

Homesick Among Liars

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Bible Verse: Psalm 120
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We're going back to the Psalms this evening, Psalm 120 and I invite you to turn there. We did an introductory message last week to these 15 Psalms that are known as the Songs of Ascent, Psalms 120 through 134, and our text tonight, Psalm 120, is a lonesome cry in the wilderness for the grace of the Lord in the midst of enemies. Psalm 120. I have titled tonight's message "Homesick Among Liars." Homesick among liars and you'll see why as we go through it here this evening.

Beginning in verse 1, Psalm 120,

1 In my trouble I cried to the LORD, And He answered me. 2 Deliver my soul, 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 Sharp arrows of the warrior, With the burning coals of the broom tree. 5 Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech, For I dwell among the tents of Kedar! 6 Too long has my soul had its dwelling With those who hate peace. 7 I am for peace, but when I speak, They are for war.

So this lonesome Psalm is the beginning of the Songs of Ascent and we'll find as we go through it that it gives us a picture not only of aspects of our own spiritual lives that we experience from time to time going through those times of isolation when people are arrayed against us, but it also gives us an echo of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ who himself stood alone in the midst of liars who made accusations against him ultimately leading to his crucifixion as the sacrifice to take away our sins. We find that this kind of loneliness is often a genuine aspect of true spiritual life. It's not always that we feel the comfort of the Lord, sometimes he allows us to feel the opposition and hostility of the world so that we learn to appreciate our fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ better, and so that we learn to appreciate our fellowship with other believers better; we sometimes go through these times of isolation and difficulty so that we recognize the blessing when it comes.

Now as I said last week, most commentators believe that Jewish pilgrims would sing these 15 Psalms as they went up to Jerusalem for the three annual feasts and these would have been deeply ingrained on their consciousness and Psalm 120 would have been the beginning of the sense of anticipation of the next feast that they were heading up to.

Jerusalem, as we said, sits at over 2,500 feet in elevation and so they're going up and that's why you have a sense of the Songs of Ascent, they are ascending up into Jerusalem in order to celebrate the feast. There was a goal at the end of the destination but it started in sorrow and in difficulty for many as they were far away from Jerusalem. By the time you get to the end in Psalm 134, they've arrived at the temple and they are prepared for the great times of worship that those annual feasts represented. So there's a lot of history and tradition that are embedded into these Psalms.

Well, it's interesting to me anyway, that it starts with Psalm 120 and Psalm 120 is a prayer for deliverance from treacherous people. The psalmist is alone in a foreign land, he is surrounded by people that dislike and are antagonistic toward him, and you get a sense of the way the people of God long for peace. Jesus said in Matthew 5, "Blessed are the peacemakers," and we get a sense of the dynamic of the longing of the desire for peace that abides in the hearts of true believers. True believers aren't those who thrive on angry conflict and find in that their greatest sense of happiness and contentment, we find our greatest sense of happiness and contentment in peace because we serve the Prince of Peace.

So this Psalm is an expression of the longing for peace that abides in the heart of true believers and as is often the case, we're going to look at this in three sections here tonight, and in the first section of the Psalm we find his prayer for deliverance. His prayer for deliverance and you find him opening in verse 1, he's recalling a past time where the Lord had helped him when he had cried out in a time of trouble.

Look at 1 with me. He says,

1 In my trouble I cried to the LORD, And He answered me.

He's remembering a time further back where he had been in difficulty and he had cried out to the Lord and the Lord had given him help, and that remembrance of past deliverance is building up his faith for what he is about to say in the remainder of the Psalm. In the original language, in the Hebrew this opens up emphatically in a way that my English translation diminishes. In the Hebrew it opens up, "To the LORD I cry. To the LORD I cry." He's making an emphatic statement about where his hope rests, who it is that he is appealing to. "I am calling upon Yahweh. I am calling upon my covenant-keeping God, the One who has entered into relationship with His people and has promised to provide for them, to guide them and to protect them." He is calling on the Lord, the Lord Yahweh, as he asks for relief. Right from the start, then, you're seeing something of great consequence. You see the psalmist turning vertically or looking up vertically, perhaps better stated. He's looking vertically for relief from the human antagonists that he has. He's not looking to man, not looking to flesh and blood for his help. As you know, sometimes there's not flesh and blood help to be had. Sometimes we are without a human advocate. Sometimes we're without a human friend in the circumstances that we find ourselves in or we find former friends, people that we thought were our friends, walking out on us and leaving us behind. So we're left to go vertically, to go to the Lord.

