

Lifting Up Our Eyes unto the Hills

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Bible Text: Psalm 121:1-2
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We turn in sacred scripture to Psalm 121. This is the Psalm, or this is the passage of scripture that the elders have, that the consistory has chosen for family visitation and the schedule will begin in a few weeks, and so we have this morning the sermon that introduces this passage and, Lord willing, will help us in our discussion and fellowship to glean from the passage and to apply it to our lives during family visitation. Psalm 121,

1 A Song of degrees. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. 2 My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. 3 He will not suffer [not allow] thy foot to be moved [to slip]: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. 4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The LORD is thy keeper [protector] : the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. 6 The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. 7 The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. 8 The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

So far we read God's holy and infallible word. It will be profitable to keep our Bibles open as we work through the Psalm and consider also the context, the surrounding Psalms in the preaching this morning.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the life of the Christian is the life of a pilgrim. As Christians, we are pilgrims and strangers on the earth. That is our reality. And when you look at the scriptures, you see that scriptures emphasize this idea all the way through, from the beginning to the end. Think of right away in Genesis, think of Abraham, the father of believers, who his whole life was spent really as a pilgrimage, at least from the time he was called out of Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan. That was a pilgrimage. And then his whole life, for the next hundred years, in or so, in the land of Canaan, he lived in tents, dwelling with Isaac and Jacob in tents because he was looking for a different city, a heavenly city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Abraham, the father of believers, was a pilgrim. Think of Moses. Think of the entire nation of Israel during the 40 years of the wilderness wanderings, which is really like a template or a pattern for our whole earthly sojourn. They lived in booths. They lived in tents as the Lord led them on for 40 years on a pilgrim journey through the wilderness to the land of Canaan.

When you get to the New Testament, it's no different. For just one example from the New Testament, think of the whole book of 1 Peter. The whole book of 1 Peter takes this as its underlying theme, we are pilgrims and strangers. The Apostle Peter writes, "I beseech you, dearly beloved, as those who have been begotten again from the dead unto a living faith, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as pilgrims and strangers, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul."

The life of the Christian is the life of a pilgrim through and through, heading to our heavenly home, the celestial city, and the life of a pilgrim is not easy. As we know, there are many struggles. There are many challenges and uncertainties. We need help on the way. We need encouragement along the path. We need a place to look for help. I bring this up because what the Consistory wants to do this year in family visitation is encourage you in exactly this way, to encourage you in your pilgrim sojourn, and to direct your eyes as you keep walking through the wilderness wanderings of this world to keep directing your eyes to the hills, keep directing your trust to the Lord and to the help and the comfort and the certainties that are yours in Jesus Christ. What the Consistory wants to do is give you that confidence and refresh you in that encouragement that scripture affords us as you navigate the path that God is calling you to walk at this time. These are difficult times. We all have our own difficulties and hardships. A pilgrim journey always has its hardships and the Consistory thought this year would be a good thing to focus on encouraging you.

One passage that gives us a great help and encouragement is Psalm 121, Psalm 121 which is a pilgrim Psalm, we could even say the pilgrim Psalm, Psalm 121 which gives encouragement to the pilgrim as he makes his trek to the heavenly city. This is the Psalm we're using for family visitation. Before we dive into the Psalm, I want to make one note on the first verse and the translation of the first verse. As you notice in the King James, the last part of verse 1 is a statement, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." The Psalter numbers though, all the Psalter numbers of Psalm 121 in the Psalter turn that into a question. "To the hills I lift mine eyes, whence shall help for me arise?" Or, "I to the hills will lift my eyes, oh whence shall come my aid?" In the King James it's a statement, in the Psalter it's a question. That might not seem like a big deal, but it raises the question, how are we supposed to understand verse 1? What are these hills that I am looking toward? Are these the hills of Jerusalem, beautiful for situation, hills of beauty and glory where Jehovah dwells in his temple? Or, in a quite different sense, are these the hills that surround me as I'm making my trek to Jerusalem, the hills on either side where danger lurks, wild animals or bandits or thieves? Well, I want us to recognize that both ideas are possible. I think we can make use of both ideas as we think on this passage, but I'm going to stick with the King James. I'm looking to the hills of Jerusalem because that's where my help comes from, and that's where we get the theme for family visitation and the theme for the sermon this morning, lifting up our eyes to the hills positively, that's where our help comes from.

