

Psalm 121

## Mission in His Grip

If we're going out in mission we need to be convinced of at least three things:

1. The Word of God is completely true and wonderful and powerful and sufficient – saw that in Psalm 119
2. We are aliens here – saw that in Psalm 120
3. We are safe – that's Psalm 121...

### (Wimbo Wa Kwenda Juu).

1 Nayainua macho yangu nitazame  
vilima,  
msaada wangu utatoka wapi?  
2 Msaada wangu hutoka kwa BWANA,  
Muumba wa mbingu na dunia.  
3 Hatauacha mguu wako uteleze,  
Yeye akulindaye hatasinzia,  
4 hakika, Yeye alindaye Israeli  
hatasinzia wala hatalala.  
5 BWANA anakulinda,  
BWANA ni uvuli wako mkono wako  
wa kuume,  
6 jua halitakudhuru mchana,  
wala mwezi wakati wa usiku.  
7 BWANA atakuinga na madhara yote,  
atayalinda maisha yako,  
8 BWANA atakulinda unapoingia na  
unapotoka,  
tangu sasa na hata milele.

It's a very simple Psalm on one level –

Mstari 3 - Yeye akulindaye

Mstari 4 - Yeye alindaye

Mstari 5 - BWANA anakulinda,

Mstari 8 - BWANA atakulinda

What's the big point - *Bwana ni mlinzi wako*

And if you're going out in mission you need to know that.

Because mission can be a scary thing. We were seeing that last week. (Psalm 120)

Going out to tell people about a Jesus who died and rose and will soon return – that can be a hard and scary thing to tell people.

When we speak of peace we may find that people war against us.

We may have to go to dangerous places.

I've been reading the story of John Paton who was a missionary from Scotland about 150 years ago who went to a couple of tiny islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, on the other side of the world.

The first missionaries to go to those islands lasted about 5 minutes – literally. As soon as they landed on the beach they were killed and eaten.

These were cannibal islands.

Incredibly violent people – constantly at war with one another. And when they had defeated their enemies they would eat their flesh.

They worshipped demons and their whole lives were ruled by fear of spirits and curses and magic. And on top of all that it was a very harsh climate with lots of diseases. And no doctors. No air ambulances. No evacuation plan.

When John Paton landed with his wife Mary on that island there would be constant danger and nowhere to run.

If you're going into that situation you've got to be seriously convinced of Psalm 121 – that *Bwana ni mlinzi wangu*

Do we really believe that the Lord is our keeper?

That he doesn't slumber or sleep?

That he will keep you from all evil?

Because there's a problem here.

John Paton arrived on the island of Tanna, in the Pacific Ocean in November 1858.

In February the next year his wife gave birth to a baby boy.

A week later his wife got a bad fever and pneumonia.

After suffering for 2 weeks she died.

A week later the baby boy also got sick and died.

Was the Lord their keeper?

Was he not able to keep them from sickness and death?

Well Psalm 121 verse 2 says he is the maker of heaven and earth – of course he can keep them.

So why didn't he?

This is a really important issue. There are plenty of verses in the Bible that promise us protection.

Particularly this Psalm and Psalm 91. And we know God is powerful to keep his promises. So why are God's children not always protected?

One way we can answer that is – you need to really believe those promises; you need to claim them; you need to declare them.

To put it bluntly: if you die in a car accident tomorrow it is not God's fault it's yours. You were not faithful. You were not trusting God enough.

But what about the missionaries who were killed and eaten by cannibals?

What about Mary Paton?

Were they not faithful enough in prayer?

Were they not standing on God's promises?

They were faithful.

But they died early, painful deaths.

So what is Psalm 121 really saying?

First – we need to think – like we did last week – about who this Psalm is really about.

If you read it carefully you notice that it starts with someone talking and saying "I", "my", "my". There's a guy who is looking for help and trusting that his help comes from the LORD. And then it switches to someone else talking to the first guy and saying, "Yes you're right the LORD is going to be your help – he will keep you in every way, no evil will befall you."

It's about a particular man.

Who is it?

Look at *mstari* 4 – "Yeye alindaye Israeli"

There was a time when Israel was just one man. His name was Jacob, then his name became Israel.

