

Who is Your Helper?

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Thank you for reading, Sam. My name's Adam White. I'm from Grace Church Leaf, which is halfway down Leaf Walk. I'm very happy to be here. I'm here usually in the food bank, so it's nice to come through the front door rather than through the sides.

And I want to take our time today to go through Psalm 121, but I don't want to presume anyone's place at the moment where their walk is with Jesus, whether you've been walking with the Lord for a long time or whether this is all new to you.

And so I want to ask the very simple question to everyone here, though, for different reasons. And that's the question, who is your helper? Now, there's been an estimated 6,000 major presidential public appearances since 1865. And the Secret Service is responsible for protecting the president on these trips that he takes into the public, into various different scenarios.

And they've got an amazing success rate in protecting him. But their track record is not perfect. In fact, it started off quite rough. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in 1865 because his bodyguard left to go and grab a drink in a local pub.

James Garfield. He was killed in 1881 because he had next to no security. He allowed the assassin to literally walk up to him and shoot him.

[1 : 35] In 1901, William McKinley was shot because the Secret Service failed to properly search his attacker. He hid his gun under a handkerchief, which is a bizarre place to hide a gun and really shows your confidence in the lack of the security around.

And then finally, of course, we have JFK, who's assassinated in 1963 because the Secret Service overlooked key security risks in Dallas. But despite this, the American Secret Service really do have an amazing track record at keeping the president safe in public appearances.

In fact, it's 99.4% of all appearances do not end with a dead president. And even if I added in all the attempts where a president was injured or any other person was hurt, it only drops it down 0.2%.

So 99.2% of the time, the Secret Service works every time. And I think that's a pretty great track record. If I'm looking for protection, 99.2% is pretty impressive.

So would you feel confident with the Secret Service being your personal protector every time you step foot out of your home? But the big question is, do you have that same confidence in God's protection?

[2 : 57] In fact, do you have even more reason to place even more confidence in the Lord? Who is your helper? I want to show you that Psalm 121 tells us exactly where we should look and why the Secret Service, regardless of how hard they try, will always be a very distant second best.

Now, this psalm is written about God's people making a long journey, a very dangerous journey to the Holy Temple situated on Mount Zion. And we read that this psalm is called a Song of Ascent. It's a psalm sung by faithful pilgrims as they made their journey to the Holy City to observe its annual feasts. Psalm 121 is sandwiched between two messianic psalms that point towards Christ. We have Psalm 120, which opens with this loud cry for deliverance from a life of distress. It's prophetically pointing towards Christ's suffering at the hands of those who falsely accuse and betray him.

On the other side, we have Psalm 122. And this celebrates the arrival into Jerusalem and is echoing the messianic expectations of a king who will reign in peace and righteousness in Jerusalem.

[4 : 16] And then sandwiched in the middle, we have Psalm 121, providing assurance and divine protection during the journey. I have to show you just how Jesus is foreshadowed in this psalm today.

And I want to show you that a little later on in this talk. But before that, just read with me verse 1. Now, I've gone with the ESV translation because I think there's some key literal translation words that really help us understand this psalm.

So forgive me if this sounds different to what we've just read. But verse 1, the psalmist says, See, the pilgrims would have to traverse these surrounding hills on their way to the temple at Mount Zion. And this would have caused enormous anxiety and fear. The Israelites, they would be making their way to the temple. And what they would essentially see over and over again is the threat of attack and violence.

And we read over and over again in the Bible that really good things happen on mountains. But really, really bad things happen on hills. You fight on hills.

[5 : 32] You die on hills. You're sacrificed on hills. The enemy worships gods on hills. The potential for danger on the way is incredibly high.

So as the psalmist is saying, essentially, the hills have eyes and I'm concerned. And the physical danger is scary enough. But there's also all kinds of spiritual dangers on the way.

These hills would bring to mind the home of altars for false gods, for instance. Although powerless in themselves, these things are set up under the influence of Satan.

Therefore, they should be approached with incredible caution. But as the psalmist reflects on these dangers, he's quick to answer his opening question.

