

150 Days in the Psalms

*I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"*

Chicago, Illinois and Concord, California are very different places. Not simply in terms of time zone or culture, but of topography. Chicago is one of the flattest cities in America. Concord, on the other hand, sits at the foot of Mount Diablo, which rises 3,849 feet. In that respect, Concord is a bit like Jerusalem. Step back, for a moment, with me to Old Testament times. To get to Jerusalem from any direction, you'd need to walk many hilly roads and eventually make one last trek up the hill to the city.

And what would you do when you entered the city? Well, Jerusalem was the political and economic center of ancient Israel. It was also the religious center, for it was home to the Temple, the very place that God resided on earth. Three times a year, most of the population of Israel would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, climbing those hills to offer sacrifices in the Temple. For it was in this holy city on a hill that Yahweh dwelt.

So, when the Psalmist writes "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?" he isn't speaking simply about casting his gaze towards the heavens. No, when he looked up toward the hills, he saw Jerusalem - God's home on earth. When he looked up to the hills and saw the Temple, he would remember that his "help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." This week's Psalms are categorized as Psalms of Ascent. While we don't know who wrote these Psalms, we do know how they were used. They were sung by the pilgrims heading up the hills to the holy city, where they would encounter Yahweh their God, who would protect them from stumbling and keep them safe from all spiritual harm.

How would we write these Psalms of Ascent in the 21st Century? Would we speak of lifting our eyes to the hills? Remember, God was not in the hills - he was in his temple, which could be seen as a beacon amidst the hills. So, we might not say "I lift my eyes to the hills." Perhaps we'd say "I lift my eyes to God's Word. I lift my eyes to the steeple. I lift my eyes to the font and altar. I lift my eyes to the cross - the cross where Jesus Christ dwelt for a time to take my sins away." For it is in these places - the Word, the Church, the Lord's Supper, and the cross where God dwells. Look to God for your salvation, for "The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."

*-Rev. Matthew Schettler
Resurrection Lutheran Church, Chicago, IL*

Psalm 120

Monday



The 120th Psalm is a psalm of prayer. It laments and cries out against the false teachers who commit murderous crimes, whose false teachings penetrate like a sharp arrow, powerfully shot. They spread themselves out like fire in a juniper bush, which burns easily and well, for it is fat and thick and susceptible to fire. In the same way, the people are much more susceptible to false teachings, which harmonize well with “reason”, than to true teachings, as St. Paul says in I Timothy 4:3.

¹ In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.

² Deliver me, O Lord,
from lying lips,
from a deceitful tongue.

³ What shall be given to you,
and what more shall be done to you,
you deceitful tongue?

⁴ A warrior's sharp arrows,
with glowing coals of the broom tree!

⁵ Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech,
that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!

⁶ Too long have I had my dwelling
among those who hate peace.

⁷ I am for peace,
but when I speak, they are for war!

Prayer

O Lord God, have mercy upon us, Your servants, who live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. We ask You to order the circumstances and opportunities of our lives, that we may live as holy people, whose lives may be an invitation to the way of peace and righteousness. Sanctify our hearts and lips, that our thoughts and words may be holy and profitable, and keep us from all slander and scandal. Grant this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Psalm 121

Tuesday



The 121st Psalm is a psalm of comfort, in which the psalmist comforts us by his example, so that we may remain strong in faith and wait for God's help and protection. For although it appears as though He sleeps or slumbers, so that we are struck down by the sun by day and the moon at night, yet it is not so, though we may think and feel it. For God watches and keeps us secure, and does not let the sun strike us dead. This we will come to know for certain at the last, though we can now only look forward to it.

- ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
- ² My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
- ³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- ⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- ⁵ The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.
- ⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
- ⁷ The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
- ⁸ The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

Prayer

O God, our Keeper, who dwells upon the eternal hills where all help comes, let Your mercies and providence watch over us day and night, that neither vanities nor terrors may disturb our peace and safety. Let us not be moved, but be fixed upon the Rock of Christ Jesus, and so order our steps in Your Word, until we come into Your presence to dwell with You forever. Amen.

Psalm 122

Wednesday



The 122nd Psalm is a psalm of thanks which gives thanks with joy for the Word of God, which in a specific city, namely Jerusalem, was given through a specific people, namely the Levites and Kings, and received by specific hearers, namely the tribe of Israel. How much is it to be lamented that, seeking everywhere for God’s Word and being nowhere able to find it, the children of Israel wound their way to idols. And we also sometimes do the same, as we fear, love and trust other things above God. But the Church is our Jerusalem, and Christ is our temple, city, altar, and mercy seat, to which, from which, and with which we seek and Hear His Word.

¹ I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Lord!”

² Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!

³ Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together,
⁴ to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the Lord,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

⁵ There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.

⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
“May they be secure who love you!

⁷ Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers!”

⁸ For my brothers and companions' sake
I will say, “Peace be within you!”

⁹ For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good.

