'll talk about making the way through the Hill country, as our song does today. And then finally arriving where? At the temple of the Lord and realizing it would be greater to be in the temple of the Lord just for one day than it would to be a thousand days elsewhere. Because I'm finally here. How blessed are the birds who roost in the nest of the temple, because he's now arrived to participate in the festival. Here's the thing we cannot know. These are all speculations. And yet, if you think about them, they could all be true, right? This could be based on a some kind of meter or phonological aspect that could have been recited during the festivals. As the priests were sending the steps, they could have been modeling the life of Israel after the exilic people returning to Zion and restoration, and they could have been sung in Pilgrim Festival, uh, you know, journeys, those are all possible.

But what do they mean for us today? A. One thing we can notice is this. There is a progression throughout each one of these songs, and these songs are songs in a way of the journey, songs of the sojourn, songs of the Pilgrim, but not necessarily the Pilgrim going to Jerusalem in a feast. Rather the pilgrim living life and pursuing the Lord. This makes these. This interpretation makes these psalms especially fitting for the church, because the Christian life is also a pilgrimage, right? We're being called out of darkness, out of the people who we used to identify with, and being drawn ultimately to our final home in the presence of the Lord. We travel together through a world that is at once beautiful but also dangerous. It's full of gifts, but it's also full of grief. And we too can sing these songs because we also are on our way to Zion, the city of the Lord, the heavenly Jerusalem. Now Psalm twenty one follows naturally after Psalm one twenty one twenty again reminds us that we're in the tents of Meshech. We're amongst, he says, a lying people, people of a lying lip, and people who are violent. So he's not surrounded by his brothers and sisters. He's not surrounded by fellow worshipers. He's surrounded by people who are against him and are for his destruction. But he takes confidence in knowing that the Lord is waiting for him. He now sets out on the journey. And as you can see in Psalm

one twenty one, he's on the journey. He's now on the path. And he's recognizing that the path is dangerous. And he's asking the question, where does my help come from? And, you know, he's on the path because he's looking out and he's seeing the horizon, like many of you did too, because we live in a town where there's an apparent horizon and you get to see it a good bit. You know, some towns like Washington, D.C., you're down in the trees all the time. You almost never see the horizon. But here in Birmingham we have hills. And so you come over hills as you would in the shuffle, a high country region of Israel. If you've ever been there, you'd come over hills and you'd see horizons. And he's looking out to the horizon and he's saying, where is my help? Where is my hope? And if you notice that looking for help, that looking for hope gives him a confidence. It's a confidence that the Lord is with him and that the Lord hears his prayers. Now we have a lot of things that might be stones on the road of the journey of life that might make us question that confidence, that might shake our confidence in the Lord to help.

There's all kinds of things, mindsets that we can fall into that would give us a not a sense of confidence, but a sense of uncertainty, maybe even cynicism about the help of the Lord. I just want to talk about three before we delve into this psalm. The first one is this. This is one of the stones in the road as we're on our journey to Zion. It's a form of unbelief that can actually sound kind of humble. It can sound sort of Christian. It's this belief, the belief that God is too great. He's too mighty to pay mind to me here alone on this journey of life. Who am I? Who am I that the Lord would care about my headache or my high blood pressure, or my broken relationships or my fears about my job? But notice, Scripture never asks us to choose between God's greatness and his nearness. Scripture never has us choose between those two things. As a matter of fact, again, to talk about exiles returning when Isaiah is writing to the exiles about their return to Zion in Isaiah forty, he's writing to exiles of the future, about returning to Zion. He says this you can take hope that the Lord is with you for two reasons. He says, here's the two reasons why you can take hope that the Lord is with you. He says, first of all, the Lord is a shepherd. And when one sheep, even one lost sheep, runs away, he'll go and he'll rescue that lost sheep and bring him home, and he'll hold you. This is the language Isaiah uses. He'll hold you as a sheep in a shepherd's hands. He'll hold you to his bosom. Think about that. That's very personal language. That's Isaiah saying no matter how small you are, your Lord holds you. He's talking about God. He's not talking just about Jesus. He's talking about God. God holds you close to him like a shepherd, holds a sheep close to his bosom. That's reason one, why you can be confident that the Lord will hear your prayer.

