

Psalm 125

Safe, Surrounded, and Secure

Introduction: This Psalm, like the other Psalms of ascent, appears to have been written in the exilic period or the immediate post exilic period (when Israel was carried away to Babylon). As they reoccupied the land they began to celebrate the feast in Jerusalem again. As they traveled up to Jerusalem they would sing these songs of reflection and praise to encourage their own hearts, they would sing these songs to God and to one another to remind each other about the person and character of Yahweh.

This Psalm in particular expresses a national sense of trust in God despite the domination of an oppressive foreign power.

Being an exilic or post exilic Psalm the fact that Jerusalem and the temple had being laid waste by the Babylonian army was in the forefront of their minds, but in spite of that they saw and celebrated the mountain on which the city of Jerusalem was built, made completely of solid rock, as an enduring monument to the fact that God's people will endure, will be preserved, to the end. It was a picture of God's protection and preservation. The promise is that those who trust in the LORD will dwell, and be securely settled forever - **“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.”**

This is the confidence and peace that comes of living, by faith, under the protection of God.

Listen to the claim - Those who trust in the Lord are never shaken, never defeated, the wicked will not rule the land of the godly.. really?

These are incredible promises that are being made here - and they need to be reflected on so as to not be simply dismissed, or taken wrongly.

As I've said many times before, God gave us the Psalms for meditation, for reflection about our lives, the world, the God of unfailing love, His kingdom and his promises. In order to truly assimilate these truths we must sit with them, we must think them over.

“Our habit is to talk about God, not to him. We love discussing God. The Psalms resist these discussions. They are not provided to teach us about God but to train us in responding to him. We don't learn the Psalms in until we are praying them.” Eugene Peterson, Answering God.

Through the Psalms we learn to be still before God, to think on his word, to mull it over, to allow it to hit us where God intends to hit us - right in the heart. Then to respond in prayer and worship. Our initial reactions to God's word are not always the right reaction..sometimes we are angry with God, frustrated, afraid, bitter, flippant. But while the Psalms allow us to express our raw emotions they simultaneously seek to shape them into righteous ones. With the Psalms we can approach God with brutal honesty, seeking to be rooted in truth and ready to submit to him.

Why is it so important to sit with Gods word and turn it into prayer? Prayer is of course important for many reasons; but listen to this reason -“Prayer is the way that all the things we believe in and that Christ has won for us actually become our strength. Prayer is the way that truth is worked into your heart to create new instincts, reflexes, and dispositions.” - Tim Keller
Prayer is the way God works his word and the new life in the Spirit into us..

1. The Declaration

1. **“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.”**
2. It is easy to become anxious in our world and we can probably think of a hundred ways to counter this verse, but here is what it's really getting at - "Being a christian is not walking a tightrope without a safety net high above a breathless crowd; it is sitting secure in a fortress." Eugene Peterson, A long obedience in the same direction
 1. **What about Depression and Doubt?** - The people of trust/faith are described as a rock solid mountain... but it seems nothing could be further from the truth... **"shall not be moved"** it says.. But we're moved by so many things, all the time - our jobs, the weather, our finances, our weight and health, the stock market, politics, NPR, CNN, Fox News, Facebook, and Twitter posts, our kids, our roommates, our spouse, a romantic relationship or lack thereof, a parking ticket....

2. But consider that this declaration was said of the people of Israel - they are not the most consistent bunch of people by any stretch of the imagination. One day they are rejoicing, singing songs of victory at the deliverance from Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea, the next day they are griping about God's lack of care or provision for water. One day they are bowing in worship to Yahweh, the next day they're sacrificing their babies to Asherah...
3. Some have referred to this as the "Saw-toothed history of Israel".. one day they are up, the next day they are down.. But here is an incredible thing -all the time as we read that saw toothed history, we realize something solid and steady - they are always God's people. God is steadfastly with them, in mercy and judgment, insistently gracious. He is the Faithful one! What shines through the inconsistency and the ups and downs of Israel's history is God's unfailing commitment to redeem his people, to fulfill his good promises to them and to the world. (Read the hall of faith passage in Hebrews 11, these are some seedy characters)
4. You see, sometimes we might feel as though we are rock solid, and that the Lord is with us, and then the next day we might feel the exact opposite. Our feelings are important and can tell us many things about ourselves... but our feelings cannot tell us anything about our relationship to God...whether we are up or down, whether we feel like we are saved or not, does not change my relationship to God. My security comes from who God is, it comes through the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ, not from how I feel. As God's people we must refuse to believe our depressions and choose to believe God. - **"As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore."** This is fact, not feeling.
 1. One of my favorite hymns, A Debtor to Mercy Alone says, "My name from the palms of hands eternity shall not erase, impressed on his heart it remains, these marks of indelible grace. Yes, I till the end shall endure, as sure as sure as the earnest is given, more happy but not more secure are the glorified saints in heaven."
 2. I cannot affirm enough how loved and secure we are in God. Those who trust in the Lord - who rest in the finished work of

Jesus Christ by faith cannot ultimately be moved. As we, as a church community, enter into a season of some uncertainty, as we break some of our normal rhythms and routines, it is so important to remind ourselves that our stability, security and foundation never changes, God will preserve his people for his kingdom and for his purposes.