Now if that's the situation that you find yourself in, then Psalm 120 is an encouragement to you because as we find so often through the Psalms, we find our own feelings of discouragement and isolation being expressed in the word of God. There's a reason for that. The word of God comes to us in part to comfort us, to strengthen us, to give us the assurance from God that we are not alone, and it is of great encouragement to come and find the Psalms expressing the feelings of our hearts maybe that we couldn't even express on our own if we were left to ourselves. In earlier Psalms the psalmist says, "I am so troubled that I cannot speak." Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt so burdened by the events of life or the weight in your heart that you're just, "I don't even know what to say," and you're almost hindered from going to the Lord in prayer to speak because you don't even know what to say. I can remember times past in the far distant past getting down on my knees to pray in a particular time of sorrow, I just said, "Dear Lord," and then the tears just started to flow and I was just heaving sobs at the time because of the anguish that was in my heart. Well, this is the kind of anguish that the psalmist is expressing. "I'm in trouble and I cried out to the Lord and He answered me at that time," and this expression at the start in verse 1 is an expression of confidence that the Lord is going to hear him in what he has to say going forward.

Now that's an important aspect of understanding in the Psalm. He's praying from a position of faith, a position of ultimate confidence, but as you go through the rest of the Psalm, that kind of recedes into the background as he's articulating this sorrow and the difficulty that's on his heart. So he's praying from a position of faith but the requests and the prayers that follow are in the midst of the hand-to-hand combat of spiritual life that he's going through right at the moment.

So he says, "In my trouble I cried to the LORD, And He answered me." That word "trouble" is expressing a sense of distress, a sense of pressure; there is stress on his heart, stress on his mind as he's writing out this Psalm. And think of it this way as we understand these Psalms, that he's making his first steps toward Jerusalem as he prays that. He's heading in the direction of worship and yet he's in the midst of great difficulty.

He's a pilgrim and he's a pilgrim that's under pressure at that, and yet notice this and perhaps this is a point of encouragement, maybe a point of conviction for some of you watching over the live stream in particular, isn't it true that we have those times where we're under distress and you're kind of thinking about, maybe some of you have said, "You know, I'm just not going to go to church today. You know, I'm just too discouraged to go to church. I'm too discouraged to be with the people of God." Well, let this Psalm be an encouragement to you that that's not the right way to respond. It's in those times of difficulty, and I say this gently and I say this to help you over the long haul, it's in those times of difficulty where you most need to gather up your volition, it's in those times of difficulty when you most need to ask the Lord for the strength to be able to come and to be with the people of God because there is a genuine grace that the Lord conveys through the gathering of the people of God and being under the live preaching of his word that is found nowhere else. So the fact that we're discouraged is not an excuse to stay away, we cry out to the Lord and then we come and we gather with his people, and I'm not talking

about people that are physically unable to come, I'm just talking about those inner feelings of discouragement, not the physical inability to be with us, and to not let that hinder you but to let it be an opportunity where you express it to the Lord and then you follow through and you come to be with the people of God. That's what the psalmist was doing here. He was in trouble, he cried out to the Lord and then he started his journey to Jerusalem to worship and that's what we need to do. We cry out to the Lord in our trouble and we start our much shorter journey in order to be with the people of God to be with them in worship.

So with that said, that past answer that opens verse 1 frames his request in verse 2. That past answer that he remembers strengthens him to ask now for help from a painful attack that was on him. And look at it there in verse 2 where he says,

2 Deliver my soul, O Yahweh, from lying lips, From a deceitful tongue.

He says, "Yahweh, deliver me." In other words, the word "deliver" has the idea of snatching him out of harm's way. You know, it's as if he were disabled on a train track and the locomotive is heading toward him and someone comes and snatches him out of the way of danger that was about to barrel over him. Something like that in mind, he is making an urgent plea for help, asking God to remove him from the difficulty that he finds himself in and he's asking for deliverance because there are lying lips that are attacking him. People are lying against him, they are misrepresenting the truth, they are attacking his integrity and character with the things that are being said and so he's asking God to be merciful to him and to deliver him from that problem.