Here's reason two--he holds the whole universe in his hand. You notice that those two are offered right next to each other. He hears your prayer about your individual occasional need, and he also, at the same time, is holding the entirety of all that is in the palm of his hand. See, we don't choose between God's greatness and his nearness to us. It's not humble to say, I'm so small. The Lord doesn't care about me. That's not humble. That's actually a kind of blasphemy against the Lord. You see, the Lord carries lambs in his arms, and he measures out the waters in the hollow of his hand. He does both. He's more exalted than we can imagine, and he's more intimately attentive than we dare to hope. So that's one stone in the road that makes us stumble in our confidence in the Lord. Here's the second stone in the road. We can adopt an overly naturalistic view of life. Now, of course, living in the South, we might know how

to talk in a way that sounds spiritual. It sounds Christian. You know, people talk about Christianese. You can speak in Christianese and yet still have a very naturalistic view of life. You can say things like, oh, the Lord has told me, or the Lord really led me here. And really all you're talking about is your own emotional inclinations, right? You say, oh, the Lord told me that I should do this because that's the thing you wanted to do. But you feel if you figure that's how we talk here in the South, this is how we talk here in the church. We want to talk in spiritual ways, but at the end of the day, it really is just about my own naturalistic needs and desires and wants. Okay. And by the way, does the Lord sometimes guide you or often even guide you by the desires of your heart? Absolutely. Okay. Check them against Scripture. We talked about discerning God's will a couple of weeks ago. You want to do all of that? Okay. But don't use spiritual language to mask over a naturalistic view of life. Our God is real. Okay. Christianity is not a philosophy with a set of ideas. Okay. It's about a God who is actively working in the world. And yes, the world is both natural and supernatural. God is in heaven. He is reigning over the earth, but he is doing things in history. Jesus walked in history. People were raised from the dead in history. Jesus died on the cross in history. He rose from the dead and the resurrected body in history, and he will one day raise you again in history. This is not just spiritual language that we use to cloak over a naturalistic, pietistic worldview. Christian hope is a supernatural hope. Yes. Even if we die, we remain fully known and fully loved and securely upheld in reality in Christ. So our first one is this the humble God doesn't care about me. I'm too small.

This the naturalistic view of life where we don't really trust in God. We just trust in whatever we're experiencing, but we use Christian language to cover over it. Or then thirdly, and here's the last one. Some people have a hard time being confident that God will answer their prayers, because they believe that the suffering they're experiencing in life is actually the condemnation of God. I've met Christians who wrestle with this, this idea that even though they know it's not right to say this, they actually believe when I suffer, it's because God doesn't love me. Or he may love me, but it's just he's just punishing me because he's unhappy. He's disappointed. You see, when we assume that God is condemning us, we are forgetting what was accomplished in Christ on the cross because the cross has exhausted all condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus by faith. And how do you know that you're in Christ Jesus by faith? Have you repented? Do you believe, then you are in Christ Jesus by faith? And if you are in Christ Jesus by faith, all condemnation has been exhausted for you. In whatever suffering you experience is now just the loving discipline of the father. And that's not a euphemism for condemnation. It is truly loving discipline. It's God caring for you because he loves you and wants the best for you. It's a coach showing a young player how to play the game well and how to develop the right skills. It's a loving father who's showing his son how to walk and how to act like a man, right. In loving ways, right. It's a mother gently pulling back her child from a busy road where the cars are racing by. It's not condemnation, it's love. There he is, raising you. The father is raising us up. He may correct us, but he will never cast us away because there is no condemnation. As Paul reminds us in Romans eight, for those who are in Christ Jesus. So when you go to him and say, Lord, I'm suffering, it may be because he's disciplining you for some sin you've committed, but it's because he's training you up. So you say, Lord, I deserve this and so much more. And yet you love grace and you love me, so have mercy upon

