

**Trust, Security & Peace**  
 Psalm 125  
 Pastor Jason Van Bommel

**A Song of Ascents.**

*Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,  
 which cannot be moved, but abides forever.*

<sup>2</sup> *As the mountains surround Jerusalem,  
 so the LORD surrounds his people,  
 from this time forth and forevermore.*

<sup>3</sup> *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.*

<sup>4</sup> *Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,  
 and to those who are upright in their hearts!*

<sup>5</sup> *But those who turn aside to their crooked ways  
 the LORD will lead away with evildoers!  
 Peace be upon Israel!*

A false sense of security can be a dangerous thing. In his sermon on Psalm 124, Dale Ralph Davis tells the story of a World War 2 bomber that ran into some anti-aircraft fire on a mission. The plane took a few bullets but stayed in the air. When they had cleared the immediate threat and were heading back to base, the tail gunner radioed up to the pilot and said, "There's a hole in the tail and some of the tail flap is missing. Are we going to be okay?"

"How big is the hole?" the pilot asked.

"About 3x5" the tail gunner replied.

"We should be fine," said the pilot, confidently.

Upon landing back at the base, the plane skidded out of control and went off the runway, but no one was harmed. The pilot got out and looked at the damaged tail section and was shocked. Turning to the tail gunner, he said, "When you said 3x5, I thought you meant INCHES!"

The tail gunner said, "Yeah, I figured you thought that, but you were so busy flying the plane, I didn't want to bother you with details."

Thankfully, in that case, the false sense of security didn't result in any loss of life. The same could not be said 30 years earlier, in 1912, when the Titanic ran into an iceberg. When first notified that the Titanic was in trouble, White Star Line Vice President P.A.S. Franklin announced "We place absolute confidence in the Titanic. We believe the boat is unsinkable." He was not alone in his assessment, either. Reportedly, when Sylvia Caldwell was

boarding the Titanic in Southampton, she asked her porter if he had confidence in the Titanic, and he said, "Yes mum, God Himself could not sink this ship."

We often see the tragic consequences of mis-placed confidence and false senses of security. But we don't need to study history to see this, do we? How many times have we placed our confidence in people or things, only to be disappointed? Perhaps the most unreliable confidence of all is self-confidence.

To the ancient Israelite, nothing seemed more stable or secure than Jerusalem.

### **A. Proclamation of Security, vv. 1-2**

Psalm 125 opens by using the imagery of the stability and security of Jerusalem as an image for the believer's security in the Lord:

*Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,  
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.  
2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem,  
so the LORD surrounds his people,  
from this time forth and forevermore.*

I've stood on Mount Zion, some 2,500 – 3,000 years after Psalm 125 was written, and I can attest that it still stands.

From the Mount of Olives, you can look across the Kidron Valley and look down on the Temple Mound (Mount Moriah) and the original Mount Zion, the one referenced in Psalm 125. The Mount of Olives is one of three mountains - Mount Scopus and the Mount of Corruption are the other two - to the east of Old Jerusalem, which together form the Olivet mountain range. They are all taller than Zion. To the west is the area known today as Mount Zion, named such by the Crusaders around the year 1100. It is also taller than the Temple Mount. To the north, more mountains rise higher than Jerusalem. Then, to the south, on the other side of the Hinnom Valley, yet another mountain rises higher than Jerusalem.

The imagery is powerful because the position of Jerusalem was seemingly so secure. Because of the strong, confident language of verses 1-2, I think Psalm 125 was written early, perhaps by King David or one of his contemporaries. Jerusalem was the last city to be conquered by the Israelites, remaining in the hands of the Jebusites for over 300 years after the rest of Israel was conquered under Joshua. It was regarded for centuries as an impregnable fortress and was a readily available and impressive picture of strength and security.

For later pilgrims who made their way to Jerusalem, singing Psalm 125 as they stood within the city walls must have been a powerful experience. After a long and dangerous journey and a difficult climb, the security of Jerusalem - stable on Mount Zion, surrounded by walls and surrounded by high mountains on every side - must have brought a comforting and safe feeling.

And yet the point of verses 1-2 is not to get the worshipers to trust in mountains, but to trust in the LORD. "Those who trust in the LORD" are the ones who are truly secure, because "the LORD surrounds His people,

from this time forth and forevermore.” If the worshipers who sang Psalm 125 looked around them and drew confidence from mountains, they missed the point of the song! In fact, the mountains around Jerusalem did not provide foolproof security. David had penetrated them and had captured Jerusalem. Later, Jerusalem would be surrounded by the Assyrians, and it would be the LORD’s power that would rescue the city, when Hezekiah and Isaiah cried out for deliverance. It was a single angel who wiped out the Assyrian army, not the mountains. In fact, Jerusalem would later be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, when the LORD decided to send His people into exile.

The only security that is not false security is found in the LORD Himself. It is His presence and His power alone which secures those who trust in Him!