3. What about Pain and Suffering?

1. **“For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong.”**
2. The Psalmist knows his fair share of trials and troubles - remember we’re talking about a people who saw Jerusalem being sacked, the temple burned, the priests murdered in the streets, the men brutally murdered, the woman raped, the children carried off to a foreign land... the promise of this Psalm though is not that no evil will ever happen but - “The ruling rod/scepter of the wicked shall not rest on the Land promised to the righteous.” The resting rule is reserved for Messiah, God’s King, and him alone.
3. The rule of wickedness or evil does not have the final word over God’s people. Evil, injustice, pain, suffering and trials cannot cancel God’s purposes. “Nothing counter to God’s justice has an eternity to it.”
4. R.C. Sproul says: “For the believer, there is no such thing as tragedy because in every situation God is working for our good. He is teaching us, drawing us close, deepening our faith, and giving us hope. Even death is not a tragedy to a believer because it is the doorway to the presence of God, the highest, deepest, and most lasting blessing there is.”
5. The promise of God’s preservation and eventual rule should keep God’s people from stretching out their hand to do wrong, or violence..as the Psalm says. Why? Because they know and trust God is ultimately in control, that God is protecting and preserving them. They dwell in Safety. Why do we stretch out our hands to do wrong? Usually it’s because we are fearful of some scarcity or evil happening to us, we feel threatened we do it out of self protection and self preservation... But listen again to the Psalm - **“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which**

cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.” We have no need to stretch out our hands to do evil - it would misrepresent God, it would be counter to his kingdom, but also because the Lord is protecting, and preserving us for his kingdom - it cannot be shaken...

4. What about Defection?

1. **“Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts! But those who turn aside to their crooked ways the Lord will lead away with evildoers!**
2. Doesn't this verse suggest the fact that we could defect; that we could turn aside from following Jesus? The Christian is never one who is confident in himself - **“those who trust in the LORD”**, Not those who trust in their morals, their performance, in their righteousness, in their health, in their pastor or doctor, in their president, in their economy or their nation. Those who trust in the Lord, will not be moved. Those that trust in his faithfulness that he is for us and will make us whole eternally...That he who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete until the Day of Christ Jesus.
 1. As the hymn says, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus name! On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.”
3. **“Peace over God's people,”** says, the Psalm! Relax. We are secure. God is seated on the throne of ultimate power in the universe - feelings of depression, facts of suffering, nor the possibility of defection are not evidence that God has or ever will abandon us. Our life with God is a sure thing - For Jesus Christ has secured it for us. He is the faithful one, our champion and forerunner of our faith!
 1. If you want assurance of your security don't look to yourself, look away from yourself - Look to Christ and Christ alone - see his perfect righteousness. It is yours! - all holiness in him is by faith/trust made ours, as if we had done it! See him there hanging on the tree in agony and God forsakenness - he does it for you, all your sin and mine, washed away by suffering and death of Jesus. Because of the work of Christ we are dearly

beloved sons and daughters and nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ. So hold fast to that Love of God.

4. Augustine said, "Only love of the immutable can bring tranquility."
 1. "There is only one thing that is immutable. It is God, his presence and his love. The only love that won't disappoint you is the one that can't change, that can't be lost, that is not based on the ups and downs of life or of how well you live. It is something that not even death can take away from you. God's love is the only thing like that. Not only can your poor performance not block it, but even the worst possible circumstances in this life - sudden death - can only give you more of it." -Tim Keller
 2. Peace be upon God's people!

Contemplation:

Reflection - What is moving you? What is giving you unrest and anxiety? What causes you to doubt God's protection and preservation?

Confession and Repentance - Let us confess those things that are moving us, causing us to doubt or fear. These are lies! He has promised, he alone is faithful and true, he alone will never let us down. Let us cling to this truth - **"Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever."**

Prayer - "Keep us, O Lord, for we cannot keep ourselves." X3

Thought - This is not to abandon our responsibility to trust, believe and obey but to humbly recognize that unless the Lord builds the house - the builders work in vain, unless our trust is in the Lord there is no true peace or rest...

Scripture - **"The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!" The Lord is**

good to those who depend on him, to those who search for him. So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord.” - Lamentations 3:19-26 (NLT)

“Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” - Romans 8:35-39 (NLT)

Prayer - Lord, I find the relentless transitions and changes of life exhausting. But you do not change, and you are a dwelling place. help me calm my heart through this truth. “For his mercies, they endure, ever faithful, ever sure.” I believe it, Help me experience it to the full. Continue to teach me that Christ’s righteousness satisfies justice and shows your love; help me to make use of it by faith as the ground of my peace, and of your favor and acceptance, so that I may live always near the cross. It is not my feeling the Spirit that proves my saved state but the truth of what Christ did perfectly for me. All holiness in him is by faith made mine, as if I had done it. Praise be to you Father Son and Spirit for the complete work of salvation and assurance of my security in you. May your peace rule in my heart today and work it’s way out to love and good works toward all. Amen