me. Show me your everlasting way. Remove from me the hurtful ways. Because that's the best thing I can imagine for myself. You see, there are stones in the road that compete or conflict with our confidence in the Lord. To answer our prayers in Psalm one hundred twenty one is teaching us how to look beyond these visible signs that we see around us, of how our lives are going, and rather to look even beyond the hills, beyond the horizon for where our help will come from. So let's now with that in mind, because I think without that, we could fall into reading one hundred twenty one and just plugging it into our christianese algorithm, right? And not actually hearing what he's saying. So now that we've got that out of the way, let's now look at one hundred twenty one. And I want you to notice two things. Notice this Psalm really just tells us about two different aspects of our salvation. It says, look to the horizon. And then it says, your hope is in the keeper. Okay. Verses one through two says, look to the horizon. Our help is ever present, but ultimately it's beyond the horizon. It's just outside of our line of sight in this world. It's just outside of our line of sight in this world. Then verses three to the end. Notice the verb that keeps showing up. It's how the Lord is the one who keeps our way. So let's look at the horizon first. I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? The psalmist looks up to the horizon. He looks to the hills again. If you can imagine the high country of Israel, it looks somewhat like Birmingham might look in the evening. Okay. Whenever I read this psalm, I imagine it's in the evening and you look up and it's kind of like seeing, you know, as I was driving in today, you know, red, red mountain in front of me as I'm driving in and you can see the bumps along the horizon. And behind it is the light and the sky, right? And he says, that's where my hope comes from. It's not the hills, it's just beyond the hills. There's a silhouette. The hills are dark in the foreground. The sun. Excuse me. The sun, the evening. The sky is bright in the background. I do imagine that it's always in the evening. When I look at this. He cannot yet see the city. He can't see Zion. He can't see the temple yet. But he knows it's there. He can just see the next ridge that's in front of him. And that's often the position of faith, isn't it? We have the promise of God, but we cannot yet see its fulfillment. I mean, the author of Hebrews says that's what faith is, right? It's belief in things unseen, right? It's recognizing that there is a thing that I don't see, and yet it's the realest thing in my life. You're looking forward. You can't see over the ridge. This is an ancient near eastern way of saying the same thing. I can't see over the ridge. And yet I know that that's where my help comes from. And that is the essence of faith. We don't see the destination. We don't see the whole road. We don't see what God's plan for us is over the hills, but we know that help is there and that it's coming. The question of verse one is answered decisively in verse two. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, who makes the heavens and the earth. The hills themselves are not the source of his help. Help does not arise from the landscape. Notice help does not arise from the circumstances immediately around him. He doesn't say my help is in my friends or my help is within me. I look within me and I find the courage that I need to succeed. Rather, he recognizes that the help is beyond him. It's outside. It's there. And even if he can't see it, it is present. Psalm one hundred twenty one, therefore, is a song of confidence against the evidence immediately before our eyes. It is a confidence in the Lord. When rescue seems unlikely. It's a confidence when the diagnosis seems too grim. It's confidence when the relationship remains strained. No matter how hard you try, no matter how hard you try, you just can't find the reconciliation you were looking for with that person, with that loved one. It's confidence. When the