### **B. Purpose of Security, v. 3**

What is the LORD’s purpose in providing security for His people? Verse 3 tells us:

*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.*

God provides security for His people, so they will be free to serve Him, to faithfully fulfill His will. The Apostle Paul tells us to pray for rulers and for those in authority in 1 Timothy 2 for a similar reason:

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. – 1 Timothy 2:1-2, ESV*

But, wait a minute! How do we reconcile the promise of Psalm 125:3 and the purpose for praying for those in authority in 1 Timothy 2 with the reality that God’s people have often been ruled by immoral tyrants who have restricted the free exercise of religion? The Apostle Paul himself, who wrote 1 Timothy 2, was executed by the Roman emperor Nero, the very man he was asking people to pray for, less than ten years after he wrote 1 Timothy!

More pointedly, Psalm 125:3 says, “*the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous,*” but we know that Jerusalem was the home of many wicked kings, who worshiped idols, neglected the Temple, persecuted God’s true servants, and more – and this was all before Jerusalem was conquered by pagans. In fact, Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives and looked down on Jerusalem and wept for the city, saying, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!*” (Luke 13:34)

So, how do we reconcile Psalm 125:3 with history? Is this promise really just wishful thinking, or is something else being communicated here?

Well, the real meaning of Psalm 125:3 is found by reading it more closely and reading it in context. This is a good guide to understanding any passage of Scripture that seems confusing: Read it more closely, to see what it actually says, and read it in context, to see how that meaning fits in with the rest of what God is saying.

When we read closely, we see that Psalm 125:3 says, “the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous.” “Rest” implies remaining for a long time. In other words, God is not saying that wicked people will never rule over God’s people, only that their rule will not remain in place for too long. When we study history in the context of Scripture, we find that God often uses wicked rulers and even their wicked rule over His people, for His good purposes.

Wicked rulers have been used by God to purify His people, to test and strengthen their faith, to promote their courageous witness, and to advance His Gospel:

- When Daniel and his friends were taken into captivity to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar got a witness to the one true God in the midst of his royal court.
- When Christians were burned or fed to wild animals in the arenas of Rome, the Roman people heard a faith that was not shaken in the face of death, and many came to believe in a Savior who was so radically different from the so-called gods of pagan Rome.
- When Mao Tse Tung sent hundreds of thousands of Christians into work camps, he unknowingly planted church planters in his labor camps, and millions came to Christ.
- When the Iranian authorities pushed the wealthiest Christians out of the country in the early 1980’s and pushed other evangelicals out of the cities into the countryside, the Christians outside of Iran financed satellite TV and radio broadcasts to send the Gospel back into the country, and the evangelicals in the smaller villages and towns gathered people together to watch, listen and start churches. Now, as many as 3 million Christians are gathered in small churches all across Iran, far more than were in Iran when the Ayatollahs took over in 1979.
- When the Muslim government in Khartoum, Sudan, began persecuting Christians and also bombing their own Muslim people in the Nuba Mountains, they triggered a refugee crisis and God is using the refugee crisis right now to bring many to Himself, including two Muslim refugees living in Uganda, who came to know Christ last Tuesday evening at Reaching Africa’s Unreached.

So God appoints and uses all things for His glory and the good of His people, even the scepters of the wicked.

### **C. Prayer for Security, vv. 4**

Knowing how God works leads the psalmist to pray for God to do what He has promised to do. Notice how understanding the good promises and purposes of God should never lead to complacency but should fuel fervent prayer:

*Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,  
and to those who are upright in their hearts!*

But are we “good”? In what sense? Is anyone good? Doesn’t the Bible say there is no one righteous, none who are good? Well, there’s a world of difference between thinking you are good in and of yourself, which is impossible, and being made good only by the grace of God through faith in Christ. This is the kind of goodness in view here: Those who trust in the LORD are those who are good – not good in themselves, but good by faith

in the LORD. So also with the expression “those who are upright in their hearts.” This is not a self-righteous uprightness, but it’s a grace-given, faith-receiving uprightness of heart, found only in Christ.

Even hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God’s people knew they needed a goodness and an uprightness of heart which only God could give them, and which He gave them in the promises of the covenant, which would ultimately be fulfilled in Christ. It’s not that people were at one time made good and right by their own works of the law, and then Jesus came, providing a way for people to be made good and right by grace through faith in Him. People have always and only ever been made good and right by God’s grace and through faith – “those who trust in the LORD.”

Knowing that God has promised to do good to those whom He has made good, the psalmist prays for God to do exactly what He has already promised to do. He doesn’t say, “Oh, well, God is going to do everything for His glory and the good of His people anyway, so why pray?” No, the promises and purposes of God fuel his fervent prayer – “Do good to Your people, O LORD, just as You have promised.”

