

You are not alone

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] afternoon we're going to look at the words we read from Psalm 125 so if you have a Bible you might find it helpful to have it open there is Psalm 125 and if you have the same Bible as me that's on page 622, Psalm 125. Now according to a recent survey that I came across people in Scotland today in the United Kingdom are experiencing crushing loneliness and despair in a way almost unparalleled to any previous generation. We live in a world that is more connected, more busy than ever but apparently we live in a world that is more and more lonely and isolated and there will be people here this morning people in Carlyway who have experienced that kind of crushing loneliness, people maybe this morning feel a sense of that. We can feel lonely even when we are surrounded by other people, we can feel isolated when we have family and friends around us. Loneliness is a very real human experience and one of the reasons I love the Psalm so much is that they capture this wide range of human emotion and human experience. You have joy and delight, you have anxiety and grief and anguish and shame, you have happiness and blessing, you have loneliness and despair. The Psalms have this wonderful spectrum of human experience and Psalm 125 I think we see in here what I think is a great antidote to human loneliness.

We're going to think about how the Gospel of Jesus Christ tackles loneliness and isolation. Now Psalm 125 is one of the great Psalms of ascent, it's one of these Psalms, Psalm 120 through to Psalm 134 which are called the songs of ascent and really what they were were Psalms that God's people would sing together as they traveled up to Jerusalem for the various feasts to celebrate God's salvation. But there are also our songs today as the church, there are songs as God's people, we share in them, we sing them, they are songs that speak powerfully and deeply into our own lives and our own experiences. You see the Bible often puts the Christian life into the language of a journey, we're described as pilgrims, we're called travellers, exiles, we're people who are traveling to a certain destination and the Christian traveller needs these songs to sing on the way, they're songs that help us, they help us face the challenges and the battles of the journey of the Christian life, they're like a Christian road trip playlist. Now Psalm 125 is one of these Psalms of ascent, it's a song for the journey and it reminds us that through the Gospel of

Jesus Christ you are never alone. No matter how isolated and lonely you might feel, no matter how difficult your experience at this time might seem, you are not alone. Those who trust in the Lord it says 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 forever more. So we're going to unpack some of these words, we're going to think about them together, reflect over them and first of all we're going to think about what it looks like to trust in the Lord, that's where the Psalm begins with those who trust in the Lord.

According to another recent survey I came across there's a growing lack of trust in our country. People are finding it harder and harder to trust others. Some examples of that, politicians in general, people say they only trust, only 18% of people would say that they trust politicians and political parties to do what is right. People also apparently find it hard to trust bankers and people who work in the financial sector. There's a wide range of things people find hard to trust but people also find it hard to trust family and friends and colleagues, the people who surround us on a daily basis. Trust apparently is declining across the board in Scotland and there is a growing wave of cynicism and mistrust. That's across the UK and apparently in Scotland that's where this this growing cynicism is at its greatest. Apparently statistically the

Scottish people are the most cynical in the UK. Now I don't know if that's true but it's an interesting statistic but the point is people are finding it harder and harder to trust others. The number one reason people gave for finding it hard to trust was because of something someone had done to them, particularly a close friend or family member. Trust is difficult, it's hard to trust someone but today here in Psalm 1 through 5 we have a picture of someone who is absolutely worthy of that trust, someone who will never let us down, someone who will never disappoint you, someone who will never break your trust, someone who will not deceive you or lie to you. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion. So what does it mean to trust? Well in a general sense to trust someone is to place your absolute confidence in them. It means to rely on a person, to think that they are dependable and consistent and when it's used in the Bible it means to take God at his word, to believe that God will do what God says, to truly believe in your heart that God will keep his word and