He says, my help comes from the Lord. And there you have it. My help comes from the Lord. We've got our answer. Thank you very much for coming.

[6 : 38] There's coffee in the back. And I'll see you later. But of course, there's six more verses in the psalm. But it's true, isn't it?

We're very guilty of moving on such a powerful declaration. It just washes over us and we don't really internalize it. Friends, I'll be the first to put my hands up to this.

As I reflected on this psalm over the past couple of weeks, I'm quick to recognize just how slow I am. Just how slow I am to come to the simple, powerful truth that it's the Lord that watches over me.

I just forget it on a daily, daily basis. Depending on the situation, it can take me days, weeks. It can even take me months sometimes. If you can relate, I think it's because God in his wisdom knows that we need this simple to understand.

My help comes from the Lord. We need it to be repeated to us over and over and over again. So it can sink in. We don't just tick it off as an intellectual exercise.

[7 : 51] But rather that we can get it stuck into our hearts and acknowledge it needs to be pressed into us over and over again. Give our hearts a chance to catch up with our heads and our fears.

So let's take a second just to really pay attention to this psalm's message to us today. I don't know what's going on in your lives. But just stop and really take that in.

My help comes from the Lord. We read verse 2's declaration. My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

That second half, who made heaven and earth. And it's meant to relay God is sovereign over absolutely everything. There is nothing that he's not in control of.

And there's nobody he's not in control of. He's sovereign. And he's actively helping his people. If you're a Christian here today, how does that make you feel?

[8 : 54] How does it make you feel knowing that the creator of the universe is your helper? If you're not a Christian, how does that make you feel when you hear that?

The Lord is your helper. We read that the Lord is our helper twice. And actually we read another word in the ESV, synonymous word keeper, six times.

So eight times we get this reference for the Lord is your helper, the Lord is your keeper. Over and over again. And this declaration is central to Psalm 121. It reveals three ways which the Lord helps and keeps his people.

And so we'll look at each one under three headings. You are kept by promises. You are kept by personal protection. And you are kept permanently.

You're kept by promises. You're kept by personal protection. And you are kept permanently. The first one, you are kept by promises.

[10 : 01] Verse three says, he will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. It's paralleled with verse four. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

And we get this wonderful faith burst out of the psalmist that his God, the God who made a covenant with Abraham, who promised that those who will be his people, he will in turn be their God.

But this promise to his people is so ironclad. It's so set in stone that even the minute details of the psalmist's life is held fast by the Lord.

So much so that not even a foot will slip for him as he makes his journey to Mount Zion. Verse four expands on this promise.

Behold, he who keeps Israel, he will do this for his covenant people as they make their way up to the hill towards the temple. And this imagery reflects his supreme confidence in God's promise to protect his people from misfortune and to fulfill his covenant promises.

[11:14] The second half of both verse three and four emphasizes that God will not slumber or sleep. You will not find the Lord sleeping at his post.

Unlike the very human secret service, the Lord never becomes too tired or too weary to care for his people. He has not got to go and grab a quick pint to refresh himself.

Unlike the very, very secret service, he's never caught off to God and he's never taken by surprise. But let me just be clear on what this is saying and what it is not saying.

This is talking about eternal things. This is not saying that there will be no physical danger for those who put their trust in the Lord. That for the Christian today, you don't have to look left or right when you leave.

You know, the bus is just going to bounce off you. You have some sort of power in Christ to repel traffic. Do not test it. Now, what this is saying, if it was though, I'm a father.

[12:25] If you're a father or a mother or anyone who's been around children, maybe this has happened to you. If it hasn't, the Lord is being very kind. Anyone ever stood on a bit of Lego? Pain like nothing else in this world.

If it was the case that this psalm is saying that it will protect you, I wouldn't have to feel that pain on a bi-weekly basis. But no, that's not what it's saying. It doesn't mean I'm not going to get in any danger physically.

It also doesn't mean that if you get sick or dealing with an illness, that you have done anything, that's happening to you because the Lord's not with you.

No, don't take that as a sign that the Lord is not with you either. Now, the protection from the Lord is against ultimate evil.

