

PSALM 121 verses 1-8

- I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From whence 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 smite 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 for evermore.

MEDITATION

Psalm 121 is another well-known psalm and to traditional Scottish Presbyterians it is popular in its metrical version, "I to the hills will lift mine eyes." In its original setting in ancient Israel it was one of the "Songs of Ascent" which pilgrims used to sing as they made their way up to Jerusalem for one of the great festivals. The likelihood is that they sang this one as Mount Zion came into view, the hill on which the sacred city stood.

So, the psalmist tells us that he lifts his eyes to the hills and then he poses a question: "from where does my help come?" He is not suggesting that his help comes from the hills, but from the Lord who made the hills, the Lord who created heaven and earth.

We would do well to lift our eyes to the hills. Living, as most of us do, in central Scotland, we are surrounded by so much that is man-made. There are houses, shops, schools, offices, factories, built by human-beings. There are cars, buses, trains, bikes, manufactured by people. We need to look beyond all these to the natural world, to the world created by God. When we see the rugged grandeur of hills and mountains, we are reminded of the God of power.

But as far as the psalmist is concerned, God may be mighty and powerful, but he is also caring. He will not allow our foot to stumble. He watches over us and he does so without slumbering or falling asleep. His vigilance is constant.

There's a story which has come down to us from ancient times. It tells how the Persian army captured Sardis, a city in Asia Minor. Sardis lay in a strong position, well-nigh impregnable. Behind it lay Mount Tmolus and from the mountain there

jutted out a ridge of rock like a pier. That's where the citadel of Sardis was built. Its army was confident that no one would capture it. But one night a band of Persian soldiers climbed up the cliffs to the top and they found the battlements completely unguarded. The garrison never imagined that anyone would climb these cliffs by night and so they went to their beds and slept. They failed to keep watch. God is not like that. He keeps watch over us, day and night, never taking time to sleep or doze.

However, we cannot expect God to do for us what we can do for ourselves. We need to be watchful as well. As Covid-19 becomes less prevalent in this country, it would be easy to show less concern about keeping two metres away from others, washing our hands regularly and all the other precautions we need to take. It will not be God's fault if we become careless and catch the virus.

The psalmist closes by reminding us that God keeps guard over our going out and our coming in. This matters at the present time, as the restrictions of lockdown are gradually eased and we are able to go out and about more. Having been limited in our movements for so long, some people have developed agoraphobia or fear of open spaces. Others have simply lost some self-confidence. Whether or not we have been affected, it's good for us to know that God watches over all our movements, outside and in. So, let's place our trust in his protection.

PRAYER

How wonderful indeed, O Lord, are all your works! We lift up our eyes to the hills; we see the beauty and splendour of your creation; and we offer you our praise. We lift up our eyes to the skies, to the sun and the moon, the stars and galaxies around us, and we realise they are too vast for us to understand. We can only bow in awe as we come before you.

We ourselves are wonderfully made; by your breath were our bodies formed from the dust, shaped, stage by stage over millions of years. In you we live and have our being and no detail of our lives is overlooked by you, for you care for us.

Forgive us, O God, for our blindness to your workmanship. We have enjoyed the creation, but have ignored the Creator. We have misused your precious gift of life and have blundered into darkness. Grant us the forgiveness which allows us a fresh start. Remake us this day and light up for us afresh the meaning of the whole of life.

Ever watchful God, we acknowledge your unfailing love for us. Even when we sleep, your care for us does not cease. When we go out and when we come in, you keep us safe. However much we forget, you never fail to remember us. However often we prefer our own will to yours, you still go on loving us. We grasp that your love for us was so great that you sent us your Son.

Ever watchful God, as we experience your love for us, help us to show our love for you by living as you mean us to live. Give us such trust in your power that we may be willing to take risks in your service. Remind us of your power to help not only us, but all your people.

Enable men and women all over the world to make fitting use of the earth's resources. Teach the people of our own nation that true greatness lies in service to others. We

pray for the sick and the suffering, asking that your life-giving love may fill their whole being. We pray too for all who seek to help them, that they may be guided by you.

We pray for our own loved ones, remembering that it is your love which has bound us together. So, we ask you to purify all our earthly loves.

We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.