[5 : 52] God is absolutely dependable and worthy of that trust. God is a God who cannot lie, God is a God who cannot fail you or disappoint you, God is someone we can place our absolute confidence in and not be disappointed. To trust God also means more than just simply believing a certain list of facts or doctrines or intellectual truths. It has to be more than that. James in his letter says you believe that God is one, great even the demons believe that. It has to be more than head knowledge of the truth, trust is a response of faith in the heart to God's promises. It's an expectation that God will do what he promises to do because he will. God is a God who keeps his word and we have to ask ourselves this morning do we trust him? Do we trust that God is faithful when we're faced with bleak circumstances? When we get that horrible diagnosis from the doctor? When our family disappoints us? When we're encountering difficult times at work and our life is just feeling like it's pressure everywhere? Do we trust that God will keep his promises? I want to suggest in Psalm 125 we have three results of trust in the Lord and the first is this trust in the Lord leads to a life of stability. Read verse one those who trust in Lord are like Mount

Zion which cannot be moved but abides forever. They're like Mount Zion. There's something incredible about a mountain. When you look out at the scenery and you see a range of peaks I was driving up the A9 just on Friday afternoon and I was driving through Dromochter and I was looking around me and I was surrounded by mountains.

It's breathtaking. Sometimes we take them for granted living in Scotland but if you meet someone who comes from a flat country like the Netherlands they come to Scotland. It's incredible the scenery we have. It's breathtaking but mountains are often used in the Bible as a picture of stability because mountains endure mountains stand the test of time and they remain strong and God is telling you here in Psalm 125 if you trust in him you have this mountain-like stability an unshakable safety and security. Maybe some of you have been to Fort William you've been up Ben Nevis or you've seen Ben Nevis from the car. Ben Nevis is an incredible beast of a hill. It stands well over 4,000, 4,500 feet tall and over 100,000 people go up Ben Nevis every year they go walking and climbing and skiing and all kinds of different activities and Ben Nevis gets all kinds of weather battering at every year it gets snow and ice and hail and wind but

Ben Nevis isn't going anywhere anytime soon. Ben Nevis has dominated the landscape of Scotland for hundreds and hundreds of years and it will continue to do so and you can imagine in a similar way God's people as they travel up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a city built on a mountain surrounded by other mountains they look up at the scenery and they're singing these songs and saying this is what God's people are like this is the kind of stability we have in Yahweh our Lord. Unshakable mountain-like stability. The point is that mountains stand firm whatever else is happening whatever storms are coming that their way mountains stand firm. We live in a world today that is constantly changing a world that's constantly evolving and we're always going through changes in our own lives everyone whether you're a Christian or not. Each one of us has a deeply rooted desire I think for stability. Stability in a world that is changing. Some people look for that stability in their career in what they do for a living or some people look for stability in finance and to have some kind of material stability and security. Other people look for stability in family and friends and loved ones. Many of us find a sense of stability here in church but the problem is that none of these things stay the same forever. Change can be hard, change can be difficult but change is fundamentally a part of life. Our circumstances change, the people around us change, our career will change, our financial situation might change but Sam 125 is this first of all wonderful reminder that there's a source of stability that never changes. A source of stability that remains the same that is firm that is secure that is steadfast and trusting God means trusting the one who never changes. It means grounding yourself in the one who is like a mountain the one who endures forever and this wonderful Sam teaches us that when we trust him we too share in that stability. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion which cannot be shaken but endures forever. Foundations are important. What you build your life on matters a great deal. Jesus picked up on this image in the New Testament he told the parable about foundations. He said two men were each building a house.

