

October 16, 2016

Psalm 121

“God Is Holding Your Life”

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INTRODUCTION

To have and to hold from this time forth and forevermore.

To have – receive without reservation the total self-gift of the other.

To hold – a vow to cherish and protect as a prized treasure.

STORY/BRIDGE TO MAIN POINT

A minister was visiting an elderly man, who’d been a person of faith for most of his long life. The minister remarked, “Well sir, after keeping the faith for so long, you must feel pretty confident of holding out to the end.” The gentleman replied, “It’s not a matter of me holding out; it’s the Lord holding on to me...and the Bible assures me that I can trust Him for that!”

MAIN POINT

To really get out of this Psalm what we need for our faith journeys, we need to understand it in its original context: First, this is a Psalm of Ascent. Pilgrims came to Jerusalem three times a year for several days to offer their sacrifices.

Elders who welcome them in the name of the Lord meet the pilgrims at the gate of the Temple. One of the group is invited to say, “I will lift up my eyes to the hills, the one on which Jerusalem stood; then adds: “Is this where my help comes from?” It is important to note that some of those hills were the “high places” on which idolatrous sacrifice was offered to Baal and the gods and goddesses. An elder then prompts the group to reply: “No! My help comes from the Lord,” who actually made these hills.

Then there is a little sermon from one of the elders, who then tells them, “The Lord, looks after you as a shepherd looks after his sheep. Nearly everyone would know the 23rd Psalm, for by then it was now centuries old, so perhaps they recited it together. The elder then goes on to say, Baal, the god with a small g falls asleep every hot summer and goes down below the ground (I Kings 18:27). But the Lord does not sleep; God never lets you go, and never lets your foot slip. We can then picture the older people in the group, especially grateful for this word, after having clambered up the donkey-path to the city amidst constant worry of falling.

Then, another elder comes out to the gate and invites them in, as he says, “Yes, indeed, the Lord is your keeper. God never rests, never leaves God’s post, and never goes off duty, just as God never sleeps.” This was simple language for simple country folk coming to the city as pilgrims.

It has been very hot as they have toiled up the hills, so the elder says to them, “God is a true Gentleman; God walks with all pilgrims on the hot sunny side of the road to keep them cool in the shade provided by God’s shadow.

Then the elder goes on to reference the moon, which ancients thought as a symbol of evil, due to their thinking and belief that because of its light, it could make you mad, so we have the word, “lunatic”, but from the Latin name for the moon. If they had this same superstition, they were then told to sharply forget it.

A third speaker takes up the tale as he proclaims, “The Lord will keep you from all evil, including the so-called power of the menacing moon. The Lord will keep your life – from that which would kill the soul.

The groups has reached the gate, and they are welcomed by a priest who offers them a blessing, “The Lord will keep your going in and out and will do so from the present moment on, and on even into all eternity.” For entering the holy place, the Temple, is a symbol of entering the Presence of the eternal God.

APPLICATION

What are we tempted to trust?

Our bank account? That is till our investments tank, or we lose our money due to an illness or an accident, or unwise spending.

Our job? That is till we find ourselves unemployed or terminated.

Our family and/or friends? That is till they forget or let us down, or are don't show up.

Those are the hills our culture looks too and we do at time as well. Yet, our help doesn't come from those hills where false gods and goddesses dwell. Rather, our help comes from the Lord – the great Creator, the Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth!

The Psalmist reminds us to put our full trust in the Lord. One, because God is the biggest, the best, the 100% faithful and the only constancy that deserves our trust amidst the constant set of changes that make up life, any life, your life, my life. In other words, fully trusting someone or something else can lead you into trouble. Yet, fully trusting God will never cause you to come up short, for God is 100% reliable!

For as the older man who was quoted when we began this sermon, “It's not a matter of me holding out; it's the Lord holding on to me...

Next, the Psalmist proposes is not a sleeping God, like other gods. Now, most of us believe in one God, and we don't readily think we have a God who sleeps. Yet, we may find ourselves acting like God is asleep at the wheel, or has gone off duty, or is taking a siesta. The truth is, God never sleeps. Yet, when plans do not go as we think we should we feel abandoned by God, we think God should have done this or that and appears to have done nothing. Yet, God will always act on our behalf when God deems it is beneficial, in the meantime God waits for others things to come into place before God acts. In the end, as well as along the way we are asked to trust that God sees the picture, and is in full control of what is going on. We can relinquish control and even worry, when we realize and accept that God sees the big picture and always has our best interests at heart. For it is not a matter of me holding out; it's the Lord holding on to me.

Having faced who can we count on to help and that God is fully await and active, and has not departed or shirked on responsibility and responsiveness.

We can now go onto another one of our fears: that we will fall down, and not be able to get up and get hurt or even die.

That the ascent we are asked to make on the journey of faith is too difficult and the mountain is too steep.

You're not going to be scorched, burnt out.

Nor are you going to go crazy.

Rather, the Lord assures us that

Protection from the burning sun and those things like the moon that we think will make us crazy will not!

Because the Lord will be there to provide us with the shade we need, if we chose to recognize it and use what God has provided. Due to God's overlaying protection, if we chose to

get under it) we need not go crazy, with that in this life that tries to make us crazy – other people’s behavior, what others say and what is happening around us which has evil in it – need not burn, consume or make us crazy. If we would just avail ourselves of the protection, refuge, respite, and rejuvenation the Lord provides. Some of us are severally dehydrated due to all this is going on around us, we need to get out of the unrelenting heat and scorching sun and bask and bathe in what God is offering us under the shadow of God’s wings. For it is not a matter of me holding out; it’s the Lord holding onto me.

Last, but by no means least, the pilgrim on the journey of faith hears the Lord keeps watch over you
as you come and go,
your going out and coming in.
In every beginning and ending,
God is there, and watching over you.

Start-ups are hard.

Yet, even there the Lord is watching us and holding our life
In the best hands there are to hold us, the 100% reliable,
faithful, constant, and fully trustworthy pair of hands.

Ending are grueling, by in large.

Yet, even there the Lord is watching us and holding our life
in the best hands there are to hold us, the 100% reliable,
faithful, constant and fully trustworthy pair of hands.

When a long time job is ending,
when I am moving from a place I love,
when a loved one dies,
God is holding your life.

When I starting new work,
When I become part of a new community,
When I new idea or baby is born.

God is holding your life.

CONCLUSION

For when all is said and done it all doesn't depend on me -
"It's not a matter of me holding out;
it's the Lord holding on to me..."

To have and to hold from this time forth and forevermore.
God's promise to us, a promise God will keep.