

Psalm 121: 1-8; “The Lord is Your Keeper”, A Communion Sermon
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 6th, 2016,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.

The Psalmist begins this psalm with a holy resolution of what he will do. He will “lift up his eyes to mountains”, or “to the hills” as our translation renders it. He knows that this is where his help comes from. He is not saying that his help literally comes from the physical mountains and hills that he was gazing at. They might afford him earthly protection from his enemies at times, but that is not how he is thinking of them. He is saying that his faith is strengthened by what he is looking at. He is actually looking up and seeing the mountains, but he is at the same time looking beyond them, by faith, to God. He cannot see God with His eyes, but he can see Him with the eyes of faith, with the eyes of his heart.

The Lord God is the Keeper of Israel through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord’s keeping of His people is described for us here, in three wonderful ways. 1st – He keeps their foot from slipping. (verse 3) 2nd – He is continually protecting His people through the Mediation of His Son. (verses 4-7) And 3rd – He is continually guarding their going out and coming in. (verse 8) As I relate these to you, I would have you to remember that the Lord Jesus died in order that these things could become a reality in your everyday experience. If you have never believed in Him I urge you to listen so that you might come to know His eternal protection and care.

1st of all - If you are a believer, the Lord Jesus is always there to keep your foot from slipping. (verse 3a)

“He will not allow your foot to slip (or to be moved); He who keeps you will not slumber.” “Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” The person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is saying to the Lord God: I want to have a new life. I want to be forgiven of my sins and I want to walk with Jesus upon the path of righteousness. If you have believed in the gospel that Christ died so that your sins could be forgiven, and you have really sought the Lord so that this would become a reality in your heart and life, then you are saved by the Lord. But, now ask yourself: What will keep me from going back to my old lifestyle of sin? Who will keep me on this path of righteousness and keep my foot from slipping back to the old paths of sin? Once again, it is the Lord Jesus. He will not allow your foot to slip.

Turn with me over to Psalm 40 and you will see the basis of this. This is a psalm of David, but it is a psalm that speaks not only of him but also of David’s Lord. “I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry.” “He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps.” “He has put a new song in my mouth – praise to our God; many will see it and fear and will trust in the Lord.” “Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.” “Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.”

There is a care that is being extolled here by David; a care which God exercised toward him personally. It is a watch care that extends to all of God’s elect, all those whom He has chosen in Christ; all those who trust in His Son for salvation. That watch care consists, first, in God’s showing you the truth about your own sinfulness and the consequences of it, so that you begin to pray and cry out to God for His mercy to be shown to you. Sometimes, even after we are converted to Christ, we do not see our sins as well as we should. We do not see where we are weak in relation to temptation.

We do not know the power of indwelling remaining corruption in our hearts. We thought that if the guilt of sin was gone, that the power of sin was also gone. We do realize after we are converted, or we should, that sin’s dominion is broken. But often we do not realize that sin will try to crawl back up on the throne of our life and reign over us again. We know that we have believed

in Christ, and we know that He is ruling and reigning in us now; but we did not suspect the strength of the battle that lay before us after we first believed. And so we come to find by sad experience that we must still continue to cry to Him for His grace and His mercy to be shown to us. We must continue to cry to Him that His help would be given to us. Do you know the reality of this in your personal experience? If you do not, perhaps you do not know your own heart.

God is the keeper of His people, and He would not have their foot to slip fatally and finally, and so, by the grace of Christ, He rescues them. How blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust. He delivered David; He rescued him from himself so that his foot would not slip forever. He does this for all of His Elect people in relation to prayer, and He does it in relation to their confession of their sins. David does not mention his sins directly at first here in this Psalm. He does mention later in verse 14 that wicked men have been seeking his life. Proud men, who turned aside to lies had come to lay in wait for his life. He was hounded by these men.

David describes these consequences of his sins as a horrible pit. He sees himself as having fallen into it, and he is stuck in the miry clay at the bottom of it. But he sees the pit of the consequences of his sins as so much greater, as he views himself in the sight of a holy God. Look at verses 11 and 12. "Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O Lord; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me." He knows and believes that God alone is the keeper of His soul. "For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me."

But God had pulled David up out of the pit of sin, before, in His conversion. He had established his steps on the path of righteousness. He had put a new song in his mouth. He would keep His soul and do him good, even through this terrible trying time in his life. The Lord had become his keeper. David would praise and extol the Lord for this. In verse 5 he says, "Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." Truly this is the Lord keeping His people. It is based upon His faithfulness to Himself, His covenant, and His promises. The Lord providentially ordered all things for David's good and watched over him in them.

But the basis of this keeping is found in verse 6. "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened." "Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require." No ceremonial sacrifices or offerings would do for this. "Then I said, "Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me." "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart." This is not written merely of David's understanding of himself. He was indeed the "man after God's own heart". But how did God keep Him during the times of his sins? He did so through what Christ did on the cross; what Christ would do for him a thousand years after he sinned.

He did it on the basis of sovereign love and grace. David saw this by faith. All believers, Old Testament and New must see this by faith. Verse 16 says, "Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, "The Lord be magnified!" "But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me." "You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God." I wonder if you realize just how great the Lord's care and keeping power are toward you, O believer? You may be poor and needy, but the Lord is thinking upon you. He is thinking upon you every moment of every day to do you good.

What ought to be your attitude if you have been praying and seeking the Lord for His keeping help? It ought to be that the Lord be would be magnified. It is that you would have all the things that He is doing for you, through your Lord Jesus Christ, to be seen in a greater and greater size in your mind and the minds of others. May the Lord be magnified! This is how you come to have a right attitude in all of your trials. You pray that the Lord would be seen as great. How big a God do you have? Is there anything too difficult for Him? Sometimes we do not even begin to understand that His thoughts toward us are so many and so great that they cannot be numbered or set in their order in our own minds. The Lord is indeed the keeper of His people. But we must examine our

faith. Your faith is built by resting upon the promises that He gives to us in the word. You say to me, “But my heart is so utterly sinful and treacherous”. Yes, this is true, it is.