A wise man built his house on a rock and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock. A foolish man on the other hand built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell and great was its fall. But do you see that in both stories the rains fell, the floods came and the winds blew. In both stories Jesus doesn't say if you build your house on the rock the storms won't come your way. Jesus doesn't say if you build your life on the right foundations you're not going to experience any difficulties. And this Sam in the same way doesn't tell you that if you trust in the Lord you won't have any problems. It doesn't tell you that you won't have to encounter sickness and pain and loss and anxiety and worry and loneliness and pressure and stress. It doesn't tell you that if you trust in the Lord you're guaranteed a ticket to an easy life. Our faith gets tested it gets battered sometimes, shaken and assaulted by the winds and the storms of this life but the point is with the right foundation in Christ it stands firm. Like a mountain in a storm. Our faith can feel weak at times, our faith can feel fragile, our faith can feel tested when we're encountering sometimes horrendous experiences and we can say why God? Why are we going through this? Why are you letting this happen? But the wonderful thing about the Christian life and faith in Jesus is it's not the strength of your subjective faith that matters but it's object. In other words it's not the strength of your own personal faith that depends on whether you'll make it through the storm but it's the person you put your faith in. Jesus Christ the object of our faith. He is the one who helps us stand firm. He is the author and the perfecter of our faith. We read in Hebrews that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever and those who trust him will be able to face all the storms of his life and stand firm. So that's the first thing trust in the Lord leads to stability. Secondly Sam 1-5 teaches us that trust in the Lord leads to surrounding by his presence. Read verse 2, as the mountains surround Jerusalem so the Lord surrounds his people from this time forth and forevermore. Maybe this afternoon you're sitting here and you're thinking that maybe I don't feel like an unmovable mountain. Maybe the situation in your life makes you feel like you're not standing firm.

[14 : 26] Sometimes our life can feel unstable. Sometimes we can feel like we're being blown about by the winds. We're so overwhelmed by the burdens and the worries and the pressures in our lives that it's hard to trust God. It's hard to take him at his word. Maybe this week you're going through a tough time at work. Maybe you have a boss that is causing you stress and pressure. Maybe you're feeling weighed down by your family, problems at home. Maybe you're struggling with ill health or sickness. Maybe long-term sickness. Maybe it's a broken or a strained relationship or marriage. Maybe it's hopes that have fallen through. The point is God knows there are times you feel this way. God knows there are times when his people feel weak and fragile. God knows there are times where your faith feels shaky. And we have this wonderful picture painted for us in verse 2. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people from this time forth and forevermore. As I said earlier, the city of Jerusalem is itself built on a mountain, but it's actually surrounded by other mountains, bigger mountains. In terms of a defensive position, that is the dream. That is the ideal defensive position for a city. I live and work just under Enborough Castle in the city of Enborough. And Enborough Castle is this beast of a castle built on a hill. It's raised up above the city and it just towers over everything else. And history shows us how hard it is to capture a city built on a hill. Maybe you've read Lord of the Rings or you've seen the movies by JRR Tolkien. There's a fortress in Lord of the Rings called Helms Deep.

Helms Deep is this fortress that has never been captured. And the reason it's never captured is because it's built into the hills. It's surrounded. It's encircled by mountains. It's a strong, unbreakable defensive position. And Sam 1-2-5 is telling us here that if you trust in the Lord, this is the kind of security, the kind of safety surrounding you have through Jesus. You're absolutely surrounded by his presence in the midst of the darkest experience in your life.

When you feel like the lights have gone out on you, when you feel overwhelmed and isolated, you are surrounded by his presence. Through the spirit of Jesus Christ you are surrounded by God. And God's people experienced horrific things in the Old Testament. They were in slavery in Egypt. They wandered through the wilderness for a whole generation. They had evil kings and foreign overlords oppressing them. They were taken from their homes and their families and carted off into exile in Babylon. But they were surrounded by God's presence.

Maybe today you're feeling alone and isolated. Maybe you feel weighed down by life circumstances. And as we were saying, God doesn't tell you that trusting in him will somehow take all these things away. He does tell you he will surround you. He will comfort you. He will be with you in them and through them. The dangerous message of the prosperity gospel is that if you trust God enough, you'll be blessed. If you trust God enough, he will make you better.

If you trust God enough, he will bless you with riches and financial gain. If you trust God enough, only good things are in store for you. If your trust is just strong enough, if you just believe enough, you won't be ill. You won't be poor. God will bless you and you'll prosper. That's an incredibly dangerous and harmful message. And it doesn't fit in at all with their own experience or with what the Bible says. I'm going to read a few verses from 2 Corinthians chapter 11.