We look at this theme under four points. First, we look at the glorious pilgrimage we're on. Second, we look at the difficult path, the difficulties that mark this path. Third, the strong encouragement. And then fourth, the personal resolution. As I just said a moment ago, Psalm 121 is a pilgrim Psalm, and I mean that rather technically. Psalm 121 was one of the Psalms that the Israelites would sing as they made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem from the towns and the villages in the countryside to Jerusalem to celebrate the different feasts throughout the year. Remember, three times a year, the Israelites had to make their pilgrim journey to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, and as they walked, they sang and Psalm 121 was one of the songs they sang.

That's obvious from the content of the Psalm. That's also obvious from the title, the heading that is given, "A Song of Degrees," and the idea is this, maybe many of you know, as the pilgrims traveled from the countryside to Jerusalem, they quite literally went up. They ascended in elevation to the city of Jerusalem, because the city of Jerusalem was situated on a cluster of hills, Mount Zion, Mount Moriah, other surrounding hills. And from Jerusalem, the land sloped downward in all directions, so that no matter what direction the people came from, they were quite literally climbing up to get to the city. So you might say step by step or degree by degree, the people made their way up to Jerusalem. That's why it's called a song of degrees.

Now what's interesting is that this heading, "A Song of Degrees," is not only given to Psalm 121, but it's given to all the Psalms from Psalm 120 to 134. In this whole section of the songbook, you have a collection of the songs that the pilgrims would sing as they observed the feasts. For example, Psalm 120, this is the first song of degrees. I should actually preface that comment by saying this. What's also interesting is that there's a logical order to these Psalms, a chronological order you might even say, so that as you read through these Psalms, you get a sense of what the pilgrims were experiencing, what they were thinking about as they observed the feasts. So Psalm 120 describes the challenges that the pilgrim experiences as he begins his journey, leaving his home, leaving his town and there's all kinds of temptations to stay behind and not begin the journey. Psalm 121 is the Psalm that describes what the journey's like and the dangers along the journey. Psalm 122 is the Psalm that describes what the people were experiencing when they were right there nearing Jerusalem and they were about to enter the city. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD." We're here. We've made it to Jerusalem. And then the rest of the Psalms in this section describe the experiences that they enjoyed as they kept the feast.

So this Psalm is a Psalm, the Psalm that would have been sung right in the middle of their journey to Jerusalem. Psalm 121 is a pilgrim Psalm and I think we know what a pilgrim is, but let's just state it explicitly. A pilgrim is one who's on a journey. A pilgrim is not one who is lost. A pilgrim is not a wanderer going here and there. It's not just a vagabond. No, a pilgrim is one who has set out on a particular pathway. He has a particular destination in mind, and he's walking the path that leads for him to his destination. He knows where he's going, he's eager to get there, and he's always focused on his destination. And exactly because he's so focused on his destination, when he travels, the

land that he's traveling through is simply that. He's merely passing through it. He's not at home there. He doesn't want to stay there. The things that he sees on his journey do not ultimately satisfy him because the situation is this, he has his heart, he has his mind set on his destination and arriving there.

That's exactly how it was for the Old Testament saints on their march to Jerusalem. Their hearts and their minds were set on the destination, the holy city. For comparison, or just to help us think about this, keep in mind that these feast days that they were going to were holidays. These were religious holy days that they were observing. Right before the spring harvest, right after the spring harvest, and right after the fall harvest, the Israelites would make the journey to Jerusalem and they would feast and they would celebrate. It would be like family vacations, where they would spend a full two weeks together, perhaps, making the trip to the destination, keeping the feast, and journeying back. And as they journeyed, they would meet up with other pilgrims going to the same holiday, going to the same journey and they would fellowship with them as they continued the journey. And as they journeyed, they would be anticipating all the wonderful sights and the sounds and the smells and the experiences that they would have at their destination, especially the event of going to the temple and being with the Lord and worshipping the Lord in his holy temple. Just think of it. There at the temple, the child of God who lives way out in a village, is going to be with the Lord in a special way. There he's going to be able to offer his lamb that he's maybe carrying with him along his pilgrim journey. There at the temple, he will be able to give his thank offerings. He will be able to express in a special way his thanks to the Lord. There at the temple, he will also be assured by the priest that his sins are forgiven. He'll see the blood of the lamb being sprinkled for him. And there at the temple, he will hear the blessing of the priest pronounced upon him with outstretched arms. This is where he's going to enjoy the nearness and fellowship of his God and so the point is, as a pilgrim, his mind and his heart is set on this, "I'm going to the holy city. I'm going to the royal city, the city of my God." It was all a very exciting time of fellowship and anticipation.