opportunity has slipped away, the door seems closed. It's confidence when the future is hidden. A dear friend of mine up at the seminary where I used to work, um, suffered and died. I got a grim diagnosis of cancer. Within six months he had passed away, and the Lord took him at a time when he was equipping the church in ways that he had never even dreamed the Lord would use him and his marriage was thriving. He seemed to be at the prime of life. His kids. He's finally empty nesting and his kids were out the door and he was able to do all these things. And then he gets this diagnosis, and in quick, short order, he passes away. And I remember sitting with him and talking to him. And I remember him just being so open and honest and saying, this is not trust me. This is not what I would have had for my life. He was like, this is not what I expected to happen. And if the Lord heals me, I will sing it from the mountaintops. But he said, I trust in my Savior's perfect plan. I love that phrase. I think about it a lot. It's the right way to say it. I trust in my Savior's right. It's Jesus's plan, a perfect plan. I would have chosen a different thing. But I'm not perfect. I'm not the Savior. The Savior has the perfect plan, and I trust in his perfect plan. See, our culture repeatedly tells us that the answer actually lies within us, and there is some truth in that. We have to remember this. There is truth in that the answer may lie within you. Hope can lie within you, but we have to do the proper calculations. The hope does not lie within you because of your own innate abilities and giftedness. Here's how the hope lies within you. Here's how you can find hope and confidence within yourself. Because you, like Paul says in Galatians two twenty, have died. And you no longer live within you. The man of flesh has been mortified, right? To use that good Pauline language. He's been put to death. Who now lives within you, Jesus Christ. That is the Holy Spirit. That is the Spirit of Christ. That is the spirit of man. You can just say those are all synonymous in the Apostle Paul. Now the spiritual man lives within you. That's if you want to find hope within you, it's because the spirit who is your advocate lives within you and strengthens you. That's how you can find hope within.

Notice he does not say, my hope comes from my ability to strive or my innate giftedness or my good buddies around me. He says, my hope is in the Lord, who made the heaven and the earth. And that's the reason why I can be confident. I'm not afraid of what lies on this side of the hills, because I know the one who not only created the hills, but exists above and beyond and over and against and before and after the hills. So let me ask plainly as we look at verses one and two, where do you look for hope? Where do you seek your vision for life, for your calling, for your security, for your comfort, your convenience, for your future? Faith does not require us to pretend that the hills are small or that they're not there. Okay. But it does ask us, where do you find your help when you're facing the hills and you can't see beyond the horizon? Well, verse three now takes us to the rest of the Psalm. Verses three through eight are now dealing with the keeper. Who is the keeper? The keeper is the Lord. That word keeper comes from this Greek word, excuse me, Greek word, Hebrew word shamar. That's the past tense of this word. And it really is the word for guard. Watch, keep. Yes, keep, but not in the sense of like, you know, possessing something per se, but rather a keep like a castle is a keep right. The castle keep. It's the thing that guards and protects. Another good word for it is to hold. But again, like a castle is a hold, right? It's a place where things are safely regarded. The word shamar really means careful attention and care when it says to keep the commandments of the Lord. It's the same of the Lord. It's the same thing, right? I keep his word, I guard them, I protect them, I

