

Songs of Ascent Pt. 2

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, July 19, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today. Whether you are here IN PERSON or watching via the LIVESTREAM, you are most WELCOME. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. Let us turn to the Book of Psalms (cf. Psalm 120).

SETTING THE STAGE

FYI – This morning I want to continue our SERIES through the Songs of Ascent...

Q. What are the Songs of Ascent?

The Songs of Ascent are a special GROUPING of psalms within the broader Book of Psalms (cf. Psalms 120–134). As was noted last Sunday, the ancient Jews would use these psalms as traveling songs as they made PILGRIMAGE to Jerusalem for the annual feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks/Pentecost, and Tabernacles/Booths. Since the city is situated on a high hill (el. 2,700-ft), pilgrims would have to ASCEND or GO UP TO Jerusalem...

...Hence the name: SONGS of ASCENT.

NOTE 1 – The Songs of Ascent were SIGNIFICANT to the people of ISRAEL...

- a) They were used in PREPARATION for worship
- b) They were vital in promoting national SOLIDARITY
- c) They gave INSIGHT re. the nature/work of the LORD
- d) They were REVELATORY re. their place in/before Him

NOTE 2 – Being short and easy to memorize, they served ISRAEL well for generations. Now, millennia later, they continue to inform and impact BELIEVERS in EVERY age. Yes, we may be removed from the ancient Jews by time, space and culture, but the THEMES these psalms touch upon are timeless and timely! Thus, they are of BENEFIT for us as we JOURNEY through this life and make PILGRIMAGE unto our heavenly home.

NOTE 3 – I would like to spend the REMAINDER of our time looking at Psalms 120–124. It is NOT my intent to provide a thorough treatise of each work! Rather, I want to IDENTIFY and EXAMINE overarching PRINCIPLES that inform and impact our lives in Christ in 2020 and beyond!

LET'S DELVE IN...

PSALM 120

Psalm 120 (NIV)

- 1 I call on the Lord in my distress,
and he answers me.
- 2 Save me, Lord,
from lying lips
and from deceitful tongues.
- 3 What will he do to you,
and what more besides,
you deceitful tongue?
- 4 He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows,
with burning coals of the broom bush.
- 5 Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek,
that I live among the tents of Kedar!
- 6 Too long have I lived
among those who hate peace.
- 7 I am for peace;
but when I speak, they are for war.

FYI – The opening line of EVERY psalm presents the dominant THEME that biblical authors seek to address. Thus said, Psalm 120 (i.e., the first Song of Ascent) emphasizes the PRESENCE of the Lord in the midst of DISTRESS. Let us consider the opening verse...

Psalm 120

- 1 I call on the Lord in my distress,
and he answers me.

Q. What was the distress of this unnamed psalmist? Source of his sorrow and feeling of affliction?

Q. Though the Bible reveals God to be a present help in all troubles—what was troubling this writer?

A. The distress of being SURROUNDED by EVIL. Note that the author BEMOANS the fact that he lives in a world abounding with and characterized by wickedness—i.e., deception and violence (v. 2, 6–7). He also LAMENTS living far from Jerusalem, the holy habitation of God where there is truth and peace (v. 5). Note that the Songs of Ascent begin—geographically and spiritually—far from Jerusalem and concluded in the city!

Q. Can you relate to the sentiments expressed by this author?

Q. Have you ever bemoaned the fact that you live in this fallen/broken world?

Q. Have you ever known a season wherein you felt fed up with its deception and violence?

KEY – The key to this crisis of soul is in calling out to the Lord—i.e., recognizing HIS ability to save you from the corruption that pervades (v. 1–2). Moreover, those who journey through this life must realize that, in the end, He will RISE UP to punish all evil (v. 3–4)...

...BUT until that day of our passing or His Coming we must TRAVEL onward and upward to heavenly glory.

PSALM 121

Psalm 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?

2 My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

3 He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;

4 indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

6 the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;

8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

Q. What key theme is touched upon in this psalm?

A. The reality that our HELP come from the Lord (v. 1–2).

NOTE 1 – Though Psalm 120 and 121 were likely penned by different authors, there is a RELATIONSHIP between the themes they present. Both Songs of Ascent posit that God and God ALONE is our help in the midst of this ruined, distressing world. Besides Him, there is NO Savior (Isa. 43:11).