And that's the nature of our world, isn't it? Sometimes it's the nature of life in the church, isn't it, to be falsely accused by people that you thought were your friends? We understand that and the nature of things is that it teaches us and it trains us to look upward to God and to ask him for mercy on us and to trust in him for the help that we need. But for the believing heart, for the genuine regenerate heart, the nature of the world strengthens our desire to turn away from it, to resist it, to be outside of it. We don't find our home here. People of truth, people of the God of truth who have been saved by the God of truth, we don't find ourselves at home and comfortable in that kind of environment. And as we grow rightly dissatisfied with the things that assail us from the lips of dishonest men and women, we turn to the Lord and we trust him for help.

One man put it this way, he said, "It is the Lord Himself who must deliver His people from deceitful and lying persons who seek their harm." Even though silence might seem like a passive solution, sometimes it does no good to respond. We must leave the answer to God. In other words, there are many many times where the right response is to just go to the Lord, ask him for help, and not try to defend yourself against men. I've seen so many times that people have brought even greater sorrow on their head trying to defend themselves before accusers, trying to defend themselves on social media from things that have been said that they didn't like and all of that, and what you end up doing is just stirring up more dust to fall down upon your head rather than just stepping back and saying, "Do you know what? I am confident in Yahweh. I am confident in my God to

keep me. I'm confident in God to protect my reputation and to protect me through these things." And sometimes it's better to let the Lord be your defense, let others come to your defense and just maintain silence on your own behalf and let that silence be your active expression of confidence that the Lord is with you and that the Lord is going to protect you. Something to think about, something to meditate on. You know, beloved, you really don't have to vindicate yourself and defend yourself against every negative thing that's ever said against you. You don't. You can let it go. You can let it go and as you let it go, you're actually, you know, speaking within the life of the church sometimes, sometimes you're going to contribute to peace simply by just saying, "You know what? I'm going to let the Lord be my defense here." That's a point of spiritual growth. It's something that we all need to learn but we need to not yield to the promptings of our pride that says, "I'm going to fight back here." You don't have to give into that, you can take a much more trusting quiet approach that says, "Lord, I'm calling out to You and I'm asking You to deliver me. I'm not going to take my own defense up in my own hands and, you know, it wouldn't help if I did."

So this Psalm already is challenging us and making us think in a lot of different directions but along with that, you know, my friends, let's just remember, let's go quickly and straight to the cross of Jesus Christ and remember that as our Lord hung there, unjustly condemned by human hands, condemned by the testimony of liars against him and mob justice being exercised against him, in his perfect innocence, in his perfect guiltlessness, as he said he had the full power to call legions of angels down to vindicate himself and to defend him and to clear him and to deliver him from the danger and what did he do? He kept his lips closed. He trusted in the Father's leading, fulfilling the eternal plan that God had laid before him, that he voluntarily took on at the time of his Incarnation. He trusted himself to God and let God be his ultimate vindicator rather than vindicating himself and exercising the power that he had to defend himself in the moment.

Well, this is very amazing for us to contemplate. If the sinless Lord kept silent in the face of false accusations, then how much more are we able to do so, how much more should we do so, we who are sinful, we who are not blameless, our Lord sinless, did not defend himself, how much more we can go and imitate the need to just rely on the Lord to be our help in the defense of our lives. This is very searching for us and we find that our Lord walked this path before us. He showed us the way. In doing so, he delivered us from our own lying lips, he delivered us from our own lying tongues, and we find in our Lord the fullest expression of what's being expressed here in Psalm 120. We'll see more of this toward the end of the message as well but our Lord held his lips. When he was reviled, he didn't revile in return. That's not always, maybe it's not even often our own personal response, is it? "I'll get him back. You know, I'm going to have my say here." Well, the next time you hear yourself talking like that, come back to Psalm 120 and look at the vertical focus that he places on his faith.

And how can he do that? Well, he trusts in the Lord. Secondly, as we go to the second section of the Psalm here this evening, you'll find his prediction of doom. His prediction of doom. We saw his prayer for deliverance in verses 1 and 2 and now we look at his prediction of doom. And he asks a rhetorical question as we look at verses 3 and 4, as he

contemplates the ultimate outcome of what lying lips will one day face. He says in verses 3 and 4,

3 What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, You deceitful tongue? 4 Sharp arrows of the warrior, With the burning coals of the broom tree.

