

The Strength of Zion - *Psalm 125*

Introduction

- Here's something you may or may not know about me: One of the things that I hate most in the world is uncertainty and change. I like plans. I like knowing what the plan is, and I like sticking to the plan. I like knowing where things are going, and I don't like it when plans change.
- But needless to say, this isn't always the way that our world works, and this past year has certainly shown that.
- I bet you're tired about hearing about all of the uncertainty and change that this Pandemic has brought to our world.
- I remember back to the first few weeks COVID started here in Canada, and it felt like every other minute there was new information, then another minute later that information was made obsolete by even newer information. Everything was so constantly changing, and there was no certainty at all.
- In the midst of all that uncertainty that was happening in the world, Elaine and I were trying to plan our wedding, not to mention our life together. Where we would live, where we would work, what everything would look like. And let me tell you, it is incredibly difficult to make plans like that in a pandemic, because you can't rely on the state of what's going on around you. It can all change in an instant. Our entire wedding was planned about 5 times, and the wedding we actually had was planned the week before it happened. Shout out to Elaine and her Mom for all their work in that.
- But in the end, it is hard to live without certainty. Many times I would talk with my family during that period and say "I just wish there was some kind of certainty, and things would stop changing for like 5 minutes"
- We can feel like that in life can't we? We just want to have some certainty and security in what's coming next.
- We've talked about this journey of life can be hard. Lots of twists and turns, lots of ups and downs.
- This journey is also a long one. Life is long, and as we look down the road, we want some kind of certainty. We want to have some sort of a handle on where life is going and what comes next. And we want to know that everything is going to turn out alright.
- And that's especially true in the times that we're facing the hard realities of life, we want to know that there's going to be an end, and that eventually there will be some relief.

- And this is something that we talked a bit about last week as we looked at Psalm 124. We talked about having assurance of victory, and being able to rest in God's faithfulness for our future.
- And now today, as we look at Psalm 125, we're very much continuing that discussion, but what this Psalm really does is call us to continue to trust in the security and certainty that we have in God, even in the midst of the uncertain times, where that security seems so difficult to see.
- Because in the midst of this trying journey, we will not in the end be overcome by the world around us if we are willing to trust in the eternal security that God promises to us.

The Promise of Security: V. 1-2

- And the first two verses of this passage provide us with such a great promise - the promise of lasting security in the Lord.
- This promise begins in V. 1, saying:

"Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,

which cannot be moved, but abides forever." - Psalm 125:1

- So this Psalm begins with this incredibly powerful image of comparing us to a mountain that abides forever! Mountains are so often thought of as a symbol of strength and consistency. They do not move, and they do not change. They are completely secure. I love mountains, so I find this to be such a great image to use.
- And this is actually quite a bit different from the other imagery that's been used to describe humanity throughout the Psalms of ascent! We have been servants, helpless victims of a flood, and weak little birds, but here the Psalm calls us mountains, which abide forever. And it feels good. Finally we're connected with this idea of strength and security, rather than weakness and vulnerability!
- Because that's what we want, isn't it? We want to have that security and strength, and be able to face whatever life happens to throw our way.
- But it is so important to understand where that strength comes from, and why we're being described this way in this verse, and to do that we have to look at those first words. **Those who trust in the LORD!**
- In my notes I have those words bolded, underlined, italics, the whole nine yards, because if we miss those first words, we will misunderstand the entire Psalm.

- That security, that strength that is associated with mountains, does not, and can not come from us. Rather it comes from the one that we are trusting in.
- On our own, we are weak, but when we place our trust in God, we are not facing this world on our own, we are given this amazing promise of lasting security in him, that we will be like a mountain that can never be moved. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
- God promises that security to those who trust in him.
- If you look at what we talked about last week, “*If it had not been the Lord who was on our side*”, then we would have been swept away in the flood, or trapped like a bird, but with God on our side, when we trust in him, we are like a mountain that abides forever.
- V. 2 continues this promise, showing even more how God is our true source of security and strength:

“As the mountains surround Jerusalem,

so the LORD surrounds his people,

from this time forth and forevermore.” - Psalm 125:2 (ESV)

- This second verse gives us a wonderful description of God and the protection that he gives to those who trust in him. As the mountains surround Jerusalem.
- And this is such a beautiful, and powerful description of who God is, and what he does for us. If you thought we were good, being compared to a strong and secure mountain, this image, as you would expect, shows God as even greater! If we are like a mountain, he is like an entire mountain range, surrounding us and protecting us. God does not only give us strength and security when we trust in him, he is our strength and security. He promises that he will be the one to protect us, from this time forth and forevermore.
- And this promise, this promise of security and strength in the Lord, is not a new one. These first two verses are really meant to be a reminder of who God is, and the faithfulness that he has promised to his people. On our own we are weak, like a person washed away in a flood, or a bird caught in a trap, but when our faith is placed in God, we are given this amazing, and lasting security, like a mountain that stands forever, surrounded and protected by our God no matter what happens in this life.

