

Series: Songs of Hope for Troubled Times

VBC

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Psalm 124

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“Is God for Us?”

When I was a young dad—and my kids were really young

-we had this ritual—we called it skyrides

-I would toss them in the air and catch them—and they would yell—Do it again
Daddy!

-and if they had their way—it would go on for the rest of the afternoon—and well
into the night—maybe through the next year

But—as Chesterton once put it—grown ups are not strong enough to exult in monotony
whereas God is—

*“It is possible that God says every morning, ‘Do it again’ to the sun, and every
evening ‘Do it again’ to the moon...It may be He has the eternal appetite of
infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we”—
G.K. Chesterton*

Chesterton’s point is that God can rejoice and does—because joy is at the heart of God

-He is the happiest being in the universe—and we will not understand God until
we understand this

-that He rejoices every day in His creation—in its rhythms—and here’s what is
most amazing—His greatest delight is in us—Pro 8:31

-and so it figures that a number of the psalms reflect something of this...

-that God is utterly committed to us—read Psalm 124

Psalm 124 is one of 15 ascent psalms that were sung three times a year

-these were no solemn processions—this was dance

-that celebrated this—that God has this thing for us

-it was part of their spiritual rhythm, spiritual practice

-to interrupt their preoccupation with themselves and attend to the presence of
God

-and refresh themselves with memories of God’s generous favor

-aimed to ward off discouragement—reinforce faith and courage (give a taste of
the coming kingdom!)

-but more—it was a spiritual discipline

-for joyfulness—like gratefulness—is a learned skill

-most—especially religious types—can be joy impaired

- stuffy bores—grim, judgmental, depressive, sour and soul—wearying
- convinced that joy is off limits (do we have to sing so many joyous chorus?)
- that God—at best—simply tolerates us

Illustration—Mrs. Sawyer—generally put off

-lots of people imagine God like this—generally unhappy—the world hasn't worked out as He hoped—watches through His curtain—suspicious when we are at play—ticked every time we trespass on His turf

-but Psalm 124 does not read this way—for it tells us a couple of things we need to know—

1. GOD IS FOR US

-the Psalm begins with exuberant joy—an overwhelming confidence—read verses 1-2

-one line is sung—and everyone else jumps in as if to say—do it again!

-they are recalling what is sometimes overlooked—that in the critical moments of life—God was there *for them*

-words needed as an antidote to our periodic sadness

-words that correct occasional assumptions that God isn't there for us

-which means—and here's the second undeniable fact—

2. NO ONE CAN BE SUCCESSFUL AGAINST US

-it's not that there weren't challenges that took them to the end of themselves

-in a fallen world—a world whose posture is against those of faith

-there can be cruelties and tragedies and unannounced setbacks and disappointments

-within their song—it is clear their terrors were real—metaphors speak to their hellish moments

-the Egyptians and the Exodus, Gideon and the marauding Midianites, David and a taunting giant, Israel and the unnerving Philistines

-but in those moments—God was there for them—on their side

a. *if God had not been—they would have been swallowed up— read verse 3*
 -an enraged enemy would have swept in and consumed them whole

b. *if God had not been on their side—they would have been swept away— read verses 4-5*

-waters like a tsunami would have engulfed them

-seething waters would have drowned the life out of them

But none of this happened—because God is this God who summons, commands, addresses the forces of this world—read verses 6-7

- like the exodus—where God put the rampaging armies and terrifying waters in their place
- so in other conflicts He did not give them over as prey for the enemy's teeth
- did not leave them entrapped

- this is the ongoing theme of ascent Psalms
 - He guards our going out and coming in—121:8
 - the Lord surrounds His people—125:2
 - He cut in two the cords of the wicked—129:4

- and why? Because He can—read verse 8
- He is the sovereign One—Maker of heaven and earth
- in Him all things hold together—Colossians 1:17

APPLICATION

As much as we may want to embrace this psalm—declare these truths—

- we may find ourselves asking—is He really there for me?
- loss of work—inability to find employment—loss of health—prolonged pain—loss of a loved one—loss of a dream—a general sense of defeat

Illustration—Iraqi families—how would they read this psalm?

