

The Lord is On Our Side

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Date: 09 September 2012

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] We were so excited yesterday when we heard that Pastor Yosef had been released. I know my family has been praying for that regularly for over a year now.

And to finally see God answer those prayers is good for us. As many of you know, he was imprisoned by Iranian authorities for three years for charges of apostasy.

And he's now at home with his family. And that's a glorious and great answer to prayer. Psalm 124, the psalm that we're going to look at this afternoon, is just for occasions like that.

Like this. It's a psalm of escape. There's real joy here and relief. And one day we will all be singing this psalm together on golden shores with Jesus before us.

Because it's going to find its ultimate fulfillment when we have finally and forever and ultimately escaped from this wicked world. But let's read it now.

[1:14] Psalm 124. I invite you to turn there. If the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel say. If the Lord had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive.

The flood would have engulfed us. The torrent would have swept over us. The raging waters would have swept us away. Praise be to the Lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare. The snare has been broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

When God first spoke the gospel to Adam and Eve in the garden, he said, I will put enmity between your seed and the serpent's seed.

Eve, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And that hostility, that enmity, is a theme in Genesis that you can trace throughout that book.

[2:20] And it's the background of your entire Christian life. Whether you feel it or not, there is a hostility between you and the wicked world.

And it's in the face of that hostility, which is the background of your life, Christian, that Psalm 124 comes to you and seeks to encourage you and to remind you and to show you and to spur you on to praise.

And so we're going to have three brief points this afternoon. And our first point is this. The puppet master and his puppets. The puppet master and his puppets.

Does that sound sinister to you? I hope it does. Filling up this psalm is the world's anger and violence toward God's people.

But behind that anger and that violence and that rage is a puppet master pulling the world's strings. And you see how he works.

[3:25] And you see their anger in four different pictures in Psalm 124. So the first, there's these four pictures that we see the puppet master and his puppets at work.

And the first is they're like a devouring beast. Look at verses 2 and 3. If the Lord had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive.

What is the hostility of evil men like towards God's people? It's like a devouring beast that swallows its prey alive. The second picture is of a flood.

Of a flood. Look at verse 4. The flood would have engulfed us. The torrent would have swept over us. The raging waters would have swept us away. Seven years ago, we saw the torrent of Hurricane Katrina come through New Orleans.

Sweep over New Orleans. Over 1,800 people drowned in that catastrophe.

[4:36] They drowned as they hid in their homes. As they went up on their roofs. As they ran away in the streets and in the cars. The waters were violent, uncontrollable.

And swept them to their death. That is what the anger of men is like. There's something irrational. There's something uncontrollable and violent and deadly about it.

So we bless and they curse. We do good and they do evil. So their consciences stab them. When they see our righteous and holy lives.

Their consciences stab them. And instead of turning and repenting, they try to put out the dark. Isn't that what they did with the Lord Jesus? That's what they do with his people.

And there are raging water. That can't be reasoned with. That can't be controlled from a human perspective. And then the third picture is of a hungry lion or a hungry beast.

[5 : 44] Verse 6. Praise be to the Lord who has not let us be torn by their teeth. The first picture was of a beast that devours its prey whole and live. This one, if anything more, is more violent and more deadly.

Because the lion tears the prey into pieces. And that's what the anger of men would seek to do.

Then the fourth picture is of a fowler. That's someone who hunts birds.

Now it's not violence. Now it's not devouring and swallowing and tearing. Instead, what is brought to the surface is their cunning.

Their deceitfulness and their secrecy. Their secret hatred. If you're going to catch an animal in a snare, you have to cover the snare.

Hide the snare. Deceive the animal. Disguise it. One time when I was 10 or 11 or so, I went with my friend and his dad. And we actually, he was a trapper.

[6 : 48] Like someone who trapped animals. And we went out with, I went out with them. And it's something I've only done one time. And it's something I will always remember.

We went out into the woods. And we went by streams. And then all of a sudden, we would stop.

And I don't know why we would stop there. But soon I realized why we were stopped there.

Because hidden in the stream was a trap. Where no one could see. And there were several times when there was an animal in there.

Dead. So the muskrat had been swimming along. Hunting for food. Minding its own business. And it swam into the cage.

And in swimming into the cage, it tripped the door. And the door shut behind him. And the muskrat probably thought he was okay for a few seconds. And then he realized that he couldn't get out.

[7 : 42] And he went one way. And he went another way. And he pushed and shoved. And he did everything he could. But there was no escaping the trap. That's the picture that David uses.