watch over them. It'd be like if someone gave you a diamond as big, as big as this water bottle, right? Someone gave you a dime and said, could you just take this out to your car right after the service? Would you walk out kind of like this, you know? You know, flipping it up in your hand. No you wouldn't what? You'd walk like this, right? You'd be careful. You'd have careful, cautious regard. You would keep it. You would guard it. You see, the psalmist recognizes that on the journey, the Lord does not just watch over us. He keeps us. He protects us. He has careful attention and regard for us. First of all, he keeps us on the path he keeps us. He's the keeper of our way. Our divine keeper tirelessly watches over and closely guards our journey through life so that we do not waver from his path. Our Divine keeper tirelessly watches over and keeps careful attention and guard over our pathway so that we do not waver from it. Notice what the psalmist says he will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. Walking is one of the scriptures most common metaphors for life. You have the way of wisdom, the path of wisdom. Walk in the path of wisdom. Walk in the path of folly. Walk in the path of righteousness. Walk in the path of wickedness. Walk in the path of the bails. Walk in the path of the Lord. Walk in the path of um life versus the ways of death. Walking on a path is a common metaphor. But when you're walking on the path to Zion and you're going through the high country so that you're looking at the hills and you're wondering what's on the other side, and you're knowing your help lies there. You know, it's like walking upon a ridge and you've got a pathway. And if your foot slips, you might not even just fall off the path. You could fall to your death. Have you ever had your foot slipped before? Literally. Have you ever had your foot slipped? I remember in our old house in Washington, we had this smooth tile entryway and it was, man, it was dangerous. If it had been raining outside. I remember one time walking in from work and I had all my bags on me, and as I walked in, my foot just went sideways. And you know that feeling where you can't even your brain can't even move fast enough to keep up with what's going on, and you lose all perspective. All of a sudden the whole room goes one way. You're going the other way. The Lord holds his foot so it doesn't slip, and he can stay on the path and he can persist to the destination. Psalm sixty six nine uses the same metaphor. He says, he kept our soul or our person among the living. He has not let our feet slip. Why can the pilgrim rest and be confident in the Lord? Because the keeper keeps his foot from slipping. And then notice what he says right away afterwards. And our keeper does not slumber. He doesn't rest. Human hearts rest. I need to rest. Remember when I was working on my PhD? I could maybe go twenty four hours without sleeping? Maybe forty eight. Right. I could never go seventy two. Right. Some of you. Because of your jobs, because of age, because you're in college, you might go long periods of time without sleeping. But guess what? At the end of the day, this is something we don't talk about enough. By the way, I think as humans, every single one of us, no matter how much power or money or influence you have accrued, every single one of us has to at least once for twenty every twenty four hours. Be as helpless as a baby. Sleep is the great equalizer. We all have to rest. There's no way around it. And yet the Lord never slumbers.

Interestingly, in the Old Testament world, in the ancient Near Eastern world, they couldn't even imagine their gods not sleeping. If you remember when Elijah was going up against the priests of Baal and Carmel, and he's kind of mocking them. And he says, maybe you should shout louder to Baal because maybe he's maybe he's asleep, or maybe he's relieving himself. It

means literally maybe he's going to the bathroom because Baal would actually do these things in the Baal epics. Okay. Baal was kind of like a big human. The Lord is not like a big human. He doesn't need to sleep. He never slumbers. He is paying careful regard to your steps, not letting your foot slip constantly. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither sleep nor slumber. God doesn't watch over us in shifts. There's no hour when his attention fades. There's no moment when our lives fall outside of his command. His careful attention and regard. We sleep. We sleep because we must. God never sleeps because he's infinite and he's eternal and unchangeable in his being wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. He has no need for sleep, and he is the one who keeps your way straight. We sometimes say God may not come when you want him to, but he's always on time. That saying is truer than we realize, because it doesn't just mean that God kind of keeps his own timetable and it's not ours. It's actually recognizing this. I don't want to be the person who is setting the timetable for the Lord. He doesn't sleep. He doesn't slumber when sometimes looks like a delay is not a delay at all. It is because he wants the best for us. He wants the best for you and he wants the best for me. His apparent silence is never sleep. And by the way, you know it's okay to cry out and say, how long, O Lord? Because I would have had you show up yesterday. But you're not here yet. How long, O Lord? But don't cry out. Stop sleeping. God. Okay. You don't want to cry that out. He's not sleeping. But it's okay because the psalmist prays to how long, Lord? I'm waiting. How long? Lord have mercy. He invites those kinds of prayers. But we can always be comforted in knowing that his timing is governed by perfect wisdom and steadfast love. So the keeper is the keeper of the way.