But remember the words of Micah 7: 18? “Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?” “He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.” “He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities.” The Lord is the only One who can do this great thing; to subdue your iniquities. But He shall do that very thing because He is your Keeper. Another person who is strong in faith and obedience may say, “I have been doing the right thing.” “I have kept myself from my iniquity.” Yes, that was God’s grace working in you, to keep you from slipping into sin. You must still pray to be kept, beloved. Take nothing of your faith and obedience for granted.

2nd – The Lord God is continually protecting His people through the Mediation of His Son. (Verses 3b and 4)

“He who keeps you will not slumber.” “Behold He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber or sleep.” Having listened to all that I have said to up to this point, you might say to me: But I am not as watchful against the sins of my heart as I should be. No doubt this is true. But there is one who is ceaselessly watching, and He is not watching over you to condemn you, but to save you, and to deliver you from these heart sins of yours. He is watching over you to do you good if you’re trusting in Jesus. “He who keeps you will not slumber.” “Behold He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleeps.”

This promise is not here simply for the protection of Israel from their enemies by Jehovah’s ceaselessly watching on their behalf. It is for the New Testament people of God, so that they will understand that the Lord God Almighty is ceaselessly watching over them for good, and He does not grow tired in doing so. What man if he is a guard on watch, if he has been watching for a long time in the middle of the night, when everyone else is asleep, does not feel tempted to let down his guard in his watch? He must steel himself in his determination to keep awake. But the Lord’s strength in watching is never diminished; He never grows tired of watching over His loved ones. We may grow very weary in watching and praying but, “He who keeps you will not slumber”.

If you will recall, on the night in which our Lord Jesus was betrayed, He had come into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, and He asked the disciples to watch with Him. But they could not do it. He came to them a little later and found them sleeping and said to Peter, “What, could you not watch with Me one hour?” “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” He went away a second time to pray and came back a little later and found them asleep again; it says, “for their eyes were heavy”. In Mark it says that when He woke them, and confronted them with their inability to watch for even one hour, that “they did not know what to say”.

In Luke’s gospel it says that, “He found them sleeping from sorrow.” What does this tell us? It tells us that there are many things that are truly spiritual, things which are of great importance and significance to God, in terms of our obedience to Him, that we as believers are not able to do, even when we want to do them; even when we might be resolved to do them. And did Christ condemn these disciples and repudiate them at that critical hour? No, He went to the cross and died for them. This was Christ keeping them. He reproves them. He says to them, “Why do you sleep?” “Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” But He does not make their perfect obedience in this matter the condition of His keeping them. No, His perfectly keeping them rests upon His own redemptive work. And His redemptive work included the prayers that He prayed for His disciples to be kept as He was going to the cross. It was because of what He would do there, in His sufferings on our behalf, which would establish our being kept by God.

Christ uses means in His keeping of God’s people. He gives them grace to abide in the truth of His word. He keeps us in that path by righteousness by showing us verses in His word which will strengthen our faith in learning to do God’s will. Indeed He died for this very thing, that we might be crucified to the world. He died in order that we might put off all the sins of the flesh. He died so

that the ruler of this world would be cast out and that his works might be destroyed in us. This ought to give us great gladness now as we come to the Lord's table and eat of His supper. He has prepared this ordinance so that we might remember that our God keeps us. Our Lord Jesus Christ keeps us in the faith and keeps us from sin, by His own watch-care over our souls, and our lives. We will now come down front to gather together to rejoice in these truths of His saving and keeping of our souls.

3rd - The Lord God is continually guarding the going out and coming in of His people.

(Verse 5-8)

“The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand.” “The sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.” “The Lord will protect you from all evil; He shall keep your soul.” “The Lord shall guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.” When the Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, He did not lead them directly into the promised land. It was because of their sin of unbelief that that He led them instead into the wilderness for 40 years. But in His mercy and because of His love, He gave them the pillar of cloud to protect them by day and the pillar of fire by night.

These were not only symbols of His guiding them, preserving them, and keeping them. They were tangible realities. The Lord would come down and speak to them in the pillar of cloud. The Lord would literally protect them by the pillar of fire. He would shade them from the heat of the sun by the pillar becoming shade for them in some general sense. He would warm them and give them light by night by the pillar of fire. In this way He was their keeper. These are pictures of what God does for us in Christ. In Christ, God has come down and spoken to us. In Christ God has become our shade on our right hand.

He is, as Matthew Henry says it, our umbra, our shadow. He says: “God promises to be their umbra – their shadow, to keep as close to them as the shadow does to the body, and to shelter them from the scorching heat, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” This is what God does for us, Christ's church, and every member of it through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In our Lord Jesus Christ He leads us through the wilderness of this world by His word and by His presence with us. He protects us and lights our way before us so that we do not walk in darkness. He watches us and goes with us and guards our going out and our coming in, all through our days here upon the earth, and bringing us to Himself when we die.

And what is most important of all; He keeps us from all evil; He keeps our soul. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 4: 18, “And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom.” “To Him be glory forever and ever.” “Amen.” As we partake of these elements, let us think of the words of Jude, in verse 24 of his little epistle. “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” “To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, before all time and now and forever.”

If God has saved us, then He is well able to keep us. But that does not mean that we do not need to pray and ask Him that we might be more holy? Let us pray that He would keep us from stumbling. This is the stumbling of sin. “We all stumble in many ways” it says in James 3: 2. But here it says that God is able to keep us from stumbling. He will indeed present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy in that Day when we see Him face to face.