Prayer

O Jesus, be pleased to preserve peace within the walls of Your Church, that all who love her peace may prosper and receive the blessings which You give to Your faithful people in the communion of saints. Take from her all schisms and divisions, that she may be strong in faith, abounding in hope, and rich in the treasures of love. And that, at the last, she may be removed to a fellowship of all those joys which are laid up for the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem which is from above. Grant this, O blessed Jesus, our only Mediator and Redeemer. Amen.

Psalm 123

Thursday



The 123rd Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the arrogant and proud who despise and scorn God's Word and His children. Not only the heathen consider the God and worship of the children of Israel as a work of error and sedition. Even among the Israelites themselves – the worshippers of idols and false gods, as well as false teachers with their multitudes, securely and arrogantly despised and scorned the true teaching of God. Even today does this also happen, so we must therefore trust in God's grace for us.

- ¹ To you I lift up my eyes,
O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
- ² Behold, as the eyes of servants
look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maidservant
to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the Lord our God,
till he has mercy upon us.
- ³ Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.
- ⁴ Our soul has had more than enough
of the scorn of those who are at ease,
of the contempt of the proud.

Prayer

O Lord God, have mercy upon us in all our troubles, in our contempt, in our poverty, and whenever we are oppressed by any injurious practices of the proud. You are our Lord and Master, and we are Your servants. Our eyes wait upon You till You have mercy upon us. Let us not be ashamed of our hope, nor unfaithful in our services, nor distrustful of Your providence, but make us diligent labourers in our calling and faithful in all Your house that we, first serving You, may at last sit down at Your table in Your Kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Psalm 124

Friday



The 124th Psalm is a psalm of thanks which thanks God that He protects His poor little band from the ruthless tyrants. He rescues them from the snares of the poisonous slander. These are as many and great as a great deep water and flood against His people. But, though their teeth be ever so malevolent and angry, God is yet greater and knocks their teeth out and breaks the snares and rescues His own from them, as we still daily ourselves experience.

¹ If it had not been the Lord who was on our side—
let Israel now say—

² if it had not been the Lord who was on our side
when people rose up against us,

³ then they would have swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;

⁴ then the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us;

⁵ then over us would have gone
the raging waters.

⁶ Blessed be the Lord,
who has not given us as prey to their teeth!

⁷ We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken,
and we have escaped!

⁸ Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

Prayer

O Lord God, we praise and bless Your Name, for in our troubles, You have stood on our side and pleaded for us against those who rise against us. It was Your hand, O Lord, and Your mercy that delivered us. To You we give praise for our redemption. Shine Your mercies upon us and destroy the temptations that could destroy our souls, that we, being delivered from sin, may be preserved to dwell with You forever. Amen.

Psalm 125

Saturday



The 125th Psalm is a psalm of thanks. It gives thanks that God will not forever tolerate the power of the ungodly teacher and officials over those who truly believe, teach, and hope in Him. Therefore, they need not be weary and for that reason fall away from the Word, but He would give all blessings to those who hope in Him.

¹ Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

² As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the Lord surrounds his people,
from this time forth and forevermore.

³ 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.

⁴ Do good, O Lord, to those who are good,
and to those who are upright in their hearts!

⁵ But those who turn aside to their crooked ways
the Lord will lead away with evildoers!
Peace be upon Israel!

Prayer

O Lord God, our Trust and Confidence, in whom those who trust in You will never be removed, but will stand fast forever, let Your mercies and the guard of holy angels stand round about us, and about all Your holy people, that we may be inaccessible by our enemies. O let us not put our hands to wickedness, and neither let our portion be in the lot of the ungodly, but let us receive the blessing which our Lord Jesus left to His Church, even the peace of God, to whom be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

Psalm 126

Sunday



The 126th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for the deliverance from the captivity in Babylon. It was written as a prophecy of comfort and hope for the people of Israel, that they may not despair their moribund state. At the end, the psalmist concludes that it happens, and must always happen to the saints, that they suffer first before they can rejoice. Conversely, the sinful world first rejoices before they get their suffering.

Therefore, the saints must sow with tears to reap afterward with joy. But, such seed is excellent and precious seed to bring forth such a fruit. But before weeping, one cannot see that it is so precious and worthy before God. But God loves His saints so much that He regards even their death, which is truly the most abominable, accursed seed of the world, as more precious than all of the world's treasures and goods.

¹ When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

³ The Lord has done great things for us;
we are glad.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like streams in the Negeb!

⁵ Those who sow in tears
shall reap with shouts of joy!

⁶ He who goes out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.

Prayer

O Lord God, who promised salvation to Your people, and has done great things for us already, deliver us from the captivity and bondage of sin and misery. Fill our hearts with holy sorrow and compunction whenever we trespass against You, and teach us so to deny ourselves, and crucify our lusts and all the temptations of the flesh, that we, going on our way with mourning and weeping, may when Your great harvest shall come, may face You with joy, through the mercies of Jesus Christ. Amen.