

New Year's Eve

Text: Psalm 121 (NIV)

¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills— where does my help come from?
² My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.
³ He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; ⁴ indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. ⁵ The LORD watches over you— the LORD is your shade at your right hand; ⁶ the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. ⁷ The LORD will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; ⁸ the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.



Theme: *The Lord Will Keep Us from Going over the Cliff*

For two months now we have been hearing about the financial cliff. To be honest, I'm not even sure what the cliff is, but I'm about ready to say, "Let's go over it and crash, so we don't have to hear about it anymore!" Life has all kinds of hills to climb and cliffs to watch out for. While we can never trust the government to keep us from going over the cliff, we know for certain that God will never allow us to go over the cliff. This new year's psalm points us to the Lord's help and protection throughout our lives. It describes God as a watchman, who watches over every moment of our lives.

Since I have been a pastor, I have used Psalm 121 numerous times when I visit people in the hospital or when I meet with people who are troubled. It's a beautiful psalm that tells us where to look for help.

Psalm 121 is divided into 4 sections. Each section begins with a statement, and then the rest of that section develops the thought of that statement. As we look at this psalm this New Year's Eve, I like to simply divide it into those 4 sections

I. Vss. 1-2 are a confession of faith in God.

I lift up my eyes to the hills --

where does my help come from?

² *My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

The psalm begins with the statement, "I lift up my eyes to the hills." This psalm is part of a group of psalms from Psalm 120 - 134, which are called *the "Songs of Ascents."* These were psalms that the pilgrims would sing on their way to the festivals in Jerusalem. Imagine singing this psalm as you are nearing Jerusalem when you first see the hills surrounding Mount Zion, on which Jerusalem is built. You wonder where you are going to find the strength to climb those hills, which lead to Mount Zion. The answer is that your help comes from the Lord, whose temple is on Mount Zion. This is the Lord, who made everything, both in Heaven and on earth. He is the one whom we can rely on in any time of trouble because He is the one who made everything.

As Christians we are also on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Our pilgrimage is to the heavenly Jerusalem, which Hebrews 12:22 calls, "the city of the living God." We have been made citizens of this Jerusalem by the precious

blood of Jesus Christ, that has been shed for us on the cross. He cleanses us from our sin, and through faith in Him, we are heirs to the promise. But as we journey, we often lift up our eyes and see the hills. At first, we might wonder how we will be able to climb them. As we leave 2012, we might be glad it's over if it seemed like a steep uphill climb. As we enter 2013 we will have new fears and struggles. A lot of new hills might already be in sight. Through all of your life, especially when the going seems to be rough, look to the Lord for help. He has made all things. In Matthew 6, Jesus said, *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"* Luther has a beautiful explanation of God's help in the explanation to the first article of the creed where it says, **"I believe that God has made me and all creatures...He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil."** Look to the Lord, the Maker of Heaven and earth, for help in any trouble. Now the next three sections develop this opening section.

II. Assurance of God's unsleeping watch over His people.

³ **He will not let your foot slip --**

he who watches over you will not slumber;

⁴ *indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

This section begins, "He will not let your foot slip. As the people climbed the hills on the way to Jerusalem, there was the danger that their foot would slip and they would fall. As we journey to the heavenly Jerusalem, we have our fears that we will slip and fall along the way. Temptations and other evils befall us. Sometimes we feel as the writer of the hymn, "Abide with Me," where it says, **"Change and decay in all around I see."** So often this world seems to be crumbling. In all the decay, we are afraid that we will slip and fall.

But here we have this wonderful promise that the Lord will not let our feet slip. The one who watches over us will neither slumber nor sleep. The word for "watch over" is translated as "keep" in some of the translations. It is the job of a watchman, who guards the city. (Is 21:11, Song 5:7). "Slumber" means a short nap. His eyes are never off of us for a second. Did you ever take your eye off of a small child, and in that flash of a second, the milk was spilled. We are tempted to think, that when bad things happen to us, that the Lord took His eyes off of us, even for a second. When we are going through an extended period of trials, we wonder if God is watching over us at all, and that maybe he has fallen asleep on us.

But God's promises that He never slumbers or sleeps, not even for a short cat-nap. He watches over us every day of the year, every hour of the day, and every second of the hour. His gracious, loving, protecting eyes are always on His people. Psalm 34:15 says, *"The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cry."* The Lord's eyes are always on you. He sees your every need and your every temptation. There is never a second that goes by when you are not under His protective watch. This is explained further by the next section...

III. Assurance of God's unfailing protection.

⁵ **The LORD watches over you --**

the LORD is your shade at your right hand;

⁶ *the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.*

As people journeyed to Jerusalem there were dangers both in the day and at night, but the Lord promised to watch over them every hour of the day, just as He promises to watch over us. In Isaiah 4, the Branch who would come from the stump of Jesse, would give Israel shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and He would be a refuge and hiding place from the storm and the rain. (Vss. 2,6) Christ says in John 10:28, "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." When we live in the forgiveness of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can be sure as we heard in tonight's Epistle lesson, nothing can separate us from God's love through Jesus Christ. No evil, not even our sins and death can rip us from our Lord's loving arms..

IV. Assurance that God will keep you from all harm.

⁷ **The LORD will keep you from all harm --**
he will watch over your life;
⁸ the LORD will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

Here we have the Lord's promise to watch over the pilgrims as they came to Jerusalem and as they went home again. He would watch over their entire life, and keep them from all harm. We have so many examples of that from the Bible. Joseph went through so many trials in his life. He was sold into slavery, put falsely into prison and forgotten by someone whom he helped. But after every one of these occurrences, it says, "But the Lord was with Joseph." The Lord watched over him and delivered him every step of the way. King David had friends betray him in his life-- King Saul, Joab the commander of His army, and even His own son Absalom. But the Lord was always with David, and He delivered David from every evil, even from his own sins. At the end of his life Paul was able to write to Timothy, "¹⁶ At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Tim. 4:16-18)

Tonight we sang, "Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come." As we look back at our lives, we see how he has always been with us, and as we look to the future, we know that He will continue to be with us. The Lord promises to watch over the lives of every one of His people and defend us and deliver us from all evil, until our pilgrimage is ended, and we are with Him in the joy and glory of His heavenly Jerusalem.

This psalm is a good explanation of the Benediction, where it says, "The Lord bless you and **keep** you." The word "keep" means to "watch over." May God give you peace as you enter this new year that you know that He is your helper who watches over your life and keeps you from all harm until you enter that heavenly, blessed Jerusalem. He is where you should have looked for help in 2012 and where you can find help in 2013 and beyond. He will never let you fall over the cliff. Amen.

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