But notice in verses five and six the keeper is also the keeper of your well-being. He's the keeper of your integrity, your constitution. That's what I mean by integrity. I'm not just talking about moral goodness. I'm talking about you being whole. He is the keeper of your Constitution. Our divine keeper protects us from forces in our lives that are beyond our control. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night, writes the psalmist. Why is he talking about the sun and the moon? I think we can imagine on the journey up to Zion, you've been. You think if you haven't been to Israel, you can kind of imagine a dry, arid land, right? And you're out there in a dry, arid land. You can imagine why the sun is a problem. It's a problem because of sun exposure. It's a problem because of dehydration. Does raise the question why the moon? Why is this exposure to the elements such a danger? And why is it important that the Lord protects him from the sun and the moon now? Now, some scholars would argue that this is because at night, if you're traveling on a road out in the wilderness, if you're in the moonlight, you can see well and that's good. But guess what? It also means other people can see you and the kind of folks who are out at night looking for you are not the kind of folks you want to run into right when you're out at night. So the moonlight can be a danger if you're out in the wilderness on the pathway, going to Zion, because that's where the thieves and the marauders hang out.

Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan that was that was a believable situation that a guy is on the road. And guess what? Some marauders set upon him. They beat him up and they leave him for dead. That's a thing that happened. Otherwise, that parable doesn't make sense. So in this passage, it seems like he's saying, even in the moon moonlight, you might be

exposed to attackers or highwaymen. Now that's possible. I'm not saying that it's not true, but I think there's something more going on here. When the psalmist says, the Lord protects you from the sun and the moon. Think about Genesis one. What are the sun and the moon? They're not just things they're called actually signs that the Lord puts to rule over the day and the night. You think about it even today, in our modern world, you have to recognize this. No matter how great, how great our technology is, no matter how much control we have about around the world, around us, about the world around us, no matter how much control we have, no matter how advanced we are, we need that sun to live. And you know how much control we have over the sun? Absolutely zero. It rules the day. Okay, I can put on sunglasses, but I'm not ruling the sun. When I put on sunglasses, I'm just protecting myself a little bit. Okay, how about the moon? The moon's up there. How much control do I have over the moon? Absolutely zero. C in the ancient world, the sun and the moon were always gods. Notice not in the Bible. They're not gods, but they are those forces in life that you have absolutely no control over, and yet they control you a whole lot. Think about it in our lives. What are those things that we don't have control over? And yet our whole fate, our fortunes seem to be tied up in them. That could be the stock market, right? How do economists talk about the stock market? They talk about it being omniscient, omnipresent. All the data and every human relationship is known by the market. Have you ever heard about the way they talk about the market? It's like a god. Okay, I don't have control over the market, but the market has control over me. And the Lord says, I'll protect you from the market because I made it. Okay. How about the relationship in your family, the person that you've tried to, to get along with, you've tried to relate to maybe a loved one who you just want to know Jesus. And no matter what happens, they just don't believe. And you realize I don't have any control over them. And the Lord says, you don't have to fear because I made them. Think about the CEO at work who controls how your job goes. You may never get to see him or her. You may never even get to sit in the room with him and talk to them. And yet they're making capricious decisions about your life. And the Lord is saying, don't fear. I will protect you from them because I made them. See, the Lord governs beyond our ability to control again. It brings us back to the hills. As I was driving in today, I was looking out and I could see the hilly horizon in front of me and what's right beyond the hills? It's the sky. And as much as the hills seem to dominate my view. I know that the sky beyond the hills is much greater than the hills. This metaphor, is a beautiful metaphor that he's using here because the hills look like they dominate your view. But what's right beyond them? It's the sky, and the sky literally goes on forever. See, the Lord is saying, I am not confused or, or vexed or routed by the things of this world because I am the creator. I made them all, and I know you and I love you. We've been going through the gospel of Mark in the evenings, and we've seen a variety of episodes. And you've heard me say this before, but I just want to point it out again. One pastor called these episodes where Jesus is taking his disciples around as he's training them in the gospel, and he's taking them to scary places. Okay. One pastor calls these fear field trips. He's taking them on fear on fear, field trips, field trips to kind of play with and learn about fear, things to be afraid of. And they meet demons and they meet storms and they meet government officials who want them dead, and they meet religious officials who mock them and call them crazy, and they meet death and they meet disease. And in each place, the Lord is actually showing his disciples. See this thing that you're afraid of? I'm scarier than this thing,

