

The Lord Surrounds His People

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 September 2022

Preacher: Colin Horne

[0 : 00] I'm going to read the passage that our brother will be preaching from, Psalm 125. If you would turn in your scriptures.

Psalm 125. We have another one in this grouping of psalms, a song of ascents.

As they're making their way up to Jerusalem for worship. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.

As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, both now and forevermore. The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous.

For then the righteous might use their hands to do evil. Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart.

[1 : 10] But those who turn to crooked ways, the Lord will banish with the evildoers. Peace be upon Israel. Amen.

Pastor Colin Horn, we're always glad to have you come and preach the word. From First Baptist Church in Warsaw, come and lift up our Savior. Good evening.

It is always good to be with you. We almost weren't with you. I don't know if Pastor John said anything at the intro of the service, but 30 is being worked on. And 31, they said exit open for 31, 331.

And I thought, maybe I should take it. We usually take fur. And I thought, maybe I should take it. Nah, fur will be fine. It wasn't. And the next exit wasn't. And the next exit wasn't. So you could have started reading in Genesis.

And it would have been like a spiritual filibuster. So thankful that the Lord brought us and we've made it. So it's good to be with you. When I was in high school, I went on a ride-along with a police officer.

[2 : 19] He was my neighbor. Knew him since I was a child. And so I felt very privileged to go with him. And he received a call for an intruder who was trying to break into a home.

And the person was said to be armed. So we went to the scene. And he got out of the vehicle. And I thought, am I supposed to get out of the vehicle? I'm not sure. So I sat there for a second.

You can come out. Okay. I'm going to take your lead and I'll come out. So I got out with him. And there were two other officers that were there. And all three men went to the trunk of the police car.

And they opened it. And they got out their bulletproof vests. And they got out their shotguns. And they did not give me a bulletproof vest. They did not give me a shotgun. And I thought, okay.

Should I stay here? Where should I do? They said, come with us. So they have their guns raised, walking the middle of this street in the dead of night, looking for this armed intruder that had been called in.

[3 : 19] And I was just following along behind them, thinking this can't be allowed. How am I able to do this? And in that moment, I felt the threat of evil in a very real, tangible way.

As I was walking, I thought, I don't know if they had a knife, if they had a gun. It was just they had some kind of deadly weapon. And they're out there somewhere. I felt the threat of evil.

We face the threat of evil every day. Now, maybe not in such tangible ways of physical threats to our life, but spiritually.

We live in a fallen world where sin abounds, where evil seems to hold great power, where evil is all around us.

And so how do we respond in the face of evil? How do we respond in the face of evil? Well, Psalm 125 helps us.

[4 : 18] Psalm 125, it helps us when we get mistreated or ridiculed for our faith. It helps us when we are pressured to conform to the world.

It helps us when we are maybe verbally attacked for holding fast to the word of truth. Psalm 125 helps us. This Psalm helps us to know how to respond in the face of evil, especially when evil seems to have the upper hand, when evil seems to rule the day.

God's people throughout history have encountered this same threat. The writer of Psalm 125 faced evil rule.

You can see it there in verse 3. 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.

And so the people of Israel, they experienced times when the wicked reigned, where the scepter of wickedness ruled and seemed to have rested upon the land.

[5 : 28] Evil kings sat on the throne. Kings that came from their own people. But instead of following the Lord in his ways, they went their own way.

They led the people astray. They followed after idols. People of Israel also experienced times where evil kings or rulers were over the land that came from outside of Israel who oppressed the nation, conquering kingdoms like the Babylonians and the Assyrians, the Persians.

And so this Psalm is filled with truth that taught God's people then and that teach God's people now how to respond in the face of evil.

And this Psalm gives us three reminders to help us to remember what is true. It may look bleak. The threat of evil in powerful places might tempt us to despair.

And these three reminders help us. They equip us to think biblically. When we look around, we see evil at work, ruling in our world, maybe at the big level of world governments or on the smaller level of in the workplace, in your home.

[6 : 45] Three reminders to help us. And here's the first one. Our security is in God. Let's read verses 1 and 2 again from that Psalm.

Psalm 125, verse 1. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people from this time forth and forevermore.

Zion was another name for Jerusalem. And Mount Zion described the hill that the city sat upon. But even more specifically, where the temple sat. So when we read of Mount Zion, we should think temple.

God's earthly throne room. The place from which he ruled over his people. Now, this was an impressive sight. Pastor John already talked about how this was a song that the people would sing as they were going up to Jerusalem to worship.

And so they're coming into the city. Pilgrims probably coming from distant lands, coming into the city, and they see the temple upon the mount. And they are reminded of God's presence.

