

TITLE: The Lord is my Keeper

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: The Lord is our guardian and protector and we ought to look to him.

STRUCTURE:

- The Lord Helps Us
- The Lord is Always There
- The Lord is Always Near
- The Lord will Always Protect.

- It's funny how Songs often take you back to a memory or a place
- I will always associate "I still haven't found what I'm looking for" by U2 with our trip to Canada in 2000;
- I will always associate John Mayer's Live Album "Where the Light is" with playing pool and having a few beverages with my best mate Matt during formation;
- And I will always associate Taylor Swift's last album to the first year of Hudson's life.

- And when the people of Israel sang or chanted Psalms 120-134 - the same would have happened to them! They would always have associated them with the walk to Jerusalem!
- These are the Psalms of ascent - and these psalms were put together for the people of God to sing as they were approaching Jerusalem for the various festivals.
- When one came to Jerusalem, they would always be going "up" to Jerusalem, not just geographically as it was situated on top of the hill
- But UP in terms of significance as well!
- This was the place where the temple was. The place where people went to meet with God and Worship him.
- But what's interesting about this collection of psalms are the themes of them.
- We might think that these Psalms would have just been filled with Praise of God; Thanksgiving to God; Remembrance of all that God has done.
- But they're actually more varied than that.
- There are psalms of Praise, yes. But also Psalms of lament. Psalms with tears, psalms with sorrow and hurt, but all ending up in trusting the Lord.
- And I think this is really amazing because as the pilgrims approached Jerusalem, they too would have had all of these different emotions and thoughts and stories in their heads.
- The Psalms give us language for our emotions in all situations.
- And as we too approach God, through his Son Jesus, We ALSO have all of these emotions.
 - And that's great news.
- Because the Psalms of ascent encourage us to set our eyes on the LORD in the midst of all that we are going through
- They urge us in the mess of life to look beyond the mess to the faithful, gracious and kind YHW.
- And Psalm 121 does exactly that.

- Because When life gets hard - where do you turn to? Who do you turn to?
- If we were to ask people in Australia, I think you'd get quite the range of options...and maybe these are some of the options that we can fall into!
 - Parents, friends, family...
 - Bank Balance...career...
 - Themselves - just work harder through it, grit it out
 - Harmful solutions - people look to the bottle, to drugs, numbing pain through fulfilment in sexuality...even self-harm.
 - People look to all sorts of things for help!
- That's the question that the psalmist starts with...
- V1 "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come from?"
- He starts by lifting his eyes to the hills and wonders.

- But The hills were the places where pagans went to worship. In those days it was thought that the 'gods' dwelt in heaven...so the hills are closer to the heavens...so when in trouble you go up your local hill to worship your 'god' or ask that 'god' for stuff...
 - In our modern culture...we could substitute so many things for hill
 - I lift up my eyes to the - shopping centre...where does my help come from?
 - I lift up my eyes to the - gym..where does my help come from?
 - I lift up my eyes to the - bank - where does my help come from?
 - I lift up my eyes to the - mirror
- But the psalmist continues:
- V2 "My help comes from the Lord, who made the heaven and the earth."
- His help doesn't come from the mountains, but from the very one who made the mountains and the hills - the heavens and the earth.
- His help comes from Yahweh!!
 - From the everlasting God, the faithful God, the covenanting God, the promise-keeping God, the Holy God, the all powerful God!
 - He made the earth and everything in it; he made the heavens and the cosmos and everything in it.
 - HE alone is the one who can give the best help, the ultimate help, and the only REAL help.
- In the midst of our mess that we find ourselves in, in the midst of difficulties, struggles, our real help can only come from him! Our creator!
 - Yes, there are some good things for us that can help us through hard times.
 - We ought to be doing things such as - sleeping, exercising, eating well, socializing with friends - but those aren't the ultimate help!
- The ultimate help comes from the God who made all of those things! Who made us!
- He's the one who sees all things, knows all things - and has helped us in the most glorious way of the death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins and reconciliation to Him!
- The great I AM is our helper.
- Charles Spurgeon writes "It is vain to trust the creatures. It is wise to trust the creator"