Well, let's apply that to ourselves today because all these things are written for our instruction. This is the reality we have today. You and I also are pilgrims. We know that we're on a pilgrim journey our whole life long. We are those who have been chosen by God, just as Israel was chosen and set apart by God. We've been chosen by God. We've been redeemed through the blood of the Lamb. We've been those who passed through the Red Sea, we've been we've been made God's peculiar people. And not only are we born again, well, I should say, we are subsequently those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. We've been born again by the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Not only have we been born again, but we've been born from above, so that we've been changed. We're no longer a citizen of the kingdom of darkness, but we've been translated into the kingdom of light. My citizenship is now in heaven. That's my home. And now I've suddenly been put on this pathway as a converted child of God. I am like Christian in "Pilgrim's Progress," who's delivered from the city of destruction and who's now on the pathway to the celestial city. That's our whole life. And for us, there is a destination that has been marked out for us. We've been put on the pathway. We've been given a road map, the scriptures. We've been given the Holy Spirit as our companion and guide, and

the destination is the royal city, the holy city of the Maker of heaven and earth, the place where God dwells in his holy temple and our whole life as Christians is but a journey to this celestial city.

And today is Sunday. Today we're getting a foretaste of it, and today we're also getting, as it were, a little break from the journey. We're taking a drink from the water of life and eating of the bread of life. We're resting at this oasis, this wayside, along our pilgrim journey, being refreshed and encouraged. And now as we walk to that city, we walk as families. We share with our children the hopes and the anticipation that is ours. As we walk, we meet up with other fellow pilgrims and we walk the path together through this life. And as we walk, it's like we're on our way to a special holiday. We're going to a feast. We're going to see the high priest, Jesus Christ himself. I'm going to see the Lamb of God whose blood was shed for me. I'm going to see him in his glory. And I'm not only going to see him, but I'm going to hear him speak his word of blessing upon me. At the same time, not only am I going to see the Lamb, but I'm going to see the lion from the tribe of Judah. I'm going to go to the palace of the King and see him in his royal glory, sitting on the throne as King of kings and Lord of lords. And there's so many things that we're going to get to enjoy when we get to that city. I'm going to be brought into his holy temple, into the most holy place. I'm going to sit down and feast at the marriage supper of the Lamb. I've got a chair at the table of the King in his house, in his palace.

And so as we walk here below, looking ahead to our destination, we walk as pilgrims walk. Not as mere wanderers. We're not lost but we're making our way to our destination. I'm not lollygagging. I'm not dragging my feet. I'm not turning off to indulge in the dainties of the city of Vanity Fair. But we're walking with determination, with steadfast heart, and anticipation, with our eyes on the prize. This world is not my home. This world is simply a place we're passing through. We're pilgrims. That, first of all, is a hugely encouraging word we need to hear and the elders intend to remind us all of that at the time of family visitation. What a refreshing word that is to God's people. But as we know, the reason why this is so refreshing is the fact that this pilgrim journey is not always an easy journey. On the whole, it's a rather difficult path where we experience much tribulation and difficulty. That's certainly how it was for the Old Testament saints as they made their journey to Jerusalem. Just think of the kinds of difficulties they would experience along the way. Not only would there be the mocking and persecution of their ungodly neighbors, who were back home, who weren't bothering to make the trip to Jerusalem, telling them it's just a waste of a few weeks of your life, "You're spending your vacation that way? We're just gonna stay home and continue and indulge ourselves in what we want. We're not gonna heed the commandment of the Lord." And that's hard, especially when it's your fellow pilgrim or your fellow inhabitant in the nation of Israel.

That's really what Psalm 120 is all about. Those struggles keep pressing on, walking in the journey. But then there's also this, the things that are alluded to here in Psalm 121. As the pilgrims would walk, they would be prone to fatigue. They would become tired. That's verses 3 and 4. Their feet and their legs would begin to grow tired so that it would be very easy for their feet to be moved, for their feet to slip. Some of these pilgrims were traveling some 80 miles to get to Jerusalem. It would take them about a week to make the

trip. It was a long journey. And besides the weariness, the terrain of Palestine is not the easiest terrain either. Think of how slippery rocks can get when they're covered with a layer of dust. It's a very rocky terrain. And just remember, the journey was practically constantly an uphill journey, an uphill climb the whole way through. Degree by degree, they would make the climb. You can imagine how it would be easy for their feet to start slipping, to start moving, verse 3 says. And then what would happen? They might take a tumble, they might scratch their knee, they might have a broken bone. The path was often difficult and exhausting.