And the word in the NIV is from all harm. But we look at that word used, and ultimate evil, I think, is the stronger, more powerful understanding for us.

[13:29] Ultimate evil on harm, attacking that comes towards us on a daily basis. Ultimate evil that tries to interact with us and penetrate into our lives a thousand different ways.

Regardless of where you are and what your walk is, ultimate evil wants to get a nip at you. And that's what the Lord is protecting you from. Verse 4, we read, Behold, he who keeps Israel.

It's a powerful affirmation and word from the Lord that would be there to clearly remind the first pilgrims who sang the psalm of the 40 years that their ancestors would have made their way through the wilderness with his protection.

Deuteronomy 3.16 records God's message to his people. Just before they entered the promised land, we read, The Lord said, Be strong and courageous. Do not let fear or be in dread of them.

For it is the Lord your God who goes forth with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. God's promise of keeping his people safe on long, dangerous journeys is not 99.2%.

[14:44] It's 100%. They have got concrete evidence. And that's true for them then. And if you're a Christian here today, his promise is the same for you too.

And so I ask the question, Do you put your faith 100% into God's perfect promise to keep you safe? We've seen that you're kept by promises.

Let's move on to our second big point here, that you are kept by personal protection. And now over and over again, the Lord is portrayed as a very personal guardian.

We see it here again in verse 5. The Lord is your keeper, and the Lord is your shade on your right hand. If you want to jump to Exodus 13, 21 to 22.

It's going to read different because I have the ESV, so I hope it doesn't trip you up.

[15:56] Let me read Exodus 13, 21 to 22. Again, the psalm cast its fist here as back to God keeping their ancestors shaded from the sun in the day, and warm as they trek through the desert

at night on their way to the promised land.

We get this combined image of the Lord being shade from natural elements, but also that he's on your right hand as the perfect secret service agent, that perfect God who's just right there.

I love how this metaphor resonates with the personal nature of the Lord's protection. You have to be intimately close to someone to provide shade for them. It's not a faraway job.

You have to get up close. The sun in Israel near Mount Zion can get up to about 40 degrees. So we get this idea that the sun, which is hot enough to burn the Israelite skin, they will be kept from that harm by the Lord who will stand between them and it.

And that's wonderful to think of. And through this psalm, the Lord wants you to put your trust in him, to understand that he is your companion throughout all the ups and all the downs of your life.

[17:36] If you find yourself in hot spots, where the enemy makes the temperature of your life unbearably painful or stressful or scary, then the Lord is there personally providing shade for you.

Shade so you can fight on continuously in his strength rather than your own. That same personal protection and warmth of the Lord for the Israelites in the wilderness is still there for us today.

And it's for anyone who will embrace him. Reach out to the Lord through his word. Be warmed by him in your struggles.

For someone who has struggled with addiction in the past, it's the cold hand of Satan that tries to creep into my heart, creep into my mind and tries to tempt me to turn the temperature down on my love for the Lord.

It's at those points that I have to recognize that it can only be pushed away and fought off with my portable, handy Bible-shaped heater. It just falls me out, warms me up through the taking in of his word.

[18:57] Indeed, those who have given their life to the Lord, they have the Holy Spirit and the flame of the Lord living and ignited inside themselves. You can rest knowing that God will protect you from the cold, cold hand of evil.

I think that's wonderful. The Lord's protection is constant. He's ever vigilant. The Lord protects from all kinds of dangers that the enemy tries to throw at you throughout the day, throughout the night, throughout the week.

Maybe you're going through illness. Maybe you're having a battle with a hidden disease or a very, very painful experience that you just can't seem to get anyone to understand.

Just know that the Lord is with you every step of the way. He's not forgotten you. He's keeping your soul safe for eternity.

Even when you stand on the Lego. Which leads me to my final point. You are kept permanently. Verse 7 and 8 reads, The Lord will keep you from all evil.