What he's expressing in this somewhat obscure metaphor here, he's expressing certainty that God will judge those liars who are assaulting him. His cry will be answered. God will help him even though in the moment his cry for help is unsatisfied, it is unanswered. So what he's saying here in verse 3, he's looking beyond the immediate conflict and he's addressing his accusers and he says what's going to happen to you in light of what you are doing to the people of God. What will be the outcome for you. And as he says there, look at it again in verse 3, "What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, You deceitful tongue?" What's going to happen to you as you assault the people of God this way? And he answers his rhetorical question in verse 4 when he tells them that retribution is going to come. God will deal with them. "Here's what's going to happen to you," he says as he speaks rhetorically to his enemies, he's not talking to them face to face here. He says, "Sharp arrows of the warrior, With the burning coals of the broom tree." What he's saying is this, "The pain," we'll take it in the third person, "The pain that they are causing me will one day return to their own bosom. They are inflicting pain now but they are going to reap what they are sowing. They are sowing pain, they are going to reap pain themselves and God's arrows of truth will one day pierce them and they will find that they have assaulted the people of God in vain."

The broom tree that he alludes to there at the end of verse 4, "With the burning coals of the broom tree," the experts in Bible background tell us this, that the broom tree was used for firewood. It was used for fires because it burned long and it burned hot more so than many other kinds of wood. So to talk about the burning coals of the broom tree was to speak of something that burned hot and it burned long. So dropping the metaphor, what he's saying is this, they are going to become the victims of their own falsehood. They will become the victims of their own lies. They will feel burning pain like hot charcoal embers being inflicted upon them. Ultimately, then, what he's saying is he is affirming that the Lord will destroy them and Scripture is clear on this, that liars will have their part in the lake of fire. Liars will go to hell if they remain unrepentant. The Lord is a God of truth and he will vindicate his truth and he will destroy all lies and all liars ultimately in the end.

So he is warning, the psalmist is warning these people against slandering the people of God because it cannot possibly come out well for them in the end. He's telling us indirectly that God vindicates his own people, God will vindicate the faithful ones, he will vindicate the blood of the martyrs, he will vindicate those who have suffered persecution for the sake of Christ. There will be this positive vindication of his people but, oh, let us never forget that there will also be an ultimate judgment where unrepentant liars are judged eternally for their sin. Hell is real. Hell is painful. Hell is eternal and therefore it behooves each one of you to take stock of your own heart, to take stock of

your own lives and make sure that your part is with Christ and that your part is with the people of God, the people of truth, not with those who traffic in lies and falsehood and deception as the world knows it and as the world loves it so. There will be an ultimate reckoning. There will be an outcome and liars are temporary, liars are digging their own grave as they traffic in their falsehood, and it is so important for us to realize that the immediate circumstances that we face in these times of accusation and affliction have a far greater spiritual context to them than we often remember in the heat of the moment. We must step back from it, step outside the bubble of the conflict, remember the things that we believe, remember who God is. He's a God of truth. He's a God of judgment. He is a God of covenant-keeping promises to his people, and he is a God who vindicates himself against liars so much so that Scripture warns them, Scripture warns sinners that there are sharp arrows that await if they don't repent, there are sharp arrows for those who do not turn away from their deceitful tongues. It's frightening. It's frightening. It's severe and there is no reason for us as people who believe the Bible to back away from those truths or to soften the sharp edges of it. God is a God of judgment who will judge unrepentant sinners and so if you're here tonight and you're not in Christ, you have not repented of your sin and turned to Christ and asked him to save you, take this as a warning directed immediately to you, immediately to you that there is a judgment coming and there is no way that you can safely trifle with the holiness and the justice of God.

And for those of you that have suffered under the hand of such people, take heart. God vindicates his own. God vindicates his own so much so that Jesus could say this, look at Matthew 5 with me, especially as you suffer under the hand of falsehood for the sake of Christ. I think of my more prominent friends in ministry who often have borne the arrows of accusation in their ministries, I think often of them in conjunction with this passage. Matthew 5:10 through 12, and this is meant to be a refreshing drink of cool water to your parched soul in such times where you have suffered for your faithfulness to God. Verse 10 of Matthew 5, the Lord Jesus himself said, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Verse 11, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." He says you are blessed. You are the privileged recipient of divine favor in those circumstances. What appears to be a negative assault is actually just the reverse. God has brought blessing to you as you suffer these things for the sake of Christ. Jesus makes a promise. Jesus whose word cannot be broken, Jesus who would never mislead us, Jesus who loves his people and keeps them, Jesus who cares about our souls more than we care about them ourselves, he said, that Jesus said this in verse 12 to those under that kind of persecution and assault, he says, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." We see from Psalm 120 God will deal with the guilty. We see from Matthew 5 that the harm that is inflicted on the people of God is rewarded greatly as we trust in him as we go along through life under the assault of such false accusations.