[18 : 32] This is Paul's experience of the Christian life. Five times he says, I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys I was in danger from rivers. I was in danger from robbers. Danger from my own people. Danger from gentiles. Danger in the city. Danger in the wilderness. Danger at sea. Danger from false brothers.

In toil and hardship. Through many a sleepless night. In hunger and thirst. Often without food. In cold and exposure. So that's not exactly a picture of smooth sailing in the Christian life. Paul's experience shows us that that's just not the case. And we know that in our own experience too. Whatever our circumstances are this week, God says to us in Psalm 125, He says to us through the Gospel, you are not alone. Whatever you are going through, you are not alone.

You are surrounded by His presence. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever more. So trusting God leads to stability, to surrounding by His presence, thirdly and finally, trusting God leads to security, a deep sense of security and safety. If you read as it Sam goes on in verse 3, you see that it goes on to speak about the reality of opposition. For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous. Now what does that mean? Well scepter is a reference to rule, to reign. It's a picture of power and control. And the point of this verse I think is that sometimes it can seem to us as God's people, like the world is out of control. That it's out of God's control. We look at our world, our country, our nation and everything that's going on. And sometimes it can seem like God's rule is nowhere to be seen. For one who is king over all the earth as we sang earlier in Psalm 47, where is God's rule? We look at the morality of our nation, of our society and we think where is God? We look at some of the things that are happening to God's people in persecution across our land, we're thinking, but

Nigeria in our prayer points, where is God? Sometimes it can seem like God's rule has been challenged. We see that in the Bible, in the Old Testament. There are enemies. There are people who are in opposition to God's rule. Sometimes God's people face external enemies. They face foreign kings and overlords who come in, Assyria, Babylon, Egypt. Sometimes it's internal enemies. They face a wicked king of their own choosing, an evil tyrant. Their own sin, all kinds of things. But today God's kingdom exists in a world full of other kingdoms. Kingdoms in rebellion against his rule. When we look at Scotland, sometimes we can be led to spiritual depression. We think, God, what are you doing? But God's promise to us is ultimately he is in control. That's what God's people were saying in this Psalm. The scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous. How do they know? What gives them the sense of confidence? They trusted in God. They trusted in his rule in the face of immense opposition and difficulty. They trusted that God ultimately would overthrow evil, that he would defeat Satan, that he would defeat all these other kingdoms, all these people in opposition to him. One day every knee will bow before him. The New

Testament promises us every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, that he is king over this world. But verse 3 also contains a subtle warning for us when living under the scepter of wickedness. I think there's a danger of God's people falling into temptation. Notice how it goes on, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong. I think this verse is really painting a picture for us of the dangers of compromise, of living in a world that's in opposition to God, being surrounded by people who are living in conflict to God's rule. The temptation is to be like them. God's people experienced this in the Old Testament time and time again. It was a massive problem for them. God has redeemed them. He's brought them out of Egypt. He's given them this land. He's given them this relationship, all these blessings. And what do they do? Time and time again, they turn away. They worship the gods of the cultures around them.

[23 : 44] They're tempted aside on this great journey. As we think about the journey, the pilgrimage of the Christian life, we know there's times where we're tempted.

We're tempted to go a different path. Maybe we know people who have followed for a time, but have turned away. Maybe we can think of people in our own family and friends who have done that. Maybe we felt drawn away ourselves. Maybe we feel even this morning that we're slipping away from God. God is always calling his people back to himself. He's calling his people to trust him afresh, to give yourself over to him and to follow him. The true king of this world is Jesus Christ and he is seated on his throne. And there's a certainty to that here in Psalm 125. The scepter of wickedness shall not remain. It shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous. While it might seem at times that the world's out of control, we're promised it is a temporary thing. There's a great security in knowing that God is ultimately the king, the ultimate one in control. The land allotted to the righteous in Psalm 125 we know from the New Testament is referring to that wonderful, wonderful promise of a new heavens and a new earth.