- a Bonhoeffer—just before he walked to the gallows?
- how much did God pay the psalmist to write this?

- occasionally people ask pastors about these matters—putting us in the position of being God's defenders
- Peterson describes such moments this way—
-“I am thrust into the role of a clerk in the complaints department of humanity, asked to trace down bad service, listen sympathetically to aggrieved patrons, try to put right any mistakes that I can and apologize for the rudeness of the management”

I don't always know the right responses

- but I know some of the wrong ones
- I know that Ps 124 was no media blitz—no press release
- God does not need a press secretary—need someone to apologize, explain, and defend
- He just needs someone to witness to what these travelers discovered on their journey—GOD IS A GOD OF SALVATION—Our God is for us!!!

And if you're not convinced—then read the Scripture

- for the story of the Bible isn't primarily about *our* desire for God—it's largely about *God's* desire for us—a desire that isn't lukewarm—but exuberant

-the most frequent promise in Scripture is—I will be with you
-the most amazing truth is *God is for us*

3. things underscores this—

a. GOD HAS SPARED NO EXPENSE FOR US

-“while we were yet sinners (when we had done nothing to deserve God’s favor) Christ died for us”—Rom 5:8

-moved heaven and earth to bring us to Himself
-sent a Son with the revealing name “God is with us”
-bore in His Son all of our guilt and shame so that we might stand forgiven

-determined through creation, the prophets, the Word, His Son—to get very close—sometimes too close for comfort
-dares to make us His bride—desires even to be in union with us
-abide with us—be the vine and we be the branches

-more than this—He was raised to live for us—live in us—intercede for us—Rom 8:27

-He even moves the events of life so that all things to work together for good for those who love Him—Rom 8:28

-if Scripture portrays God as this searching shepherd, careless farmer, reckless woman, extravagant father who runs to embrace the wayward son—how could there even be the notion that God is not for us?

-here’s the second major proof He is for us—

b. GOD WILL SPARE NO EXPENSE FOR US

“He who did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for us...how will He not also with Him grant us everything?”—Rom 8:32

-John Piper has referred to this verse as the most precious promise of Scripture

-if He gave us His Son—than giving us any thing else is easy—it’s nothing
-this is the point of Eph 1—“He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing—bestowed, drenched upon us His grace”
-given us everything we need to live out His will
-given us everything to be victorious—meaning—
(and here’s the third proof)

c. GOD HAS DEFEATED EVERY ENEMY DEDICATED TO OUR DEFEAT

-“Who will separate us from God’s love. Will tribulation...persecution?”—8:35

“In all of these things we overwhelmingly conquer”—8:37

-God has confronted and defeated the forces of darkness—defeated those who would swallow us whole, overwhelm us, rip us, and entrap us
-delivered us from the authority of the enemy—transferred us to His domain—Col 1:13

-disarmed the rulers of darkness—Col 2:15

-it's not that God promises an injury free world
-that we get everything our imperfect hearts want
-that there aren't attacks—heartaches and death

-but the enemy can only do what God permits him to do
-can only do what works out the ultimate will of God
-what in the end works out for our good

-we too can look into the heavens like the Psalmist and say—*Our help is in the Lord*
-meaning He takes every setback, discouragement—every pressure and pain—even death—and strips it of its destructive power and works it for His good and ours

-so that to our enemies we can say—
“Do what you must—but in the end, all of your words and all of your injury can only refine my faith, draw me closer to God, enlarge my reward, and transfer me to paradise”

CONCLUSION

Sometimes you have to leave the mountain

-go back down the hill

-everyone has to return to the valley of ambiguity—Ortberg—but sometimes you also have to go up

-so I am pronouncing a moratorium on joylessness

-until you have worked these three truths through