- *In the context of the Psalms of ascent, imagine walking up to Jerusalem, with all the hills and mountains around. With all of your life's worries and strife on your mind, mulling over them...*
- *There were no podcasts to listen to as you walked! But there was music to sing.*
- *And as you walk to come to celebrate the various festivals, you sing these very words - my help comes from the Lord who made all these mountains and valleys and all in it...my help comes from YHW who made me...my help comes from YHW who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love...*
- What great comfort that would have been!
- The one who made all things is able to help us.
- And he helps us in so many ways at all times

- **ALWAYS THERE**
- V3 ""He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."
- The Lord will give us stability and steadfastness in the midst of this world. He is a sure rock, and a solid foundation. If our lives are built on him - we won't be moved or taken away from God, no matter what hardships we face.
- And this is based on the certainty that God who keeps us won't slumber or sleep.
- This word 'Keep' or 'Keeper' is repeated 6 times throughout this Psalm! It's the central message of this Psalm - that God Keeps us.
- But the Hebrew word is a little deeper than just **keeping** something. The word **Keep** kind of communicates a bit of a passiveness on God's behalf
- But the word has more of a concept of God guarding us, or protecting us always. God is active in keeping us or guarding us from anything that could take us away from him!

- *We used to give our family dog Evie the bone from the roast leg of lamb. It was kind of hilarious, because sometimes the bone was as big as the dog!*
- *And once we gave it to her, there would be no getting it back. She would go to town on the bone - and if we tried to approach her and her bone, she would growl and bark!*
- *She was very protective of her bone!!*
- *Guarding it. Fending off anyone who would try and snatch it away! Active in keeping it to herself.*
- And if we ramp that up by a BILLION that is what God is like with us. Keeping us utterly protected, guarded and secure in him.
- And he doesn't clock off at any point in time!
- Notice in V3 - he does not slumber...he will neither slumber nor sleep...
- He is ALWAYS available and ALWAYS there protecting us!
 - There are no power outages, no power naps, no lethargy, no annual leave, no long-service leave - God who protects us is always there.
- *About a third of our life will generally be spent asleep. A third of our life will be spent - not physically working, not praying, not earning, not working out! - but sleeping.*
- *So if you live to the age of 90 - you'd spend a total of 30 years asleep!!*
- *This just seems a bit strange when you think about it doesn't it?? It's a bit humbling isn't it? We think we are so great as human beings - but we spend a third of our time here on earth sleeping!*
- *And if we don't get this sleep - it leads to all kinds of disastrous mental and physical health!*
- *But the reason that we can sleep peacefully is because God doesn't sleep.*
- We can sleep knowing that he is keeping us and guarding us! We can rest knowing that he is protecting us! We can doze off (at the right time!) knowing that he is always there.
- And even if we can't sleep and are awake at all the wrong times in the middle of the night - God isn't sleeping! He is right there with you!!
- He who keeps us, who keeps his people Israel and his body the church - will never not be there for us.
- **Always Near**
- And he's always near to us!
- V5 "The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night."
- Again, we get the repetition of the fact that the Lord is our Keeper and protector - and then we get another aspect of this...the fact that the Lord is always near.
- He is always there, and always near
- Always available and always close by.
- *You might have experienced this as a parent or uncle or aunty or even as a leader on Holiday Kids Club! Sometimes kids at a certain age just attach themselves to you. Always following you, always curious as to what you are doing, always wanting to get involved, and always finding you even in the midst of other people!*
- *So much so - that we sometimes call them 'our little shadow!' because they are always there!*
- Well - that's what should come to mind when we think about the fact that God is always near.
- He is our shade on our right hand. He stands beside us, waiting to defend and protect us and keep us!
- He's our BIG shadow - and a helpful one at that!
- He protects us from all kinds of worries that come during the day and during the night.
- He's like an umbrella - protecting us from sun-stroke, and he's guarding us from the dangers of darkness.
- Always near.
- For us here today, we can be confident of this because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Who isn't just an agent of God, or an angel of God, or a servant of God - this is God HIMSELF with us!