and you're my friend. You see this? See death. You're afraid of death. I'm scarier than death. And I love you. You see the wind and the waves. I'm more frightening than the wind and the waves. And I invite you to my table. You see the approval of men. You see death itself, right? I'm more powerful than all of those things. I'm the thing you should be afraid of. And I love you. And I'm giving my life for you. You see, you don't have to fear the moon or the sun, because the God who made those things is your friend and he keeps your way. A friend of mine who led a successful company once company once was facing a season in which everything depended on a single government approval, and if they got the approval, they'd be able to go on as a company. And all of their investments were tied up in it, and they were just waiting. And it was beyond their control. They had no control over it. And I remember talking to him and him saying, I know that my place in this world and my place before God are secure in Christ. And that's the only thing in this life that I can hold on to. And guess what? He's absolutely right. Okay. He's absolutely right. Christians can grieve, but we don't. What we grieve as those who have hope, not as those who have no hope. We wait, but not as those who have been forgotten. We suffer, but never outside the shade of our divine keeper. Lastly, I would point out, look at verses seven and eight. He keeps your way. He keeps your well-being. Ultimately, he keeps your life. Our divine keeper protects our past, our present, and our eternal future. With him, the promise reaches its fullest expression in the final verses. The Lord will keep you from all evil, all calamity, all trouble. He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore. Sometimes the Lord's deliverance comes in the near term. The medical treatment works. Justice is done. A door opens that you thought was closed. A relationship is restored that you thought was irrevocably damaged. We receive those tender mercies for what they are. They are teasers. They are teasers of our destination. Okay. Enjoy them when the disease is healed. Enjoy it. But remember, that's not your hope. Your ultimate hope is beyond those hills. It's when you have an imperishable body. When all relationships are reconciled, when all justice has been done and the world has been put to right. But in the meantime, he's gracious and he gives us little teasers along the way to strengthen us. Enjoy them when they happen and tell other people about them.

Okay, let me add that when the Lord answers prayer, your response is give thanks and go tell everybody you know what he did. The Lord's keeping care. His guarding means. That does not mean that evil will never have or will never come into our lives. But it does mean this. The Lord's keeping care means that evil will never have the final word over his people. Evil and struggle and suffering may afflict us, but it cannot possess us. It can afflict us, but it cannot possess us because we are possessed by another. And he is our keeper. He guards our going out and our coming in, which means he guards all of our life. There's no place where you can go where the Lord says, okay, I don't go that far. You've now gone beyond the boundaries of my jurisdiction. Okay? Whenever you come back, I'll protect you then. But while you're out there, you're on your own. That never happens. He guards your coming out and you're going in no matter. And if you had any questions, he goes. He says in a different way. He says, the psalmist, let me just put it this way. He guards you forever and forevermore. Okay. Is that enough? See, you are known by the maker of heaven and earth. The God who governs the universe does not consider it beneath him to guide your every step. The God who never sleeps will never lose sight of you. I want to be clear. We see Jesus in this passage in two ways. The

first one is this. Jesus is the pattern for this passage, and he is the foundation for this passage. Just in brief, what do I mean by that? He's the pattern, which means this I can do this sojourn that's described here, but I will always, if I'm just by myself, be asking the question, am I one of the pilgrims, or am I one of the enemies who have lying lips in our violent generation? Right. It's hard for me to know, because I know there's been times when I've had lying lips. And I know there's been times when I've been violent. So which one am I, Lord? I need to find the pilgrim who can righteously sing these songs and have them be true of him. Who is the one who actually came from outside and made his way to the house of the Lord, who is the one who faced the mockery and humiliation, the broken promises, even death. And as he did the whole way, he entrusted his pathway to the one who judges justly. I want to argue this the Psalms of Ascents are the script for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's what Jesus Himself lives out. And he ascends slowly through suffering, but in faith all the way to the presence of the Lord, where he sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, the just Lamb who was slain, and the one who will make all things new.