NOTE 2 – In this world we WILL know trouble and great sorrow (John 16:33). Man IS born unto adversity are surely as the sparks fly upward (Job 5:7). MANY are the afflictions of the righteous (e.g., physical, emotional, familial, interpersonal, financial, etc.)—yet the Lord delivers us from them ALL (Psalm 34:19)!

KEY 1 – Consider that the author both POSES and RESPONDS to his own question in **verses 1–2a** (see above).

KEY 2 – The author then spends the whole of the psalm DETAILING the nature/work of the Lord. God is OUR...

a) Helper (v. 1–2)

b) Keeper (v. 3–4)

c) Protector (v. 5–6)

d) Preserver (v. 7–8)

KEY 3 – These realities were NOT just true for the ancient people of God. They REMAIN true in ALL generations...

Hebrews 13:8 (Emphasis Mine)

8 Jesus Christ is the same **yesterday** and **today** and **forever**.

PSALM 122

Psalm 122 (of David)

- 1 I rejoiced with those who said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Lord.”
- 2 Our feet are standing
in your gates, Jerusalem.
- 3 Jerusalem is built like a city
that is closely compacted together.
- 4 That is where the tribes go up—
the tribes of the Lord—
to praise the name of the Lord
according to the statute given to Israel.
- 5 There stand the thrones for judgment,
the thrones of the house of David.
- 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May those who love you be secure.
- 7 May there be peace within your walls
and security within your citadels.”
- 8 For the sake of my family and friends,
I will say, “Peace be within you.”
- 9 For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your prosperity.

Q. What dominant theme is addressed in this psalm?

- A. The joy that comes from being in the presence of God (v. 1).

NOTE 1 – We must understand the OT relationship between Jerusalem and the presence of the Lord. Jerusalem was NOT simply a city like any other for the Jewish people. Rather, it was the place where God UNIQUELY manifested and dwelt (i.e., as David moved the Tabernacle to the city and was later replaced by the Temple in under Solomon). Thus, Jerusalem was holy, sacred, and NIGH other-worldly...

...Therefore, David rejoiced at the prospect of engaging God in Jerusalem in the midst of corp. worship (v. 1).

NOTE 2 – The remainder of the psalm can be broken down into TWO sections (BOTH centering upon the CITY):
a) the PRIORITY/SIGNIFICANCE of Jerusalem in v. 3–5 and b) an appeal to PRAY for Jerusalem (v. 6–8).

Q. How is this applicable to the NT believer and era?

KEY 1 – It is true that we NO longer pilgrimage to Jerusalem to engage the Lord in a Tabernacle or Temple. In fact, the Lord NO longer uniquely dwells in a man-made structure—but WITHIN His people. We are now the TABERNACLE or TEMPLE wherein He resides (cf. 1 Cor. 3, 6). Thus, we have INTIMACY with God that David would have NEVER deemed possible. This is the joy and wonder of the NEW Covenant (i.e., nearness to God). Yet...

KEY 2 – I posit that there is still BENEFIT in corporate worship and connection. I maintain that it is a GOOD thing when someone invites me to a time of worship, prayer and beyond. I LOVE assembling as His church because there is a UNIQUE manifestation of His Spirit when we are together...

Matthew 18:20

20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

KEY 3 – In many ways the JEWISH emphasis on the city of Jerusalem seems ALIEN to us. This is understandable as we live in a different age and spiritual dispensation! However, the day will come when all of the righteous will dwell eternally in the NEW JERUSALEM with God (cf. Rev. 21–22). At that time the prayer of David will be ANSWERED, as the City of Peace will know peace as the One who is peace resides there with His people...

...Even so, come QUICKLY Lord Jesus!

Until that day—we TRAVEL onward and upward unto heavenly ZION!

PSALM 123

Psalm 123

- 1 I lift up my eyes to you,
to you who sit enthroned in heaven.
- 2 As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a female slave look to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the Lord our God,
till he shows us his mercy.
- 3 Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy on us,
for we have endured no end of contempt.
- 4 We have endured no end
of ridicule from the arrogant,
of contempt from the proud.