[7 : 54] Their king who rules over them. Now, there were natural defenses as well. The mountains that surrounded Jerusalem. And so all of this was an impressive sight.

So coming into Jerusalem, these travelers are coming in, and they are reminded, they are comforted, they are reassured. God's enduring rule and reign over his people.

It's pictured in the solid structure of the city and its temple, resting on Mount Zion and the mountains surrounding it, like God surrounding them.

Those who trust in the Lord are like this firm foundation because God is their protector. And so the Israelite pilgrim coming into Jerusalem would have thought, we're safe.

We're secure in our God. We are secure because God surrounds us. We're immovable because God is our protection. Those who trust in the Lord, they are like Mount Zion.

[8 : 55] A mountain is just about as immovable as it gets, isn't it? You're impressed by the mountains. If you're traveling from this part of the country out west, and as you come to like the rocky mountains and they just rise up before you, that is an impressive sight.

There is security in thinking that that mountain's not moving anytime soon. That's why Jesus used the idea of moving a mountain to explain what it means to have faith in God.

Think back to Mark 11 verse 23. Jesus said these words. Mountains don't move.

And that's why Jesus makes the point. His words are so powerful. And that's what makes the psalmist's words so comforting. It is that those who trust in the Lord, they're like an immovable mountain because God himself is like the mountains that surround Jerusalem.

And so God protects his people. God protects us. He is our security. When we look around and we see evil at work in the world, we remember that God is our protection.

[10 : 20] And so we don't waver. Our faith isn't shaken. We don't despair. We don't quake in fear. We don't give in to evil and participate with it.

But when evil abounds, we know where our confidence lies. Our faith is immovable. There's another psalm that I think ties well to Psalm 125, and that's Psalm 11.

David wrote Psalm 11. And in this psalm, his companion says this to him in the face of evil. His companion says, Flee like a bird to your mountain.

For behold, the wicked bend the bow. They have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart. If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Flee like a bird. That's very different from the words that we have here in Psalm 125. The immovable mountain contrasted with the bird that flees in the face of danger.

[11 : 25] And so David's companion is freaking out. Run for the hills. Look at the enemy. The wicked are going to overtake us. David's physical life was threatened all the time.

His enemies wanted him dead. And his companion is saying, run away. But listen to David's response in Psalm 11. And this is where Psalm 125 would connect.

Psalm 11 says, The Lord is in his holy temple. The Lord's throne is in heaven. David's faith is firm. I know my God will deliver me. Maybe from death or maybe through death. But I know my God will deliver me to himself. He is sitting on his throne.

The ancient of days. He is the one that we look to and find our rest. He isn't afraid. And so we don't need to be either. God is our security.

[12 : 26] And so do you believe that this evening? Can you say that you won't be moved? Come what may, you'll continue to stand fast even in the face of evil. Or like David's companion in Psalm 11, will you say, flee like a bird?

Psalm 125 helps us. What do we do when we're faced with evil? We remember our security is in God. And he surrounds us like the mountains of Jerusalem. So that's our first response when faced with evil.

Here's our second response. We remember evil will not rule forever. Look again with me back at verse 3. 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.

That's a great mercy from God to us in that verse. The scepter of wickedness shall not rest. That's a really important phrase. To say that evil will not rest on the land is to say that evil will not rule forever.

Evil will not have the last word. It won't prevail. And this is God's mercy to us. How is it his mercy? To say that evil's rule is temporary.

[13 : 46] Well, it's his mercy because we are prone to forget that. We are prone to forget that God's rule and authority and his sure future victory is to come.

And when we forget, we're tempted to sin. We might be tempted, as the psalmist said, to stretch out our hands to do wrong.

And so this psalm here, it helps us to keep perspective on the eternal, on the ultimate end of all things. God wins. He conquers.

His kingdom will have no end. Remembering that evil will not rule forever, that helps us to fight against the temptation to sin. And maybe that sin comes out in giving in to the cares of this life, to loving this present world.

Pursuing godliness is hard. Loving this world is easy. And so when we lose perspective on the end of all things, when we forget that God will put his enemies under his feet, that's when we're tempted to lose hope and resiliency, to quit persevering.

[15 : 00] Think about kids and road trips. Here's a question. What separates an adult from a child on a road trip? Think about that for a moment.

What separates an adult from a child on a road trip? There's probably lots of answers that you could give to this.

One is perspective on time. We were driving to Bremen a few months ago. And Piper asked, how long till we get there?