Testing for a time: V. 3

- V. 3 then, continues this promise of lasting security in a very interesting way:

*“For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest
on the land allotted to the righteous,
lest the righteous stretch out
their hands to do wrong.” - Psalm 125:3 (ESV)*

- This verse begins with a very important word “for”. For the sceptre of wickedness shall not rest.
- It’s meant to be emphasizing and adding on to the promise that was just made, giving assurance to the people who are reading this, that what the first two verses said is really true. That those who trust in the Lord really will endure the trials that they are facing.
- And it’s really important to see what the first part of the verse is saying when it points out that the sceptre of wickedness shall not rest on the righteous. Because you’ll notice that it isn’t saying that wickedness will not come, only that it will not last forever.
- Actually, if you look at what this verse is saying, it’s pretty clear that this Psalm was being written to God’s people as they were facing an incredibly difficult time, in which they would be tempted to forget God’s promise, or believe that maybe God had forgotten them. The commentaries that I read actually pointed to this likely being a Psalm written later in Israel’s history, speaking about their Exile.
- So this is a Psalm being written for God’s people as they’ve been displaced from their home, lost their families and their culture, taken captive in a foreign country where they were oppressed, and discouraged, wondering if God had forgotten all of the promises that he made to them.
- But the Psalm is meant to be an encouraging reminder of the promises that God has made to his people in the midst of that devastating situation. It is assurance of the truth that the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on God’s people, and if they continue to keep their trust in him, they have security like a mountain that lasts forever, always protected by their God. This is a security that would long outlast any opposition they were facing.
- It’s saying that the wickedness facing God’s people will not last forever.
- Someone last week asked the question of how we as Christians are supposed to handle periods of delayed expectations, in which it seems like God is not answering our prayers, and we’re struggling to see his faithfulness in our life. That is exactly the type of situation that this Psalm is talking about, encouraging God’s people in the midst of those moments of “delayed expectation”. While in Exile, Israel was in an incredibly difficult period of waiting for God to fulfil his promises, and rescue them from their captivity.

- And this is so important for us, because really, everyone who has given their life to Christ, and committed to follow him is living right now in a time of anticipation and “delayed expectation”.
- These Psalms of ascent have made no effort to hide the fact that we live in a broken and a fallen world that is so full of wickedness and trials, and as the church, we are waiting for the fulfilment of God’s promise that one day, Christ will return to redeem all of creation, and we will live with him forever in the new heavens and new earth. That is the promise that we are waiting for, and so for this time of waiting and anticipation, God has provided us with beautiful Psalms like this one, reminding us that our waiting will not be forever, and encouraging us to continue to keep our faith in the security that God has promised us, even when it’s hard and life feels so uncertain.
- So this Psalm provides such a profound promise and encouragement for all of Christ’s followers, to continue to trust our God while we face the sceptre of wickedness which, for a time, remains on this world. To remember his promise, that if we trust in him we will be like a mountain, which abides forever, and protected by our God from this time and forevermore.
- And the second part of this verse begins to speak to why it is so important for us to remember and hold onto the promises of this Psalm. Why this reminder is necessary in a difficult time.
- We are being reminded of this promise of security, “*Lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong*”.
- The first two verses showed so clearly how our strength and security comes from our trust in God rather than ourselves, yet we are so incredibly prone to try to take matters into our own hands. We can think that, if God isn’t answering our prayers or fulfilling his promises fast enough, and we want things to change, it becomes our job to fix whatever is going wrong, and deal with the wickedness that we see around us.
- In essence, we are weak, and our trust in God is also weak. We so easily fail to trust him when faced with this wickedness in this world. I know that’s true of me.
- But God is well aware of our weakness, and our tendency to try to handle everything on our own and abandon our trust in him.
- And that is exactly why we have been given Psalms like this to remind us to continue to trust in God rather than ourselves, or anything this world has to offer. He sees our weakness, but he is such a loving and merciful God. Even the fact that we have this Psalm is a part of the protection that he has promised us. We have God’s Word to encourage us, and remind us in difficult times, who God is and what he has promised. We have Psalms that remind us that God is our security, and has promised to be faithful to us, and that encourage us to continue trusting in God as our security, rather than trying to rely on ourselves for our own hope and security.