This is how faith works. Faith is not anxious and fearful, but faith is also not complacent or presumptuous. Faith lays hold of God’s promises. Then, it lays hold of the throne of God with His promises in hand. Then, it goes out to serve in faith, doing what God has called us to do, trusting in His promised provision to do it.

Do you struggle with knowing how to pray? Pray for God to do what he has promised to do. Matthew Henry’s *Method for Prayer* is a great way to do this, and you can find it free online at [www.MatthewHenry.org](http://www.MatthewHenry.org). But reading and praying through the Psalms is another great way to do it, just by reading a psalm every day, or perhaps one psalm in the morning and one in the evening, and praying the psalm and its priorities to God for His people and His kingdom work.

#### **D. Presumption of Security, v. 5a**

Praying God’s word back to Him ensures that our prayer life is shaped by Scripture and is a helpful guard against presumption. Too many people actually have a false sense of security in God that is not drawn from trusting in the LORD and in His promises but in a presumption that because I am a Christian or because I go to church or because I am a pastor, therefore I will always be safe. This is not an active faith but a passive presumption. People who live in such presumption often go astray, and we’re given a sobering warning about them in verse 5:

*But those who turn aside to their crooked ways  
the LORD will lead away with evildoers!*

If we’re trusting ultimately in ourselves and not in the LORD, we will lean on our own goodness and our own wisdom, and we will turn aside to crooked ways. A study of history shows this too often, but so would a study of our own hearts.

Jerusalem was not made safe by her walls nor by the surrounding mountains, and we are not made safe by being counted among God’s people. Faith clings to CHRIST, and faith CLINGS to Christ. Faith looks to no other object but Christ, and seek to actively abide in Him. As the late great Rich Mullins once said, “I would rather live on the verge of falling and let my security be the all-sufficiency of the grace of God than to live in some kind of

pietistic illusion of moral excellence -- not that I don't want to be morally excellent, but my faith isn't in the idea that I'm more moral than anybody else."

Or, in the words of Sinclair Ferguson: "When I know that Christ is the one real sacrifice for my sins, that His work on my behalf has been accepted by God, that He is my heavenly Intercessor - then His blood is the antidote to the poison in the voices that echo in my conscience, condemning me for my many failures. Indeed, Christ's shed blood chokes them into silence!"

Or, in the words of the Puritan Richard Sibbes: "As the strongest faith may be shaken, so the weakest, where truth is, is so far rooted that it will prevail. Weakness with watchfulness will stand, when strength with too much confidence fails. Weakness, with acknowledgement of it, is the fittest seat and subject for God to perfect His strength in; for consciousness of our infirmities drives us out of ourselves to Him in whom our strength lies."

### **E. Peace of Security, v. 5b**

What is the result of finding our security in the LORD alone by faith? What benefit do "those who trust in the LORD" gain from being surrounded by His presence? Quite simply, in one word, peace. Shalom.

*Peace be upon Israel!*

Peace is the pilgrim's great object in going up to Jerusalem. Peace is the longing of our hearts, to be made right and whole, to find both security and rest, to be at home and to be safe and satisfied.

This final line of Psalm 125 is both a prayer and promise. Whenever we pray for the things God has promised in His word, we can trust that we have them. I John 5:14-15 says, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him."

But when? When do we receive the peace we so desire on our pilgrimage? Certainly we get glimpses and foretastes of it in this life, but most believers would not say they live their lives in this peace always. So how do we get more of it and when will we receive this peace in its fullness?

In this life, we can discipline our hearts and minds by the power of the Holy Spirit, so we experience more of this peace. Paul gives us great instructions in Philippians 4 toward this end:

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these*

*things. <sup>9</sup> What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil. 4:4-9)*

Through the spiritual disciplines of thanksgiving and prayer and learning to discipline our minds, we can and do experience more of God's peace in this life. We see growth and we experience real peace. But even as we experience it, we long for more, don't we?

It's right that our hearts should keep longing for this peace, knowing it is coming. Isaiah 24-26 paints a powerful picture of the coming great Day of the LORD, when Christ will return and the LORD will judge the nations and usher in His final kingdom. Isaiah 26 gives us a song we will sing as God's people "in that day" -

*In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:*

*"We have a strong city;  
he sets up salvation  
as walls and bulwarks.*

*<sup>2</sup> Open the gates,  
that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in.*

*<sup>3</sup> You keep him in perfect peace  
whose mind is stayed on you,  
because he trusts in you.*

*<sup>4</sup> Trust in the LORD forever,  
for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock."*

We have a strong city now, the heavenly Jerusalem, our true and eternal home. One day we will see it not by faith but by sight. One day, we will be kept in perfect peace, and nothing will ever disturb it, when sin is no more and we are in the presence of God forever. We can long for that day safely, knowing it is coming, and we can pray for a foretaste of that peace, even as we continue our pilgrimage of ascent through this life.