And I said, about 20 minutes. And her response was, how many seconds is that? 1,200 seconds. Her response. Okay. All right. Whatever pleases you. If you just need to know how many seconds, great. But kids, they struggle to understand time. Are we there yet?

[15 : 58] Is that not a common question when traveling with children? And so kids are, they're quick to lose hope. They're quick to quit persevering.

Because to them, it feels like forever. They're stuck in this car forever. They can't understand time the way that an adult would. And so they can't persevere like an adult.

We took a road trip to California last year. And that was 13 hours a day, three straight days. So when we got to the point where it was like under four hours, it felt like we were almost to our destination. Like, oh, under four.

We're almost there. And so as an adult, I can grasp that. For a child, it's like under four hours. It still feels like all day. They can't keep perspective.

This road trip is going to go on forever. We can kind of treat evil that way. We can treat sin in that way. The wicked will rule forever. Psalm 125 reminds us, no, it won't.

[16 : 55] Satan and his forces, they may seem to have the upper hand, but they don't.

Remembering that evil will fully and finally be defeated, it keeps us from hopelessness, from giving in and living in the here and now for ourselves.

It keeps perspective. What feels like forever to us is only a moment to God. 2 Peter 3, 8. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

And so evil will not have the last word. From a human perspective, we see how things appear, but from God's perspective, we see how things really are.

And that is why we need his word, to help us keep perspective. When faced with evil, we remember that it will not rule forever. Well, that's the second response.

Here's the third and final response from our verses this evening. We remember that God will act according to his righteous character. Now, perhaps a more skillful preacher than myself could say that more succinctly, but I couldn't figure out how to.

[18 : 04] So that's what that is. We remember God will act according to his righteous character.

Read again with me verses four and five. Do good, O Lord, to those who are good and to those who are upright in their hearts.

But those who turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord will lead away with evildoers. Peace be upon Israel. Here's what we learn from those verses. God is unchanging.

People are fickle. We can't make up our minds. We change the standards all the time, but God doesn't. God remains the same.

He's constant. He's consistent in how he relates to us. Those who walk in righteousness are blessed. Those who walk in wickedness are judged.

Go all the way back to God's dealings with his people after the Exodus, and we see it throughout history. God acts in accordance with his character. God makes no exceptions.

[19 : 08] He doesn't tweak the standards. He acts according to his righteous character, always.

People don't. We're terrible at being consistent.

For me, this immediately goes to parenting. Parenting is hard for lots of reasons. One of those reasons, being consistent. When the rules change, when the standards change at home, that makes for confusion and frustration for the kids.

But it doesn't just apply in the home. It applies in the workforce. If your boss changes the standards, says you're going to work these amount of hours this week, and then you look at your schedule, and that's not what you're scheduled for, that's frustrating.

The standards have changed. People are bad at being consistent. But God isn't. He acts according to his righteous character, always. And so, that's helpful to us.

That's good for us. When we see evil at work in the world, we're comforted in knowing that one day the righteous will be vindicated. If not today, one day for sure, God indeed will do good to those who are good and upright.

[20 : 18] He will bless them. He will bless them with an eternity of joy, an eternity of delight in himself. And at the same time, we can be sure that God will deal with the wicked.

It might feel like he's not going to. It might feel like the wicked will get away with their evil. There may be times that we think, God, how can you let this go on?

Read the Psalms. God's people have said that before. And yet this Psalm reminds us God is going to do something. Maybe not today, but one day he will.

The wicked will not get away with their evil forever. God will do what is perfectly just. God will do what is perfectly right. There are no double standards.

He won't be paid off by the wicked to show some leniency. He won't accept any bribes. He will judge with complete fairness. And he'll get the judgment right every single time.

[21 : 20] His justice is perfect. Now here's the thing. If God judged us according to our deeds, what would be the end for us?

If we're looking and saying, God, do to the evil as they deserve, what if he did that to us? What do we deserve?

If God judged us according to his deeds, we would be headed for destruction ourselves apart from the work of Christ. We too were wicked.

We too had turned aside to our own ways. The psalmist pleaded with God to do good to those who are good. If you notice, it's the only time in the psalm where the psalmist addresses God.

He goes from talking about God, from talking about God's people, to talking straight to God. He was so caught up. He was so moved by this desire for God to act according to his righteous character that he just cries out directly to God.

[22 : 30] He is desperate for God to intervene. But here's the reality. There is no one who does good. No, not one.

There is no one who is upright in their heart except God himself. God is good. Fallen humanity is crooked. That's what the Bible says.

Just before Moses died, in the book of Deuteronomy, he wrote a song. And listen to how he describes God and how he describes the people of Israel in this song.