Without getting too far astray from Psalm 120, one of the things that I particularly like about this particular promise of Christ in verses 10 through 12, this isn't a promise that is only given to the martyrs, it's not given to those who are imprisoned for their faith alone, Jesus extends it simply to those of us that we feel more lightly the persecution, it's an

insult or things falsely said about us. It's only words, it's not physical harm. It's only that kind of affliction, not the loss of freedom or life, the loss of liberty or life. Look at it there again in verse 11. You're insulted, people falsely say all kinds of evil against you. It's simply verbal things, a lighter form of persecution. None of it loses, none of it falls out under the sight of our Lord. He sees it all and when he sees us suffering for his sake, he comes to us with a personal direct word of encouragement and says, "You take heart, you rejoice, you be glad." The Lord is storing it all up. The psalmist tells us that he stores our tears in a bottle, it's metaphoric but you get the idea. The Lord never forgets the tears and the sorrows of his people and when we're feeling that sorrow for his sake out of faithfulness to him, the Lord comes with this sweet promise and says, "I promise you," the Lord says, "I promise you that your reward in heaven is great so you can rejoice and be glad now. This isn't lost on your God. This isn't lost on the books of heaven. It will all work to your good, your eternal good in the end."

And what we're going to find, I'm sure based on what Jesus says here, he talks about the lightest form of adversity, you know, mere verbal insults. He doesn't say that you'll have a corresponding reward in heaven, as you suffered so also you'll be rewarded. No, he gives us the impression that the reward is going to be utterly disproportionate to the suffering that we have. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great. It's great not only in its magnitude but it's great in comparison to the suffering that gave root to it. Just as God delivered you from sin in his gracious generous way of dealing with you, so also when it comes to suffering persecution under the hands of liars, under the lips of liars, I should say, God is going to greatly reward you in a way that goes far beyond all that you ask or think. And that New Testament perspective augments and helps us understand the way that we should appropriate Psalm 120 today. God will bring judgment on liars. I had a daughter who one time told an uncle who was teasing her, she said, "Do you know that God hates liars?" She was two at the time when she said that, not taking into account at that time how much she needed to hear that word herself with the lies that she told at that period of her life. But be that as it may, God will deal with liars. He will reward the godly. All is well. We can rest and be at peace knowing that there is great hope for us in Christ.

Go back to Psalm 120 as we look at the third and final section of this Psalm. Psalm 120. We see here in this next section that the psalmist is suffering as an alien. He is homesick to be with his own people and he is not, he's separated from them. In verses 5 and 6 he says,

5 Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech, For I dwell among the tents of Kedar!

Now just a brief geography lesson here. Meshech was an area that was in modern-day Turkey. It was an area that was known for its warlike people. They were hostile people and he's expressing a sense of being with them. It's about 400 miles away from Jerusalem. At the other end of the compass, Kedar was a hostile tribe in the northern Arabian Peninsula southeast of Jerusalem. And what these two regions are expressing is this, he uses these far distant regions away from Jerusalem to express a spiritual reality as

he obviously wasn't in both places at the same time. What he's saying is that these two regions represent the reality of living far from home among a pagan and hostile people. "I'm so far away from Jerusalem. I'm with people who do not share my faith. I'm with people who are hostile to all the things that I hold dear and I'm all alone in the midst of them." This is a genuine spiritual hardship that he's going through. His tender soul is brutalized by the effects of the hostile people that are around him. It reminds me of Lot.

Look back in 2 Peter with me for just a moment. You remember the story of Lot. He was living in the midst of Sodom and Gomorrah and from the Old Testament account it wasn't quite clear exactly how he responded because he wasn't all that he could have been perhaps, but looking at 2 Peter 2:4, we get a sense of God's ability to deal with the wicked and also to care for his own and this is a very crucial passage for you to be familiar with if you are suffering affliction and you feel very alone in the midst of it. This chapter is telling us and illustrating for us the ability of God to keep his people, to strengthen his people, and also to deal with the ungodly.

