

“I Lift Up My Eyes”

This morning’s psalm is a “psalm of ascents.” This collection of 15 psalms were most likely sung by the Israelites as they made their annual spring, summer, and fall journeys to Mount Zion in order to go to the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem.

They would make these pilgrimages so they could draw near to the presence of God and worship Him and offer sacrifices to Him (since the Temple is the place where it was believed that God dwelt); and so they could remember and celebrate God’s mighty acts of salvation in their lives—namely God’s freeing them from slavery in Egypt, His giving of the law to them (The Ten Commandments) for their wellbeing, and His sustaining of them as they wandered around in the wilderness for forty years.

When we look at the first verse of this psalm the context in which these 15 psalms were first used it makes perfect sense.

**I will lift my eyes to the mountains-
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
The Maker of heaven and earth.**

I would imagine that when the pilgrims thought about their journey to the Temple they would think of the mountain that the Temple itself rested upon or perhaps the mountains and hills that they would have to go over in order to get to the Temple, and then they would think to themselves how will I be able to get there safely?

The journey that was before them was not like the journey that I just made to Dallas, Texas. For sure, my journey was not perfectly comfortable. We did have to leave very early and my flight did get diverted to Houston because of bad weather, but at least I didn’t have to walk there, or sit on an animal, or even drive. I was able to get on an airplane and travel 1500 miles in about four hours. I also was able to sit in a relatively comfortable seat with air conditioning, have internet access, and be served peanuts and a Coca-Cola on my flight. Not bad.

My trip was far easier than the ascent that God’s pilgrim people would make anytime they set out to go to the Temple. They would see the mountains and wonder how they would get through them safely. Who would keep them from falling off cliffs, or from dehydration and sunburn, or from the attacks of wild animals? The mountains were treacherous so when they looked to the hills they would ask themselves who will protect us from harm’s way?

One of the problems of living in modern society with all of the modern conveniences of life is that we don’t look to the Lord for our help as much as our ancestors did. We think our way of life is superior to theirs and perhaps on a convenience level it is, but what about on a trust or spiritual level?

Perhaps there is something good to be said for a time when one couldn't look to all of the modern conveniences of life for our help. Maybe all of these things cause us to take for granted the help and sustaining power of the Lord in our lives. But our forbearers in the faith couldn't do that when they began their journey to the temple. The trip they were about to embark up was full of danger and because they did not have all of these things they were more vulnerable to harm and death. They had nothing else to look to but the Lord when they set out on their journeys and that is not a bad thing.

The psalmist builds on this image further when he says of the LORD,

**He will not let your foot slip-
He who watches over you will not slumber;
Indeed, he who watches over you Israel
Will neither slumber nor sleep.**

When one begins to walk on a mountain the terrain gets rugged. Not long ago I was at Hanging Rock State Park and we walked up to the top and there was some places you had to be very careful. Most mountains have narrow paths and twists and turns that are close the edge and one misplaced step can mean death or serious injury. So here in this verse we see the Psalmist trusting God to protect him and guide his footsteps so that he does not fall and injure himself.

Another thing that happened to God's people on these journeys was they were exposed to the harshness of the elements. We see this when the text says,

**The LORD watches over you-
The LORD is your shade at your right hand;
The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.**

**The LORD will keep you from all harm-
He will watch over your life;
The LORD will watch over your coming and going
Both now and forever more.**

What the Lord is saying in this section of the Psalm is that God will protect his people from the elements as they make their journey to the Temple on top of Mount Zion. They will not die of heat exhaustion and thirst. The Lord will provide places of rest and shade for his people.

Again, this is something so easily overlooked in our day because of air conditioners but when God's people found a shady tree to rest under on their journey they saw it as God giving them shade. The Lord also says that he will protect them at night. Maybe the Lord would provide a cave or some other type of shelter for them to sleep in on their way. Perhaps it was an acknowledgment that God would keep them safe from wild animals or bandits. Regardless, it reflects an inherent trust that they would be well on their journey to and from the temple.

In thinking about how this text may apply to our daily lives I have three things to share.

First, to whom do you look to for help when you are facing a mountain in your life?

Our help is in the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth. We should not trust in our own power or intellect, or in modern conveniences and advancements for our salvation and help, even those things are a gift from God. Our ultimate hope is in God. It seems so simple but it is something that we need to be reminded of frequently, especially in our world because all of these conveniences we have so easily allures us to trust in them for our help and not God.

Second, if your trust in the LORD God will take care of you.

We must be careful here not look at this Psalm in the sense that we derive from it an idea that our feet will never slip and that we will never be harmed because there are too many places in Scripture that tell us otherwise, so we have to read this psalm in light of what other places of Scripture, even the Psalms, tell us about the troubles that God's people can go through. Even so, there is a confident trust in this psalm that when we look to the LORD for our help that he will take care of us. It is true. God will take care of us.

Finally, the Lord has his eye upon our lives.

The LORD does not sleep or slumber, he watches over our coming and going from beginning to end. Whether we are coming and going to church, work, or to and from other places, our God is keeping watch over our lives, more than we realize or are aware of. His eye is on the Sparrow. He does not take his eyes off us for one second. This should be of great comfort to us.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.