Deuteronomy 32. Deuteronomy 32, and we're going to look at verses 4 and 5. The rock.

His work is perfect. For all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity. Just and upright is he.

[23 : 28] Now he's going to shift to talking about the people of Israel here in verse 5. They have dealt corruptly with him. They are no longer his children because they are blemished. They are a crooked and twisted generation.

Same language as Psalm 125. Those who are upright and those who turn aside to their crooked ways. And ultimately, only God is upright and we all have turned aside to our crooked ways.

Earlier in Deuteronomy, when God was preparing the next generation of Israelites to enter into the promised land, he made sure that they understood why he was giving them the land.

In case they were getting kind of puffed up about themselves and thinking too highly of themselves, thinking, we really deserve this. We're awesome. Previous generation, they messed up. We got it right. We're getting the land.

In case they started thinking that way, listen to what God says in Deuteronomy 9, 5. Not because of your righteousness or, hear it, the uprightness of your heart are you going to end to possess their land.

[24 : 37] But because of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God is driving them out from before you. So God says, you are not upright in heart. Only God is.

Deuteronomy 32, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. So we were doomed. We were hopelessly lost. If God were to do good to those who are good, there wouldn't be much for him to do.

But here's the beauty of the gospel. Christ took our place. We deserved death for our sins. And Jesus took our place. The Bible says that through Christ's death, the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands was canceled.

It was nailed to the cross, Colossians 3 says. And so the only one who was ever upright, he was condemned. He died when we should have.

And those who were deserving of condemnation by grace through faith are now considered upright by God. This is the great exchange. His robes for ours.

[25 : 45] His perfect righteousness. Our unrighteousness. His perfect record for our sinful record. For those who are in Christ, God the just is satisfied.

Because Christ's righteousness has been credited to us. This is the wonder of the gospel. That Christ not only would die in our place, but that we would be robed in his righteousness.

And this same Savior who died in our place, he rose again, and one day he is returning. And the Bible describes him as a king coming to conquer his enemies.

And so when we face evil, when we are tempted to despair, and when we think the scepter of wickedness will rest on the land, we remember no. It's not the scepter of wickedness that will have the final say.

It's not the scepter of wickedness that will rule and reign in the end. It's Jesus. It's Jesus, our king. He will rule forever.

[26 : 51] The peace that the psalmist cries for in verse 5, that peace is only found in Jesus Christ and his kingdom. And so if you're here tonight and you have not bowed the knee to King Jesus, there is no better time than today.

Repent, turn from your sin, trust in him. Trust in Christ to save you from God's wrath. He gladly welcomes all who come to him by his spirit, his righteous record in exchange for your sinful one. You stand rightly condemned as we all did before the righteous, perfect judge. But today you can stand blameless, fully accepted, covered in Christ's righteousness.

Bow to the king worthy of all honor. The writer of Hebrews talks about how Jesus is king. And he quotes from another psalm, Psalm 45.

And he says that the words of Psalm 45 are about Jesus, that they're fulfilled in Jesus. And listen to what the psalm says, Psalm 45, verses 6 and 7.

[28 : 03] And see if you can hear the contrast to Psalm 125. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness.

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. And so when we're faced with evil, we remember that God is our security. We remember that evil will not rule forever.

And we remember that God will act according to his righteous character. Psalm 125 says, that the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous.

That's true. Because that land was ultimately allotted to the one righteous one, King Jesus. And he holds the scepter of uprightness. And he is the king who is worthy of all our worship.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we come before you tonight in humble submission and in humble adoration that you, Lord, would look upon us just as you would look upon the people of Israel and say, not because of your righteousness.

[29 : 16] And that is so very true of us. It is not because of our righteousness. We enter into your throne room even tonight not because of our righteousness, but because of the righteousness of your Son that has been credited to us by faith.

And Father, we do pray tonight that you would remind us who our king is, that you would remind us and comfort us with the truth of your word.

As we see evil around us, Lord, we do pray that you would help us to remember your Son, the perfect king who holds the scepter of uprightness and we can put our trust in him.

So help us, Lord, to live in light of that, to live as a people of hope, an assurance, to live with confidence before a watching world.

Help us, Lord, to be quick to speak of you and of your ways, of the great mercy that is found in you. Even as we go forth from here back into another week, Lord, we pray that you would strengthen us from your word.

[30 : 20] We thank you for Psalm 125. We thank you for the hope that it contains. We thank you, Lord, for your Son and that by your Spirit we could gather tonight in unity to hear your word preached.

We pray, Lord, that you would work it into our hearts, that we would go from here to your praise and to your honor. And it's in Christ's name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.