The End Result: V. 4-5

- The final two verses continue to talk about the importance of this, of remembering God's promises and keeping our trust in Him rather than ourselves, by leaving us with both a prayer, and a warning.
- In a way, these last two verses present us with a bit of a fork in the road. A crossroads which presents us with two possible responses we can have to these promises, and where those responses lead us.
- V. 4 presents the first path to us, beginning with a prayer for God to remain faithful to the promises that he has made. It says:

"Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,

and to those who are upright in their hearts!" - Psalm 125:4 (ESV)

- So the first response that we see here, when faced with the wickedness that we see in this world, is a response of trust, and prayer.
- Remembering God's promises, and praying that he would remain faithful to those promises that he has made.
- This verse is a prayer to God to fulfil the promise made in V. 1 & 2. For protection and security for those who trust him.

"Those who trust in the Lord are like Mt. Zion,

which cannot be moved but abides forever" - Psalm 125:1 (ESV)

- That is the prayer here, that for those who trust in him, God would remain faithful to his promises. That he would be their strength and security, and that he would protect them in the midst of a difficult time.
- And this gives us a great example of how to pray in the midst of difficult times.
- When you are faced with the challenges that come in this world, and when you're tempted to try to find help and security in the things of this world, remember this Psalm. Take time to remind yourself of the promises that God has made, pray that he would remain faithful to those promises, that he would be your security, and that he would surround you like the mountains surround Jerusalem, and then trust that he will do it. Trust that you serve a God who is faithful, and no matter how long the challenges last, or how long your waiting is, he will be faithful to his promises and you can find eternal security in him.
- This is why it is so important for us to study and be familiar with the character of our God.

- But endurance is hard in those times, and we face a constant temptation to turn aside and to put our trust in things other than the faithfulness of God.
- That brings us to the second path, the warning that is presented in V. 5.
- We are not forced to put our trust in God.
- Some do choose to turn aside to their own ways, and this is what the verse says:

“But those who turn aside to their crooked ways

the LORD will lead away with evildoers!” - Psalm 125:5a (ESV)

- This verse shows the somewhat uncomfortable reality that, while there is so much security and protection and help for those who put their trust in God, there are also consequences for those who try to find that security in themselves, or the things of the world, and choose to place their trust elsewhere, believing that those things will be able to protect them and care for them better than God can.
- And really, the consequence here, for those who turn aside to put their trust in other things, is that God allows them to put their trust in other things. Things that, when push comes to shove, will always fail.
- You know, this Psalm reminds me a lot of Psalm 1, which describes those who delight in God’s law, and meditate on his word as a tree that prospers at the edge of a river.
- On the flip side of that, however, those who love wickedness, and give in to it, are like chaff that blows away in the wind.
- The last verse of that Psalm says this:

“for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,

but the way of the wicked will perish.” - Psalm 1:6 (ESV)

- God is not just the best in a long list of good options for security in this world. He is the only option. Anything else that we put our trust in above God is an idol, and idols will always, without fail let us down.

Conclusion

- And I think that this last verse really does give us such a beautiful picture of where we would all be without Christ. Without him, we’re nothing more than lost people, turning aside to our own crooked ways to find some kind of security and hope in this life.
- But because of what Christ has done for us on the cross, we are able to look to God, to place our trust in him, and receive the lasting security that he promises. And really that is all that he

asks of us. To turn away from our own crooked ways, and our own sin, and to place our trust in him.

- So if you're still in that place, of putting your trust in yourself, or this world for security, I want to invite you to turn to Christ today, see your need for him and put your faith in God as your strength, your security, and your protection in this world. Everything else in this world will fail us, but Christ never will.
- So we have a choice of how we will respond to the promises that we see in this passage, when we encounter difficult times. Will we trust in the security that God has promised to us, or will we turn aside to crooked ways?
- Because the reality is that this world, and this life will never give us the security, or the certainty that we want. Whether we like it or not, life will remain uncertain, life will continue to change, and we will continue to face difficult times. And in the midst of that, we are all going to look for that security somewhere. The only question is where. Will we put our trust in God, and his promises, or will we turn aside to put our trust in the world?
- The final words of this Psalm are once again a prayer: *Peace be upon Israel*. A prayer that, of the two options just presented, God's people would choose rightly. That they would put their trust in God as their security, and that he would be faithful to his promises.
- And my prayer for us is the same. That we would see the promises that God makes in this passage, and choose to put our trust in him, as our strength and security in this long, difficult journey, no matter what comes, or how uncertain things seem. Because in the end, He will be faithful to those who trust him.
- I want to end now with something I said at the very beginning. In the midst of this trying journey, we will not in the end be overcome by the world around us if we are willing to trust in the eternal security that God promises to us.