[20:12] He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out. And you're coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

And this is once again why I like the ASV translation, the literal translation here. Notice the subtle change in the last part of the psalm. The psalmist switches now from present tense to future tense. And instead of the Lord is your keeper, he says the Lord will keep. Now he's looking to the future with 100% confidence.

As I mentioned at the beginning, it's here that we see Psalm 121 start to foreshadow the promises that are filled in the Lord Jesus. We get these free quick the Lord will keep statements.

In verse 7 and 8. So let's look at the first one. The Lord will keep you from all evil. As I said before, the more accurate translation, ultimate evil. Literally from all possible kinds of evil Satan can throw at you.

[21:18] I think it's important to remind ourselves again that this is not saying that the Israelites will not face troubles and pain. It's so easy for us to fall into that thinking. Things are going wrong, Lord. Where have you gone?

It's not saying we won't face trouble and pain. I'm sure if we could grab one of these early travelers to the temple and ask them, you know, did you have a bad trip? Any danger or dread?

You could take a few nicks. One guy's trying to take my arm off. Like, it's not the case that there's going to be easy walking. No, instead, this is talking about keeping true followers of the Lord from all attacks from the evil one.

We read in John's Gospel of the Lord Jesus praying to his Father for protection for his followers. Chapter 17, verse 15, he says, I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep

them from the evil one.

So to the Christian, do you trust your Lord and Keeper? To the non-Christian, who is your Lord and Keeper?

[22 : 32] The second, the Lord will keep your life. And for the Israelites who are faithful to the Lord, their promise that no one can take them from he who keeps them.

In Deuteronomy 7, verse 9, it says, God, therefore, I shall know, therefore, that the Lord, your God, is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.

A thousand in the Bible means forever. It's such a ridiculous number. It definitely includes us, don't worry. We're in. The psalmist affirms that the Lord has long promised to protect those faithful to him and finds its fulfillment too in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We see it in John 17 when he says, Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one even as we are one. And to the Christian, do you trust your Lord and Keeper?

To the non-Christian, I respectfully ask, who is your helper? And finally, verse 8, my favorite verse, the Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

[23 : 59] Notice it doesn't say, you're coming in and going out. Let me use you all as an illustration. You're all inside.

That means you have to go out now. It says you're going out and coming in. The prayer in this psalm from the beginning is the Lord is going to bring the whole of his people, body and soul, safely to his presence at the temple.

But verse 8 declares that the Lord's already got them there. You can only go out if you first come in. It's wonderful. The Lord is so sure he's going to get his people home safely that when he talks about the future, it's not they're coming in, but they're going out.

And what they're going to do next? You're going out and coming in. And so for you and me who put our faith in the Lord, he's saying he will really get you home.

You will arrive one day, body and soul, in the presence of Christ when he returns. It's a done deal. And when you arrive, you will never have to leave again.

[25 : 09] Never have to deal with pain or illness or sadness, or temptation or despair, or frustration ever again. This eternal life insurance is 100% guaranteed.

And it's underwritten by our Lord Jesus. So to the Christian, do you trust your Lord and keeper?

How quickly we fall into believing that God has forgotten about us at the first sign of peril, such is our nature to harden our hearts to the truly powerful fact is that the Lord is your keeper.

We're just so quick to just cold and get, where are you? The minute something goes wrong. Old Testament scholar Bruce Watke, he says, and the tendency is to forget this fact.

In his psalm commentary, he says, on the contrary, even when we seem to have largely experienced what this protection of God implies, we yet instantly tremble at the noise of a leaf falling from a tree, as if God has quite forgotten us.

Being then entangled in so many unholy misgivings and so much inclined to trust, we are taught from the passage that if a sentence couched in a few words does not suffice us, we should gather together whatever may be found throughout the whole scriptures concerning the providence of God, until this doctrine that God always keeps watch for us is deeply rooted in our hearts so that depending upon his guardianship alone, we may bid adieu to all vain confidences in the world.

[26 : 46] Fellow Christians, confidently put your trust in the Lord. He will keep you safe from harm and evil today, tomorrow, and for whole eternity.

It is impossible for him not to. If you're not a Christian, or you've not put your trust in Jesus yet, I'm so happy you're here.