In addition, as they walk on their journey, they would be exposed to the elements, to the weather, that's verses 5 and 6. In the land of Palestine, as you maybe know, the days could often be very hot days and the nights, in turn, could be very cold. During the day, because of the hot rays of the sun, the pilgrims would be exposed to sunstroke, or the danger of heatstroke, and then at night, if you have the clear moon shining, this is what the last part of verse 6 means, if you have the moon shining, what that means is that there's clear skies out and what that means is that there's no clouds to hold in the warmth in the atmosphere and so you have cold nights, and the people were in danger of catching cold or becoming seriously ill. That's the end of verse 6.

And then in addition to that, as the Israelite journeyed to Jerusalem, he would sometimes have to pass through valleys or along the river's edge and of course, beside the river's edge or in the valley, you have danger lurking, evil, as verse 7 says, the evil of wild beasts or the evil of bandits or thieves. We all know the story of the Good Samaritan and how the Israelite in that parable was beaten up by bandits along the way. Now think of being a pilgrim, making your way through these valleys to the celestial city, how vulnerable you are to the bandits or wild animals.

Well, I think we get the picture, and the reality is that's just how it is with our pilgrim journey as well. It's a difficult and dangerous journey. Sometimes our feet do grow weary with the walking. Our path often feels like an uphill trek. And how many obstacles aren't there for us to navigate, lest our feet slip? I can't help but think of Psalm 73 and Asaph's struggle with the prosperity of the wicked as he sees the struggles that the godly have to go through in life. And remember what he says at the beginning, he says, "But as for me, my feet were almost gone. My steps had well nigh slipped. My feet were almost moved." Or think of the experiences of the Christians in the book of Hebrews. They are suffering such persecution from their own family members who hate them without a cause, and the writer to the Hebrews writes and says, "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees."

Sometimes we experience that, don't we, spiritually feeble knees and we have our struggles. And it's different for each one of us. Tension in the family. Broken relationships with those whom I love. Hardships at work. Maybe it is just the constant daily grind of life. Life is busy. We get tired. And maybe we get spiritually tired, tired of waging the warfare against my old man of sin, tired of saying no, saying no, choosing to do something godly instead of something evil, and it's a battle. Our feet sometimes grow weary with the walking. Or maybe it's this, maybe it's the hot rays of the sun, or the cold

frigid temperatures of nighttime, spiritually speaking. Maybe you're under pressure, right? You feel yourself in the pressure cooker, so many responsibilities, so many people placing demands on you. Maybe this is just the season of life you're in, but it feels like you're under the heat of the sun. Or maybe it's the cold temperatures of loneliness or isolation. We all experience this to one degree or another at certain times in our lives. Maybe the older saints especially. There's maybe little in the way of deep relationships. We can't get out much like we did before because our bodies are breaking down. And there's the cold, dark hours of the night, sleepless nights where maybe the anxiety rises up when it seems everyone else is sound asleep and there I am sitting at my kitchen table, wrestling with the Lord in prayer. And it's a cold night. Or again, maybe it's the heat of the day, stress at work or at school. Or maybe it's this, maybe you're walking through a valley right now. Maybe it's the valley of the shadow of death. Maybe it's just another valley of difficulty. Maybe it's cancer or another sickness or another hospital visit. Maybe it's a sick child. Maybe it's just a deep disappointing experience that you're going through. Maybe it's a very uncertain time in your life and you don't know what the future holds for you, right? You don't know what's around the bend because you're in a valley. Maybe you know you're in a vulnerable position right now and maybe you wonder when is Satan going to jump me from behind, from behind the cliffs of the rock and sweep down from the sides of the cliff and assault me and tempt me and try to ruin me or drag me away from the path and take away my determination to walk the path.