The world is a fowler secretly laying its traps. And we are the animal that it seeks to hunt. Now, what is interesting about these four pictures is that the New Testament takes each one of them up. And applies it to Satan. Because behind the anger of men is the hostility of something far more sinister.

Satan. So listen to these passages. 1 Peter 5.8 Satan is a devouring beast.

2 Timothy 2.26 talks about people in sin. And Paul says, Now you need to restore them gently. Gently instruct them in the hope that God will grant them repentance. That they will come to their senses and will escape from the trap of the devil.

[8 : 58] Where do wicked men learn their deceitful ways? Well, their father was a liar from the beginning. Revelation 12. Satan is pictured as this terrible dragon. And first he hates the infant boy who becomes a king.

He hates Jesus. And when he can't get to Jesus, he turns his venom on the woman, who's a picture of the church. And there it says, From his mouth, the serpent spewed water like a river to overtake the woman and sweep her away.

Satan unleashes the terrible floods that threaten the people of God. And the point is, behind all the anger and the malice and the persecution of men and of governments is an evil puppet master.

There is puppets. He is the unseen king of this world. And he has taken men captive to do his will.

Now, some folks make too much of him.

But some people can make too little of him. It was not Benny Hinn or Lester Summerall who said, For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers and against authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

[10 : 26] Behind the rage of man is an enemy that's far too great for any of you. He's too strong. He is too smart.

Martin Luther said, On earth is not his equal. You are not his equal. So behind the puppets of governments and men is this puppet master.

And he is real. And he is terrible. And he hates you. So you need help.

You need help. Or he will devour you. Sweep you away. And that brings us to our second point.

And our second point is called The Great Difference Maker.

The Great Difference Maker. Now, we hear about difference makers in sports a lot. That's a title that they put on really good athletes. Now, Michael Jordan was probably the greatest difference maker in basketball history.

[11:29] So his rookie year, he led the Bulls in every statistical category. Do you believe that?

That's pretty good. In steals, rebounds, points, assists, block shots.

He was the first. He was the best on his team. He made the Bulls a different team. So they went from gutter-dwelling nobodies to a playoff team.

And that's what David is saying about God. He changes everything. He makes the great difference.

You've seen who we are up against.

Wicked men, evil men, with Satan propelling them and driving them and controlling. We're outmatched. You are outmatched.

You are outgunned. You are outsmarted. And yet, we are safe. You're safe. You're not swept away.

You're not torn to pieces. Why? Well, the psalm begins with this.

[12:32] Because the Lord is on our side. If the Lord had not been on our side, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, if it had been anyone else, we would have been in the same danger that we've always been in.

But, if the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel say. In other words, you, Israel of God, you need to say this. You need to recognize it and see it and understand it.

If the Lord had not been on our side, when men attacked, they would have swallowed us alive. And so, the Lord is on our side and that makes all the difference. It changes the picture completely.

Men are strong. God is stronger. Men are cunning. But the wisdom of man is nothing but foolishness to God. He couldn't stoop that low to think that dumb.

That's what it means. It's foolishness to him. And haven't we seen that again and again in Isaiah?

His understanding no one can fathom. It's not because he is irrational or he is below us that we can't make sense of him.

[13:39] His understanding is so far above ours. And he is the sovereign Lord. He whistles and kings come running. He raises up kings and he puts them down.

He raises up Babylon and puts it down. So men are strong, but God is stronger. And so all the rage of men, all the forces that are against us and against you personally, Christian, is nothing compared to the Lord who is your help.

The nations rage and the Lord laughs. Their cunning is laughable. Their rage, their strength is laughable.

So dads, when you wrestle your younger children, do you cower in fear? Do they trick you?

Are they so smart that they outsmart you and they get you? Well, your strength and your IQ is a lot closer to your children's than God is, God's is to man's.

[14:46] He is far above us. And so you have a reason to fear. Psalm 124, you have no reason to fear. The Lord is on your side. Yes, men are against us.

And I think we need to be prepared that they are going to go from bad to worse. And there are going to be dark days ahead for all of us.

And in the face of that, in the growing hatred of men, as things come to a climax, which I have no idea when it will be, near or far, whatever we face, there's no reason to be afraid.

If the Lord is for you, who can be against you? Nothing you have faced, nothing you face now, nothing you ever will face, will finally be your undoing because God is on your side.

And that makes all the difference. He set his love upon you and he will have you. He's chosen you. He's justified you. And he will glorify you. And so the end of the book is clear.

[16:01] We win. The Lord has set his love upon us and that is something that should put steel in your bones and put courage in your chest.