I would respectfully ask once again, who's your helper? When things get hard, think back to a time of deep despair.

If I asked everyone in this room, was there a time when you were just so stuck and lonely, or just in despair? There's not a single hand that wouldn't go up. Think back to that time when no one understood you or could protect your soul from the darkness that was just surrounding you.

Maybe you received some terrifying news from the doctor. Maybe a once trusted relationship is shattered. Maybe you feel wounded and lost from a friendship and a trust betrayed. Maybe you're battling addiction or you're longing for someone to truly see and heal your brokenness.

[27 : 58] I don't know what it is you do. Christians and non-Christians alike are going to suffer physically in this world. Sooner or later, it's going to happen. Nobody is immune. Whether it's from injury, accident, untimely disease, or age-related disorders, it is impossible.

The question is, who else are you going to go to for protection of your soul? Because the last time I checked, the Secret Service were not in the business of saving souls.

Just bodies. 99.2, impressive. But it drops to 0% when it comes to protecting souls. That's the Lord's business.

He has no competition. And so, to finish, let's look at this psalm if it was written from someone who says, there's no God.

I lift my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? No help is coming. I'm on my own. Verse 3, my feet are slipping and sliding all over the place.

[29 : 12] Nobody is there to keep me steady. Nobody is awake to help me. Nobody is my keeper. The sun burns me by day, and the moon leaves me cold at night.

Nobody will protect me from the evil attacking my soul, and I don't think I'm going to make it. nobody keeps my life safe, and nobody keeps my soul safe in eternity.

Now, I don't know about you, but I consider that to be an incredibly scary and sobering version. And I don't really like it very much, so let's go back to the original. The journey of life is long and dangerous.

Evil comes from all directions, taking chips out of your heart, tempting us to give up and to give in, but here is the amazing claim that the Bible makes, is that God became flesh and dwelt among us in the Lord Jesus.

Jesus Christ, fully God, humbling himself, becomes fully human. So we see this, in here, Jesus Christ is the example of the perfect pilgrim on a dangerous journey.

[30 : 32] There's nobody who's traveled further from home than the Lord Jesus. Jesus is the perfect pilgrim who put his full trust in his Father on his dangerous journey, from infancy to being hunted down by a king to his childhood to his short time preaching and healing the lost and teaching that salvation comes by turning to him in repentance and faith.

His enemies were everywhere, but his trust was in his Father to keep him safe on his earthly journey, to complete his mission, which he did perfectly.

Even when he was betrayed by a friend, even when he was beaten and put on a cross, he knew his Father's will. He knew it was being done sovereignly and in control of his life throughout all the pain. His crucifixion and resurrection was the defeat of the ultimate enemy. Defeating death itself he was brought safely home to the Father who kept him safe here on earth.

Not in the way we think safe is. And now his Father and him are reunited as he stands and sits at the right hand of him, ever watchful over us, perfectly and personally keeping anyone who puts his faith in him.

[32 : 09] Only the Lord Jesus can give you that 100% perfect personal protection for your life and soul. And if there's any truth in what you've heard, isn't it worth spending some time looking into him?

Spending some more time getting to know him? You speak to me, other members of the church after the service, you can go straight to the Lord Jesus in prayer. You can do it today, you can do it right now.

The amazing truth of the gospel is this, if you are truly sorry for the things you've done, that the pain you've caused to others yourself, recognize that your creator is the chief one you've offended, then you can humbly ask for forgiveness and he's just so gracious to forgive, so quick, he will then keep you safe from all evil today, tomorrow and into eternity.

As the band come back up, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this psalm, Lord.

We thank you for the encouragement of knowing that you are our keeper. You are the Lord who keeps us from all evil, from ultimate evil. Help us, Lord, to take the message that you, Lord, will keep us from all harm and evil from today, tomorrow, and eternity.

[33 : 29] Help us take that into our heart and help us turn to our friends, family, neighbours and help them see that their help can only be in the Lord Jesus.

We thank you for our time today together, Lord, and we pray all this in your Lord's name. Jesus, Amen.