So Jesus is the pattern. He's the pattern. He lives out the pilgrimage of the songs of ascents. And yet, because he has done it on our behalf. Guess what that means. I can now sing the songs of ascents in him. I can now see my life as patterned in the same way. Because it's his Spirit which dwells within me. My sins have been placed on him. His righteousness has been put on me. As Paul said, you've received the inheritance of the saints in light. I can now on my own, not on my own, but I can now in Christ be headed towards the heavenly Jerusalem, headed towards Zion. I can pray and know that the Lord will hear me because Christ has gone before me. He is the reason that these promises belong to us. See at the cross it appeared that the father had allowed Christ's foot to slip at the sun, and the darkness had struck him, and that evil had taken his life. But even there the father kept his promise, and Christ entrusted His spirit into the father's hands on our behalf, passing through death and entering into and being raised into his glory. You see, because Jesus Christ was raised, we have that hope in him because Jesus Christ was raised. The worst thing that can happen to you is not the last thing that can happen to you. The worst thing that can happen to you is not the last thing that will happen to you, but rather you will be raised in him. The spirit lives within you. So you can pray the songs of ascent and he teaches you to pray as Christ prayed. That's why I love. I love for Briarwood to be a church of prayer.

So we've been talking about Psalms. We've been talking about how they guide the ways that we pray. This church has been known for prayer, but I want you to remember prayer is more than just having a Sunday morning worship service or going to Saturday morning prayer up at the Mountain View House, or praying with your small group throughout the week. Prayer is a thing that we are called to, which is continuous. In first Thessalonians five, Paul says, pray without ceasing. What does he mean? He's talking about having a stance towards life that is like this psalmist who is having a stance towards the hills, and he's looking at the horizon of life, and he knows that beyond it is where his keeper is. And so he is going, and everything he does is directed toward the Lord in prayer. That doesn't mean that you're not able to have conversations with other people. It doesn't mean that you're not able to. You have to go become a monk in the medieval style and live in a cave so that you can pray all the time. It is

about having a life that is always bent on the dependence of the Lord. I've heard people say, I wish I just prayed more and I go, I do too. It would be great if you prayed more, but I'd like you to pray more. Independence on the Lord, right? It is about being directed to the Lord in all things. Whether you're talking to your loved ones or you're going about work, or you're driving down highway two eighty, you're realizing that you live utterly dependent on the Lord. And if you live that way, then humility is always nearby. Faithfulness. And the reason for your faith is always nearby. And your hope in Christ is always nearby, because you know how dependent you are on him. We're called to pray without ceasing.

The Apostle Paul in Colossians one nine through twelve, it's where we got our gospel. Word of salvation this morning, I think gives us a great model of prayer. And I'm just going to read this and then we'll close. Colossians one nine through twelve. This is the passage that comes right before the benediction that we read earlier as our gospel word of salvation. Listen to what he says about prayer. And so from the day we heard about you Colossian church, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom. That's in bold there, because that should be a capital S spiritual wisdom. This means wisdom of the spirit. Okay? As in the Holy Spirit, his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord. And whenever Paul uses the language of Lord, particularly when also saying God elsewhere or father Lord, is Jesus. Okay? So men are worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Do you see the Trinitarian nature of this prayer? This is how we ought to pray to pilgrims on the road. We pray in the spirit that we might walk right on the pathway in a manner worthy of Jesus, who walked the pathway before us and now indwells us through His Spirit. Why? Because God the Father has provided for our hope and our help. Okay? We pray in the Spirit unto Christ, the revelation of the father, that we might walk in a manner worthy of him, so that we might give thanks and recognize that the father is the source of all of our provision and our blessing. I want this to be the prayer of Briarwood Church too. Let's commit to it, praying without ceasing, so that the Lord will continue to encourage us and keep our foot, our feet from slipping. Keep our way from being distorted because of sin and unbelief, and to keep our well-being and our lives firmly in his hand. Let's pray.