

Facing the New Year

Psalm 121:1-8

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It is a trite thing to say that no one knows what we face this year. But if we believe it has been true in past years surely it seems to be more true this year than ever before. I am afraid that there will be many times during this year when each of us and all of us are going to need to have some place we can turn to for strength and guidance. This morning I want to try and give you a passage of Scripture which will be of a great help to you during the whole of the new year and all through your life. Even if you forget what I say, and most of you will, you can find the basis for it in this psalm. It has become known as “The Traveler’s Psalm” and many people read it as a part of their devotional before they start on any prolonged journey. Let me read it to you now and then try and call your attention to some of its teachings. It is Psalm 121.

The psalm begins as you notice with the phrase, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills” or “mountains.” There is something wonderful about the mountains. To the Jews there was a stability about them and they have been referred to as being eternal. As you stand and look at the Blue Ridge Mountains from a distance you see a beauty that to many of us is indescribable. As you look at the towering Rockies you see nothing of the beauty of green trees and foliage, but you see rocky crags and towering heights. There is a majesty about them that makes you think of great power. The psalmist looked at the hills and saw their beauty and their majesty and said, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains.” Although he saw their majesty and beauty, he was conscious that they were immovable, impersonal objects and that they could not be his help in view of trouble and so he cried, “From whence cometh my help?”

In this day, we need to be made conscious of the fact that no impersonal, mechanical object can be our help in these trying days. Far too many of us have looked at mechanical impersonal, irrational things and have thought they could help us. We have seen our country as the greatest producer of instruments of war. Better able to produce than any other nation. In the language of one of the automobile concerns advertisement, “When better automobiles are built, we will build them.” We just knew we could build the most and finest airplanes. We could build the largest and most efficient ships to sail the seas. We could build the most destructive tanks and in this sense of our ability to build we have at least nearly found our security. But today we find that we are behind our enemies in the ability to build the fastest airplanes, the best submarines and tanks, and now people perhaps more than ever before are coming to ask, “from whence cometh our help?”

Individually, too many who have been able to face the years as they have come and gone have felt that somehow God had endowed them with an ability to meet whatever situation might arise and they were to a large degree able to depend upon their own resources. But today from the leaders of our own nation down through all degrees of business, statesmen and politicians are now asking as they never have before, “From whence cometh our help?” This is true not only as groups but individuals are uttering the same of which comes from the lips of the psalmist, “My help cometh from the Lord.”

I. He finds his help not in the impersonal, irrational mountains as majestic and stable as they may be. His help comes from the Lord. From a personal individual who is able to think of Him, to love Him, and to will things in regard to Him.

1. The Lord who made heaven and earth. The hills might seem to be ever so mighty but I would not depend upon them, but upon the One who made them and all other things.

2. The Creator of heaven and earth. To David the earth was a small thing compared to our knowledge of it today. The universe was just a speck as compared to what we know about the universe today. Listening the other day to one of the radio newscasts, I believe called "The World Today," although I am not sure, one of the newscasters told of a news release which had come from Harvard University. This news release said that for several years the astronomy department of the University had been making pictures of the universe at certain times and angles and that they had now come to the conclusion that we know very little or nothing about the extent of the universe in which we lived. That it seemed certain to them now that the great Aliscoki at Polomar, California would be able to take picture of or behold only a very small portion of this universe.

What a glorious thing it is for us that we can say, "My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth."

But there are those skeptical souls who cannot believe that God cares for them. To them they think of Him as not caring for such small, insignificant individuals as you and me. At Mayo's Clinic they have thousands of patients a year and several hundred are there each day of the year. When you go and register you are given a number and they send to one department after another. You sit in the waiting room which will probably seat 200 people and when they desire to communicate with you they call your number. You are just one of hundreds known by a number to the attendants at the desk. But when you step into the doctor's office you become a personality. He does not refer to you as a number. He calls you by name and so far as you can tell you are the only patient Mayo Clinic has at that time. I believe that God knows and cares for us as persons with different individualities and needs.

David believed that, because as you follow through the psalm you find that he says God does the most personal things for us and gives to us His personal care and attention.