Starting in verse 4, 2 Peter 2:4, it says, "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly." He's building a case here. He's using a number of illustrations to make a clinching point at the end of the passage. He says, "Remember Noah. Remember how a whole world was against him and God saved eight of them and destroyed the rest of the world. Remember that," he says in verse 6, "and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot," Lot being rescued in the midst of it, "oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds)." Here is Lot living in the midst of such ungodliness and it's just tearing him up inside and the point of what Peter is saying is the Lord rescued Lot from that and brought judgment on the people that he was living with. The Lord rescued Noah and rescued his small band that would have seemed to have been so easy to overlook from a human perspective because they're lost and engulfed in a world of ungodliness. He said, "Look, look, if God knows how to judge demons, if God knew how to deliver Noah, if He knew how to deliver Lot, then do you know what, do you know what, do you know what? God hasn't changed and therefore that means He knows how to deliver you too." That's his whole point in verse 9, "then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority."

Look, look expanding our view of this beyond the personal into the cultural and to the broader world in which we live. Yes, we all get the fact that the world is ungodly. We get the fact that there are ungodly people with power and authority over us and over the institutions. We get that. It seems like at times that they have all of the marbles, that they have all of the power and there's nothing that we can do in response to it of any effect.

There's none of us in this room that can march over to Washington and change the way things are politically, let alone spiritually. None of us have that power. We're weak, we're helpless in the midst of it. We have no human resources with which to defend ourselves. And the whole point of Scripture from Psalm 120 to Matthew 5 to 2 Peter 2 is this: remember who your God is. Remember who reigns. Don't simply judge what you see around you in the world. Don't judge it by present conditions or who holds the levers of power today. We are never to view life from that worldly limited perspective. We step back and remember who our God is, we remember who our Christ is. He has loved us and given himself up for us. He knows how to keep his own. He will keep his own. He will reward us greatly when we're in heaven for the persecution that we suffer. Then if all of those things are true, and they are, then it just compels us, it just corners us into this position of joy and contentment that says, "I can live with the way things are now because I know who God is and I know what He does for His people and I'm content to rest in Him even though I don't see the results right before me today." We're meant to be a people that walk by faith, not by sight.

So the people of Christ should not be found among those who are constantly agitated and wringing their hands over what's going on in the world. Is God sovereign or not, I ask you? Is God faithful to his people or not? Does God work all things together for good to his people or not? Will he do that for you or not? We just need to get these principles clear in our mind and as they do, they blow away the fog that we are engulfed in as we're engulfed in this fog of spiritual war all around us, at least our hearts can see clearly and know, "Do you know what? I'm confident that the Lord hasn't lost sight of me here yet, nor will He ever because He keeps His own." And we could multiply the passages of Scripture that would point us to that same kind of conclusion and what you and I need to do, it's just very very important for us in a time like tonight, in a time where there is a comparative peace in the world around us, where there's enough stability where we have the time to sit back and meditate on these things and reflect on them, it is so vital for you rather than being agitated over the state of the world as you see it now, is to meditate on these biblical principles to the point that they become the convictions by which you see the entire world, they become the prism through which you view everything else, because the days will come when we're not going to have time for meditation, we're not going to have time to think reflectively and meditatively on these things, and so we have to do it now while we can. We have to put our spiritual money in the bank, if I can make that grossly poor illustration, we have to store spiritual things up now so that we can draw upon them in the future. We need to sow to the Spirit while there is time so that we're able to draw upon it when the hostility is more pressing and more open than it is right now. So whether it's personal adversity under the hand of liars, whether it's the cultural scene or somewhere in between, a job situation, neighborhood situation, beloved, come back and remember who your God is as you go through these things.

Now going back to Psalm 120 in verse 6, you see the expression of his heart in its fullest sense. He says in Psalm 120:6,

6 Too long has my soul had its dwelling With those who hate peace.

In this groan of lament he says, "God, I've had enough. I have had enough. I've been living among people who slander me and they make every aspect of life difficult for me and I'm tired of it all." He said, "This is too long. I'm tired of being in the midst of these people." And yet at the same time, he shows the source of his discontentment. It's because of what he loves, what's in his heart. In verse 7, he's a man who loves peace. He says, verse 7,

7 I am for peace, but when I speak, They are for war.

"I want harmony and these people want conflict. I want peaceful quiet meadows, they want nuclear explosions. They glory in bloodshed. They glory in lies." There's an emphatic contrast here. Look at it in verse 7, "I am for peace, but," sharp contrast, "They are for war." The emphatic contrast is saying, "I have nothing in common with them." The godly have peace in their heart whereas the ungodly sow discord and adversity. And coming back and circling back to his opening prayer here, you can see why he's crying out to the Lord. There is nothing in the human situation that will give him any relief and that's why at the start he cried out to the Lord in the midst of his trouble and went to him for deliverance.