Then he had 12 sons and they became the 12 tribes and then there was a whole people called Israel.

And they went down to Egypt

Badly treated

And then God said, "Israel is my firstborn son." Tell Pharaoh, "Let my son go"

So he brings them out of Egypt, they're tested in the wilderness for 40 years, enter the promised land, and grow in power.

But also grow in idolatry.

Then 10 of the tribes of Israel are scattered among the nations and lost.

And then the other two tribes are exiled in Babylon.

And a few came back but they are a sorry sight.

And then, a few hundred years later, along comes another Israel.

A man who goes down to Egypt and then God calls him out again.

A man who is tested in the wilderness for 40 days but doesn't fail as the first Israel had.

A man who is the light to the nations that Israel was supposed to be but had failed to be.

That is who Psalm 121 is about – the true Israel, the true Son of God.

Like all the Psalms, this is a Psalm about Jesus.

First we see his faith.

Verses 1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus is absolutely confident in the Father's help.

He knows that the LORD is the Creator, he was there as the heavens and the earth were under construction.

But as he lifts his eyes to the hills he sees a Cross standing there, waiting for him.

Jesus' life was a pilgrimage to Jerusalem but not a happy one. It was a Jerusalem that he had longed to gather like chicks under his wings but a Jerusalem that had killed all the prophets and would kill him too.

Then we go to the other voice in the Psalm encouraging him how the LORD will protect him. I think this is now the Spirit speaking. The Spirit is reassuring the Son of the protection of the Father. Isn't that beautiful? The Spirit is telling the Son, the Father will keep you.

He'll keep your foot from slipping – that's verse 3 - Which doesn't mean you won't get hurt – it means your faith won't fail. If you look at how that idea is used in other Psalms (e.g. 66, 73) it means when people are putting you under massive pressure, when you're carrying a crushing burden of pain or persecution, you don't utterly lose your faith. Or when all the godless scoffers are doing really well in life and you're doing really badly and you're tempted to give up – then God will keep your feet from slipping, you will maintain your faith.

And that promise was kept for Jesus – even when he carried the crushing burden of our sin, even when people were taunting him on the Cross. He kept looking upwards to his Father in faith.

He'll keep your foot from slipping

And then he'll keep you from all harm – this is the big one:

It is a total promise – all harm, all the time

It's going to be day and night protection (v5-6)

From a guard who doesn't sleep for a moment (v4)

It's protection from all evil (v7)

Your going out and your coming in (v8)

Your whole life (v7)

24 hour 360 degree total security.

Forget KK and Radar and Lavington and Ultimate Security – this is really Ultimate Security.

But how did Jesus apply this to himself?

Well the devil encouraged him to claim these promises.

When he was in the wilderness for 40 days

the devil said, "If you're the Son of God then these Psalms apply to you don't they so why don't you throw yourself down off the Temple and see if God keeps his promises and protects you."

And Jesus knew the devil was right that these promises were for him but he said, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." (Luke 4:9-10)

And he kept on walking towards the hill with a Cross on it.

And there he endured the darkness at midday. Interestingly the sun didn't strike him by day for three hours. But he was being struck – struck with the rod of God's wrath again and again for all our evil and faithlessness.

And then he was buried in a tomb and the moon didn't strike him that night.

And then on Easter morning he proved the deeper meaning of verse 7 – that the Lord would keep his life. He wouldn't be abandoned to the grave.

And now he lives "tangu sasa na hata milele" (v8).

That is how Jesus fulfils this Psalm – Cross and then Resurrection.

And once we've seen that – now we can apply it to ourselves if we are in him, in the New Israel.

*Mstari 2* \_\_\_\_\_

Because of the Cross, the God who make heaven and earth is for us. We have the Creator of the Universe for us not against us. As our helper. As our Father who loves us as much as he loves his Son.

And He'll keep your foot from slipping – you remember when Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Satan demanded to have you but I have prayed that your faith would not fail” – Jesus prayed that the Father would keep Peter’s foot from slipping. And you remember Peter’s faith did almost completely fail and he denied Jesus three times but it didn’t quite fail – he was being kept – there were everlasting arms underneath and he did come back and strengthen his brothers.