- The Holy Spirit is described in John's Gospel as our Helper - teaching us about Jesus
 - The Holy Spirit is promised at the end of Matthews Gospel where Jesus says "and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age."
 - The Holy Spirit is described in 2 Cor 1:11 as a seal! A guarantee of our right relationship with God and a seal of our Eternal life!
 - The helper - YHW himself is IN us and WITH us.
 - Always there, always near.
 - And always Protecting
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- **The Lord will Always Protect**
 - Now in the Psalm - the tense changes to future.
 - And notice the repetition of 'keep' - 3 times in these two verses!
 - V7 "The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will Keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."
 - The Lord will keep - the Lord will Keep you - the Lord will Keep you
 - Are you getting the point!
 - He will protect us from all evil; keep our very own life; and protect every step that we take whether we are going out or coming in from now and forevermore!
 - Are you getting the point!
 - Every aspect of our life is guarded, protected, and kept by the Lord.
 - No matter what earthly circumstances we find ourselves in - how busy or anxious we are, how sinful we might seem, how unwell we are, how unwell our family members are, how sleepless we are, how far God might seem - YHW will keep your life!
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- And we can trust in him and put our lives in his hand - because he has given us the life of his very own son for us!
 - This psalm finds its completion and fulfillment in Jesus!
 - Jesus is the one who defeated the powers of death and evil in his death on the cross
 - Satan tried to destroy him, death sought to hold him - but both those powers couldn't overcome him. In fact, he overcame them. And **Jesus** put **them** in chains. And **he** was put in authority over them.
 - In Ephesians 1:20-21 Paul prays that the church may have the knowledge of the fact that Christ is raised from the dead and seated at God's right hand "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come"
 - This same Christ is our help, is near, and is always there for us!
 - Protecting us from the evil one and his schemes. Jesus will keep us from all evil. Jesus will keep your life.
 - Again - Are we getting the point!
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- The author of this Psalm - could have just stated it plain and simple in one go - the Lord is your keeper. He could have saved a whole lot of writing!
 - So why all this repetition and drawing out? It seems a bit excessive doesn't it? Why keep on dwelling on the authority of God and the protection of God?
 - John Calvin writes "But when we consider how difficult it is to correct our distrust, it will be easily perceived that one does not improperly dwell upon the commendation of the divine providence."
 - Essentially John is saying - the psalmist repeats himself a lot because we are stubborn, stupid, and silly lot and full of disobedience and distrust and doubt! And the more that we cast our eyes on the authority and protection of God - the less we will rely on ourselves!
 - The psalmist repeats the fact that the Lord is our keeper - because we need to hear it!
 - We so quickly run to our bank account, or our job, or even ourselves when we come under pressure than running to God.

- Or I know that i'm so quick to have confidence in myself and my own abilities - than having all my confidence in God.
- What a silly thing to do - to run to the hills, to run to the things that are created - rather than turning to the one who made the hills and all the world for help and protection.
- So we need to return to Psalm 121 time and time again.
- We need this reminder time again.
- Week by week - we need to gather here to sing and worship and have this reminder
- Day by day - we need this reminder as we read God's word and pray.
- We need to be reminded that we aren't self-sufficient, and that our help doesn't come from ourself or our own abilities - but our help can only come from YHW through his son Jesus!
- Spurgeon writes: "None are so safe as those whom God keeps, none so much in danger as the self-secure"....
- "None are so safe as those whom God keeps, none so much in danger as the self-secure"
- I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.