NOTE 1 – Having looked AHEAD to the glories of Jerusalem (i.e., heavenly glory) in Psalm 122, Psalm 123 brings us down from the mountaintop into the VALLEY. Note the progression and sense of movement in the Songs of Ascent! Herein we are confronted with the fact that we are STILL in the midst of a broken, ruined world—i.e., a world full of deception and violence (cf. Psalm 120) AND unending HARASSMENT from the ungodly (v. 3b–4).

Q. What is the appropriate or godly response in such a spiritual condition?

A. To look to the Lord and trust in Him for His sustaining MERCIES (v. 1, 3–4).

NOTE 2 – I love the imagery and simile utilized in **verse 2**. In the same way that SLAVES (male and female alike) looked to the hands of their master(s) for provision, protection, security, etc., so WE are to look to the Lord. This reminds me of a central biblical truth: i.e., a relationship with God is NOT a relationship amongst EQUALS. He is LORD and we live to serve Him. He does NOT live to serve us!

KEY – The ONLY way to navigate this sinful world full of sinful people is to ENTRUST oneself to the care of God and trust in His MERCY. In the end, He shall be found faithful—and the faithful believer will find ULTIMATE respite and reward in Him. Until that day—we TRAVEL onward and upward unto heavenly Jerusalem!

PSALM 124

Psalm 124 (of David)

1 If the Lord had not been on our side—
 let Israel say—
 2 if the Lord had not been on our side
 when people attacked us,
 3 they would have swallowed us alive
 when their anger flared against us;
 4 the flood would have engulfed us,
 the torrent would have swept over us,
 5 the raging waters
 would have swept us away.

6 Praise be to the Lord,
 who has not let us be torn by their teeth.
 7 We have escaped like a bird
 from the fowler's snare;
 the snare has been broken,
 and we have escaped.
 8 Our help is in the name of the Lord,
 the Maker of heaven and earth.

Q. What dominant theme is addressed by David herein?

A. David celebrates PAST protection and provision in distress (v. 1–5).

NOTE 1 – If the PREVIOUS Songs of Ascent looked to God for provision and supply in the PRESENT and unto the FUTURE, Psalm 124 looks BACK over PAST victories in Him. DAVID could say—at the time of this writing—that God had been with Him and seen him through many difficulties and challenges. The ancient Jewish PILGRIMS—in their season(s) of singing—could say that God had carried them through many adverse afflictions...

Q. Is this something that you can say?

Q. Looking back can you see the hand of God?

Q. Can you see His supernatural aid, prov. & supply?

Q. To what degree can you attest to the reality of this song?

Amazing grace, How sweet the sound
 That saved a wretch like me.
 I once was lost, but now I am found,
 Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
 And grace my fears relieved.
 How precious did that grace appear
 The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
 I have already come,
 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
 And grace will lead me home.

NOTE 2 – Our PRIMARY focus should be onward and upward to heavenly Jerusalem. We should be a people abounding with and motivated by HOPE (i.e., a confident expectation of good in store ahead). Yet every now and then, look BACK and revel in the PAST provisions of God. They will encourage you to believe in the present and unto the future HE has for you...

...And this SHOULD motivate us to praise! Note how v. 1–5 set the STAGE for the final elements of the psalm!

Psalm 124 (Emphasis Mine)

1 If the Lord had not been on our side—
let Israel say—

2 if the Lord had not been on our side
when people attacked us,

3 they would have swallowed us alive
when their anger flared against us;

4 the flood would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over us,

5 the raging waters
would have swept us away.

6 **Praise** be to the Lord,
who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

7 We have escaped like a bird
from the fowler's snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we have escaped.

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

SUMMATIONS

I can only IMAGINE how these Songs of Ascent would have impacted ancient JEWS pilgrimaging to Jerusalem. However, I can know and experience the realities of the themes they touch upon. As for me and my house, we WILL work to embrace and apply what has been shared today.

Q. What about you and yours? PRAYER

CONCLUSION PT. 1

KEY – Homework...

July 26 – Ps. 125–129

CONCLUSION PT. 2

KEY – Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church WEBSITE (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may place your donation in the OFFERING BOXES in this Sanctuary.

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.