We don't have to face this world cowering and unafraid and uncertain. The Lord is on our side. God makes all the difference. Now, third and last and finally, a question.

How can this be true? In a certain way, it's easy to preach a psalm like this here, now.

No enemies attacking with freedom. We face limited persecution. And so, we may well ask because when times may change, we may ask, how can this be true?

The year was 1582. The place was Scotland. John Drury was a Scottish minister. And he had been forcefully exiled from his hometown and from his church.

[17:08] And people prayed for him to be brought back. And for some time, he wasn't even allowed to come back to his hometown, his church. But after a while, people prayed and they prayed and he was finally allowed to come back.

I don't know all the details of it. But as he came into town, his flock met him. There was about 200 people there and he was met with cheers.

And as they walked further and further into the town, further into the center, more and more people met him. And there were soon 400 people and 600 people and 800 people. The whole, everyone's flocking to see him.

And soon it was over 1,000, upwards to 2,000. some people said. And about halfway to the church from out of town, from the outside of town, the crowd started singing four-part harmony.

Psalms 124. And it was an amazing sight. 2,000 people singing a cappella, four-part harmony.

[18:12] Let Israel say if the Lord had not been on our side. Now, onlookers were astonished. I mean, at the sight and of what was happening.

And the man's enemies, they were silenced. Could not be heard or found. And it was clear to all that God had rescued John Drury.

Brought him back. Yesterday, God rescued Pastor Yusef. yesterday in Pakistan, a girl who was also under the indictment of apostasy and threatened with death was set free.

the Lord rescued that young lady. And it's amazing and our hearts rejoice to see God answering this. But it doesn't always end up like that, does it?

There was a Stephen. There was a Peter. There was a Paul. There were many others. Hebrews 11 talks about many glorious things.

[19:19] About amazing things and wonderful things that faith is able to do with God's help. But then it goes on to say, others were tortured and refused to be released.

Some faced jeers and flogging while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned. They were sawed in two. They were put to death by the sword.

Now, when times like that happen and when things like that happen to you and yours, it can seem like Psalm 124 just doesn't ring true.

So let's suppose that Pastor Yusef was executed yesterday instead of released. What would we say then? Well, I think if we understand the Bible correctly and we understand the big picture, we could still go to Psalm 124 and say, praise be to the Lord.

We have escaped. How can we say that? How can we say that?

[20:30] In our own death and in the death of those who we love, who are violently attacked and martyred. Well, because for every Christian, death is our escape.

Pastor Yusef, if Pastor Yusef had died yesterday, the Lord would have still rescued him. He would have shut his eyes on this world and opened his eyes on the next. And Pastor Yusef could have said, praise be to the Lord, I have escaped.

And that's why Paul could say to live is Christ and to die is gain. Death is not loss, it is gain for the believer because death cannot overcome God's protection.

Death cannot support God's love. And instead, for many, it is God's way of salvation. It's his way of rescue.

And they will be resurrected on the last day. And in the hope of that, we can face our death and know that this too, our death too, God will turn it for our good.

[21:33] So when we die, we escape this world of sin. And we escape this world of hatred and this world of fear. God delivers us from all of our enemies in death.

And he brings us safe to his side. So what shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

What enemy shall we stack up against God? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things?

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Who shall? Evil men? Satan? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or sword or danger or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we face death all day long, we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No.

[22:44] In all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life nor neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything in all of creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's the message of Psalm 124. You are safe in his arms. He has loved you and he does love you and so rest yourself, dear Christian, in God's care for you.

Repent again of your unbelief. love you. It's easy to be afraid of men because they're so present, they're so in your face, and it's easy to be swept away with fear.

And so bring Psalm 124 before you again. Repent and believe and say with that father, I believe

Lord, but help my unbelief. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we love you because you first loved us.

And we know the grand sum total of our love is nothing compared to the height and the depth and the persistence of your love. Thank you that your love will meet us on our deathbed and beyond.

[24:15] Thank you that your love will see us on the day of resurrection and judgment and you will give us safety and peace and hope and joy in that day and we will all be together.

Our fellowship will be complete and not one of your little lambs will be missing. All those for whom Christ died will be brought safely in.

We thank you that many here are among your flock and we pray for those who are still outside.

Open their eyes. Show them the futility, the uselessness of idols and believing and things that cannot save, trusting in themselves and their own righteousness, trusting in their own ideas.

Show them yourself. Show them your saving might and how they can let go of all that they are holding dear and come and find everything they need for life, for godliness, for all eternity in Christ Jesus.

And it's in His name I pray Amen.