I hope these can be some of the things that you maybe talk with the elders about at the time of family visitation, right? We're all on a pilgrim journey. The way is difficult and dangerous and the elders are there to encourage you, to help you and strengthen you and guide you. That's what we want to do. We need the encouragement. We know that the days we live in are difficult and the elders as shepherds and overseers, and simply as your fellow companions, your fellow pilgrims, want to be a help and encouragement to you in your trek. And that, again, is why we've chosen Psalm 121, because that's what this Psalm is all about. I haven't even, by this point, entered into the Psalm. I've just really been laying the context of what a pilgrimage is and the difficulties of the pilgrimage but now, here in the third point of the sermon, I want to narrow in on Psalm 121 and I want us to see that Psalm 121 is addressing all these fears and addressing this pilgrim journey and is giving us comfort for every aspect of the journey.

So as we look at Psalm 121, we can divide it into four main sections; it's got eight verses, two verses to each section and we can see how there's encouragement found in each part of the Psalm. First of all, verses 1 and 2. And in verses 1 and 3, we have kind of the heading, right? We have the foundational truth that God is our sovereign helper. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth." The Lord is your helper. The Lord is your companion on the pilgrim pathway. It's so striking. The Lord is the one that I'm looking to, right? I'm looking to the hills, I'm looking ahead, I'm seeing this mountain, and there's Jerusalem way in the future, way ahead of me, but even as God is in his holy temple in Jerusalem, God is also here with me, helping me, carrying me, really, as I'm brought to his holy temple. He is my companion on the journey. He is right there with me.

And who is the Lord? Well, he is the Lord, capital letters, L-O-R-D. He is Jehovah, that first of all. He is the one who has made promises to you as his covenant people. He's the one who's going to keep those promises, right? He's the one who made the promise to our first father, or to our spiritual father, Abraham, to give his seed the land of Canaan. And now here I am, walking in the land of Canaan to the city of Jerusalem. God is faithful, and that's true for us spiritually. God is the one who keeps his promises to us. He will fulfill his word. And he's the one who's put us on the path. He's the one who's called us to make the journey to keep the feast and he will supply what is needed.

He will be our helper. That's the second thing. He's our helper, which means he's our friend. He's our supporter. He's our protector. He's the one who carries us as we go on our way. We can trust him to be there. He is your personal, knowable, trustworthy friend. And then in addition, as verse 2 says, he's the one which made heaven and earth. The one who is Lord, who keeps his promises, the one who is our helper, is the Almighty God of heaven and earth. He's the one who's created the whole land of Canaan. He's the one who's created this world and all its history, who's brought it to pass. And he's the one who rules over everything. He's ruling over the hot rays of the sun. He's ruling over the clear, cold skies at night. He's ruling over the valleys. He's in control of the wild beasts. He's in control of the bandits and the thieves. He's in sovereign control of everything. He's the one who made heaven and earth. He is our sovereign helper. That's how the Psalm starts. I keep looking to that reality, who he is, and who he is as mine.

Then verses 3 and 4 start breaking things down for us. What do we see in verses 3 and 4? We see God as our watchful keeper. "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." We grow weary along the path, right? It might be a few days journey, and we get tired, our legs grow heavy. Maybe we're prone to slumber, and then we are more prone to trip over the rocks. God never slumbers. God never grows weary. He never needs rest. He never grows drowsy. He's always alert. He's never growing tired of watching us, caring for us. He's like a shepherd who's constantly energized to care for his sheep.

Sometimes we grow so spiritually weak on our pilgrimage that our feet are about to slip but God is constantly watching us so that our feet are kept from slipping. It's like what the Psalmist says in Psalm 91, we sang it, "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." That's the confidence that the child of God has on his pilgrim journey. God, as we make our pilgrim journey, God dispatches his angels so that they watch our feet, so that our feet don't slip. Rather, he strengthens us with grace, that as the Psalmist says in another Psalm, my feet become like hind's feet, like deer feet, so that I'm strong in my walk. Without interruption, God protects and guides his people and their every step to heaven.