"He will not suffer thy foot to be moved" is one of those personal things. As we walk along there are many times when we would slip, stumble and fall except He stood by and held our hand. Let me give you an illustration out of the life of Mr. Moody. He had a young daughter and for her birthday or some celebration, I do not remember which, they had given her a beautiful white muff. You know, one of those fur hand warmers. Immediately she wanted to go for a walk. As they went out into the street where it was icy and the sidewalk slippery, Mr. Moody asked if she did not think she had better let him hold her hand. Of course, she did not. She was going to put both hands in that beautiful muff. But they had not gone far before her feet slipped and she almost fell but her father caught her. Again, she came almost falling and her father said to her,

“let me hold onto you.” But she continued to slip and slide and found that she did not have the strength to hold onto him and finally in resignation she said, “Hold onto my hand.” She continued to slip and slide and even at times her little feet went out from under her, but she did not fall because the strong hand of her father was holding her. Beloved, we are all or most of us are going to walk out into a new year. We will come to many hard and difficult places and many times our feet will slip, but thank God we can put our lives into the great hand of our God and know with the psalmist of old, “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved.”

Verse 5 – “The Lord is thy keeper.” The word for “keeper” means “garrison, guard, protection.” What a marvelous truth to lay hold of as we move out into this new year. But what does David mean when he says, “The Lord is thy keeper”? Surely his mind must have gone back to the time when he was preparing to go out to fight against Goliath. Saul, you will remember, wanted to loan him his armor with its helmet and shield. You may remember, at least most of your children will, that David tried it on and then took it off and said, “I cannot go with these for I have not proved them.” David knew what he could do with the help of the Lord for he had killed a lion and a bear. You remember David came to beat Goliath and Goliath ridiculed him because he was just a boy and because he came against him with no mighty weapon. But do you remember what David said in 1 Samuel 17:25? “Those comest to me with a sword and spear and with shield. But I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the men of Israel whom thou hast defiled.” And on this he adds, “And this day shall the Lord deliver thee unto my hands, and all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not by sword and spear for the battle is the Lord’s and he shall give you into my hands.”

Yes, David knew from experience that the Lord would be his keeper. But let me take you to a small city in Texas where there is a Presbyterian college. Several years ago, Dr. Thomas S. Clyce was president of Austin College in Sherman, Texas. He had three children. The youngest was a beautiful daughter. When she was in her early twenties, she was visiting in West Texas and was killed in an airplane crash. Just as soon as some of the men in Dallas who had been in school under Dr. Clyce heard of the accident, they, at least four of them, got in an automobile and went immediately to Sherman and to Dr. Clyce’s house. When they went in the living room, Mrs. Clyce said, “Boys, he is up in the attic room, but would want you to come up, so you go on up.” Dr. Clyce was a big man, tall and heavy set. When the men opened the door, he arose from a chair and came to them and said, “Feel my head, it is not wet. Smell my clothes, they do not smell of fire,” and the minds of those men raced to one of Dr. Clyce’s favorite verses found in Isaiah 43:2 – “When thou passeth through the waters, I will be with thee and through the waters they shall not overflow thee. When thou walketh through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” “Boys,” he said, “I have been through the waters and the fires, but my head is not wet and my clothes do not smell of the fire.”

A great soul had faced his sorrow knowing God was his keeper. You and I too can face this year asking, “From whence shall my help come?” and thank God we can answer, “The Lord is my keeper.”

3. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth.

To preserve means “to keep safe, to defend, to sustain, or uphold.” In these days of insecurity we need to be able to say such a thing.

There seems to be no dependence upon any material thing. The leaders of our nation are confused and confounded. We have nowhere to turn. But we know we have a God and we know He will defend, uphold, and keep safe those of us who will turn unto Him for help.

Conclusion:

1. As we face the new year, let us be able to say with the psalmist, “These things are true for us.”
2. Then come to this communion table.
 - a. Find here the assurance of God’s love in that He gave Christ to die for us.
 - b. Find here a challenge to our souls to turn to Him and serve and trust Him.