Isn’t that a massive encouragement –  
that the Father will keep you from falling away  
If it was about me holding onto God by my own strength – then I’d have fallen away long ago –  
but he’s got us in a life-savers grip – by the wrist.

He never slumbers or sleeps.  
I slumber and sleep. You slumber and sleep. There are times when I’m not putting my faith in the Lord. Or anyone. I’m unconscious.  
But it’s not about my faith – it’s about him keeping me in his grip. And he never slumbers or sleeps.

And He'll keep you from all harm – in the same way that he kept Jesus  
Through suffering to glory; cross and then resurrection.  
So verse 6 about the sun not striking you by day or the moon by night – that is applied in the Book of Revelation (7:16) to our *resurrection life* in the New Creation where streams of living waters flow and when God will wipe every tear from our eyes.  
There will be a day when we have our Easter morning – and there will be no more arrows by day or pestilence by night; no need for locks on your doors – perfect security.

And verse 7 is true even now – *he will keep you from all evil.*  
Even when we’re suffering that will be true because what the devil and the world throws at you as evil – God will use it to you as good.  
He will either use it to conform you to the likeness of Christ or he will use it to take you to himself quicker.  
So what is thrown at us as evil – when it lands on us – it will be painful but it will not be evil, it will not be for our harm  
Even death, if you are in Christ, will not be evil to you, because death’s sting has been taken. It will be a departure not to condemnation but to be with Christ.  
*He will keep your life.*  
You are completely secure in Christ.  
Your life is hidden in Him.  
Ultimately nothing can harm you.  
No-one can snatch you out of the Father’s hand.

Let me finish by giving two examples of how this works in practice.  
First – the Apostle Paul – he knew the Scriptures more than any of us, he believed Psalm 121 more than any of us; I suspect he fasted and prayed more than any of us; and he also had a harder time than most of us – he knew that in every city imprisonment and afflictions awaited

him, he was beaten with rods, stoned almost to death, shipwrecked and he had a thorn in his flesh that wouldn't go away.

But he knew Jesus and he knew that Psalm 121 was about Jesus (cf. Rom. 15:3) and that was his encouragement – that if he suffered with Christ he would also be raised with him.

When he was in prison near the end of his life he wrote to Timothy:

“The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18) – just like Psalm 121 – The Lord will rescue me from all evil – He's just about to be killed by the Romans – but he's looking beyond that to the heavenly kingdom and being with Christ which is better by far.

Second example – John Paton – I mentioned at the beginning.

He spent four years on this little island under almost constant threat – being attacked all the time by mobs of cannibals. Often on the run. Numerous times he was surrounded by people with guns or axes just about to kill him.

And what he says about those moments is very interesting:

1. He knew his God was completely in charge of the whole situation – that no one would pull a trigger or throw their spear without the permission of the God of heaven and earth. He knew that the Lord wasn't slumbering or sleeping.
2. So the prayer he prayed, every time he was in this situation, was, “Protect me or to take me home to Glory as you see best.” That's an amazing prayer. He prayed for deliverance but was also completely resigned to being taken to the Lord. Either way, the Lord would keep his life.
3. That released him from fear and he was able to talk to the people who were trying to kill him – not to beg for his life (as I think I would have done) but to challenge them – “What you're doing is evil. You need to repent and turn to Jesus.” He says that with a gun in his face! Because he know the Lord is his keeper.

As we go out in mission we need to know

*Bwana ni mlinzi wangu - kweli*

To someone looking at us it might not look like it – we may well suffer – like John Paton's wife and baby boy – we might even get sick and die young.

But we are eternally safe. Your faith will not fail, no evil will harm you and the Father will bring you safely into his heavenly kingdom.

Tuombe...

24 Kwake Yeye awezaye kuwalinda msianguke na kuwaleta ninyi mbele za utukufu Wake mkuu bila dosari kwa furaha ipitayo kiasi, 25 Yeye Mungu pekee, Mwokozi wetu kwa Yesu Kristo Bwana wetu, utukufu, ukuu, uweza na mamlaka vina Yeye tangu milele, sasa na hata milele! Amen.