So the thought of going to Jerusalem is sweet. He says, "When I get to Jerusalem, when I get to Jerusalem I'm going to be with like-minded people. We're going to be there for worship. We are going to be there in peace and I'm going to be with those who share the aspirations and affections of my heart."

Now just stepping back and building your appreciation hopefully brick by brick here for the blessings that the Lord has given to you, you can identify with this, can't you? You live or you work among hostile people. You know what it's like to be in that secular environment with so much contention with people who don't share things, some of you unequally yoked with spouses who want nothing to do with your faith, children who won't turn to the same Christ that you've taught them from when they sat on your knee, or people living with you that are hostile to it all and you feel the isolation that that brings. Well, can't you identify with that spirit of longing for Jerusalem? When you come to this church, if this is your church, don't you know something about the fact that your church family is an oasis for you? That at least here there is one place where there's a like-minded love for Christ and his word? Isn't it here that sometimes often hopefully you find people who will hear you sympathetically and you can listen to them sympathetically, people that are on your side? Well, what a blessing that is. You have something that many many people don't have. So we treasure this. We treasure it and we recognize that the fellowship of God's people is a great blessing to give us an oasis as we walk through this life so much so that when we're within the walls of Truth Community Church, that we have a heightened sensitivity and a heightened sense of protection of protecting the peace of this place, of protecting the peace of the body, protecting the unity of the body so that the hostility of the world doesn't leak in here through ungodly carnal attitudes and relationships. It's all so very important and if we treasure the gifts of God and if we treasure the peace of God, then when we find it we revel in it, we come to share in it, and we're mindful of protecting it as we have opportunity and need to do so.

Well, what can we draw out of some final lessons here? First of all, as I said last week, the desire for peace, the promise for peace, that's a major feature in the Songs of Ascent and we'll see it as we go through them. The mere fact that it opens with Psalm 120, these Songs of Ascent open with Psalm 120 and in the midst of such hostility, there's an important lesson for us to learn from that. The road to Jerusalem, speaking metaphorically, the road to heaven is often hard for pilgrims like you and me. Our upward journey is hard in this world. It's not easy. The promise is not ease but the promise is for provision in the midst of it, the presence of Christ in the midst of it. So we understand that we expect the road at times to be hard just like it was for our psalmist in Psalm 120. Beyond that and speaking about this in New Testament terms, we look to our Christ, we look to our Lord who walked this path before we ever did.

Go back to the letters of Peter, this time to 1 Peter 2. I want you to see this and find in the things that you have heard this evening, find that which gives you resolve and a sense of purpose as you move forward. Hopefully you'll have Christian friends that come around you, but even for a time you don't, there is still the presence of Christ with you and he is enough. Peter says this in chapter 2, verse 21, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." When you are falsely accused, remember that Christ has done that and remember how he responded. He held his tongue and he entrusted himself to his heavenly Father. Christ went further, there was a redemptive aspect of his sufferings that our sufferings do not have. Verse 24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

Beloved, if you are in Christ, you have a Shepherd who is leading you through these times. If you are in Christ, you have one who is functioning as your Guardian through them. You can rest in him. Look to Christ. Look to Christ. Trust Christ. Call out to Christ and find that he loves and protects you through it all. Look to the cross where he opened heaven to us. Look back to the cross, look forward to heaven to your final destination. There and there alone will you find your ultimate provision and experience of perfect peace and the glory of it all, the glory of that promise is that there will be no liars there to disrupt the bliss.

Let's pray together.

Our gracious Lord, we thank You for Your presence with us through the blessings and hardships of life, the heartaches and the joys. Through it all we look to You and we walk by faith, not by sight. I pray for these dear friends in front of me and over the live stream. Father, I pray that You would comfort them in each one of their afflictions. Comfort them when the earth seems so hostile, when family and friends betray and speak such untrue and hurtful things. Father, in that time may they find a particular newness and freshness

and sweetness of fellowship with You. May it be true of all of us, O God. Thank You that You are with us through adversity and that we can trust You, the God of truth, no matter how much liars line themselves up against us. We thank You for these things in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

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