Then there's verses 5 and 6. And in verses 5 and 6, we see who God is as our comforting defender. "The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night." Are you at risk of spiritual sunstroke

or heatstroke as you walk your pilgrim journey? Are you at risk of spiritual coldness and shivering in the cold, clear skies of the nighttime when the moon is shining brightly? Well, what did God do for Israel in their wilderness wanderings? He provided that pillar of cloud by day, not only to lead them, but as Psalm 105 says, to give them cover, to give them shade from the hot rays of the sun. There was that cloud so that they were walking under the shade as they walked for 40 years. And at the night, in the nighttime, there was that pillar of fire that was not only leading them, but that was hovering above them to give them light and to give them safety and comfort during the middle of the night. Just so the Lord will do the same for us. He will be our shade by day and our pillar of fire by night. Without exception, no matter the circumstances, he is there 24 hours of the day defending you and comforting you. Rain and sunshine, hail and snow, spring breezes and summer warmth, he is in sovereign control of all the weather of your spiritual life. He knows exactly what he is doing with each one of the seasons of your life. Every weather pattern you face, every ebb and flow of the tide of your life is in God's sovereign care and he will shield you from all evil or turn it to your prophet.

That's verses 5 and 6 and then verses 7 and 8. Verses 7 and 8, we have who God is as our eternal preserver. "The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." The Lord won't let terrible things happen to you indiscriminately. The Lord will never let Satan defeat you. He will preserve you on your pilgrim pathway without limitation. There's never going to be a day in your life as a Christian when you are going to wake up and find that God is no longer there preserving you. These verses, verses 7 and 8, really teach us the doctrine of the preservation of the saints. The Lord who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the end, until the day of Jesus Christ. The Lord who has called you to this pilgrimage who has put you on this pilgrimage will see you to it. And then, this is just a thought coming to my mind, but God even said to them in his word, "When you go on these pilgrimages and you commit yourself unto the path of righteousness, I will make sure that there's peace back home so that your homes and your villages that you're leaving will be kept safe. I will preserve that too. I will preserve you on the way and all your worries back home, I will take care of it. I will protect you." That's verse 8, "The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in." Your departure, your going out as you start your pilgrim journey to Jerusalem to keep the feast. He will preserve you in your going out and in your coming in. As you enter into the city of Jerusalem as you finish your journey, from beginning to end, your going out to your coming in, he will preserve you from this time forth even forever more.

So the Psalmist is addressing all the obstacles all the challenges that make the trek to Jerusalem difficult and he is saying verse by verse God will take care of it. This is what the people were singing as they made their journey, as they made their trip. And so it is for you. All the spiritual obstacles in your life, all the challenges that make the walk to the celestial city difficult, God will take care of it. He's got an answer for it all. He will see to it that you arrive at your destination. You will arrive in heaven, and all the tears will be wiped away, the sorrows will cease, all weakness will depart from the body, and you will enter into the joy of your Lord. And you get the sense of that at the beginning of

Psalm 122 as well, we're about to enter the joy of the Lord and then the rest of the Psalms in this section.

That's the reality for the pilgrim saint looking to heaven. That's strong encouragement and all I would simply leave you with this morning is the simple word that starts out this Psalm, keep looking to the hills. Keep singing the song. Keep looking to the hills from where your help comes. Keep your eyes fixed on the Lord and who he is. That's the Psalmist's personal resolution. That's what the saints were singing as their legs were getting tired. They've got that uphill climb and what happens when you get tired? Maybe you're inclined to put your head down, start dragging your feet, maybe sit. Maybe even the temptation comes to start turning around because it's so much easier to go downhill than uphill and the Psalmist says, "I'm going to keep my eyes looking upward, keep looking up to Jerusalem, my destination, my hope, the place from where my help comes. God will help me. God will uphold me. God will strengthen me with the right hand of his righteousness." That's the personal resolution that you and I also need to have along this earthly pilgrimage. "I will keep looking to the Lord. I will keep trusting in him. I will keep following his commandments, doing his will, and seeing how he provides for me. I will trust in him. He is my sovereign helper. He is my watchful keeper. He is my comforting defender. He is my eternal preserver."

This is what the elders want to do in family visitation, so that we all, they and us, and all of us together, keep directing our eyes to the Lord. Keep looking to the Lord for strength and help. He will be the one who faithfully leads you to the end of your pilgrimage. These are the things that we want to talk about in family visitation and with the Lord's blessing, these are the things that will be of great encouragement to us, whatever our pilgrim journey is, whatever season, whatever marks our pilgrim pathway at this present time in our life. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank Thee Thou art the God who understands us so well and who knows exactly what songs we should be singing to help. Write these songs on our hearts, and put these songs in our lips, and keep us always to have uplifted head, looking for our salvation, looking for the end, and also looking to Thee as our helper along the way. Shape our hearts, shape our lives by this instruction from Thy word, and may it be an encouragement to us and a refreshment along our earthly pathway. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.