A home for God's people. A home that we are traveling towards. A home where there is no evil, where there is no difficulty, no wickedness, no sin, no temptation, no suffering. Revelation 21 promises us on that day that he will wipe away every tear from your eyes. He will make all things new, a new heavens and a new earth for us to live with God and with each other as his people. It's a wonderful promise, a wonderful security. Today in Scotland most of our enemies are spiritual. We don't face persecution perhaps in the same way that they do in Nigeria or in the Middle East. But these enemies are real. We are very much in a battle as Christians. Trust in the Lord gives us a deep security against our enemies. I think it was C.S. Lewis said the three main enemies in the Christian life were the world, the flesh and the devil. And we might be attacked in all different kinds of ways even in this week to come. As we follow him, as we love him, as we live for him, we think about these songs, the Psalms of Ascent, the songs for the journey. And we're reminded that these aren't here to stop the danger, they aren't here to remove the conflict, to deal with the opposition, therefore equipping us to face it, to stand firm, to be strong. The reality is that the Christian life each and every day is a battle. When you wake up in the morning till you go to bed in the evening, you're in a battle. There's spiritual warfare going on and it is naive or even dangerous to ignore that.

The Psalm before this one, Psalm 124, that wonderful Psalm is a powerful reminder of this fact. It says, if it had not been the Lord who had been on our side, when people rose up against us, they would have swallowed us alive. The flood would have swept us away if it had not been the Lord who was on our side.

And that confidence, it leads us in Psalm 125 to prayer. Look how the Psalm concludes, 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 evil doers. Peace be upon Israel. Now it's important to acknowledge that when we say to God, do good, O Lord, to those who are good, we're not referring to those who are perfect, to those who are somehow morally righteous.

[27 : 47] Verse 4 isn't asking God to be good because we've somehow earned it. Those who are good are essentially those who trust in the Lord, those who are His people, those who love Him, those who follow Him, those who have a relationship with Him.

So the Psalmist here is asking God to be good to those who are following Him in a world that has rejected Him, a world that has turned away from Him. This kind of trust should always lead us to prayer, to intercession, to coming before our God and praying. We need to be people who pray, who come to God with our battles, who come to God with the things that worry us, our struggles, our difficulties, even when our faith seems fragile, like we're hanging on by a thread. Jesus promises us in this wonderful chapter in John chapter 10, if your faith and your trust are in Jesus, your security, your safety, your stability is never determined by the quality of your own faith, by your ability to obey, by anything you can possibly do. He says, my sheep listen to my voice, I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. We have this wonderful promise in the Gospel, this unshakable safety, stability and security. I want to conclude with this quote from a scholar called Tim Keller. He says that trusting God means connecting yourself to the one person who will endure forever and that means that you will endure as well. In a world where seemingly everything changes and nothing lasts, fix your mind, fix your heart on that promise. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people from this time forth and forever more. Let's pray.

Lord God, our Father, one in heaven, the one who loves us, the one who surrounds us by your presence. Lord God, we praise you for what you've done for us through the Gospel. We praise you for the wonderful, unshakable safety and security we have through Jesus Christ. Lord, we acknowledge how weak our faith can seem at times, how hard it is to trust you, Lord how hard it is to live for you in a world that has rejected you, a world full of temptations, a world full of difficulties.

Father, we pray that you'd speak to us this morning. Lord, that you would equip us and enable us to be faithful, to follow you, to commit our lives to you, to love you with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength. Father, go before us in the rest of this day. Lord, we pray that you'd enable us to be a people who put on the full armour of God. Lord, who surround ourselves and are secured in your presence. Equip us, Father, to do all we do to your glory in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude our time of worship together by singing the words we've been looking at, these wonderful words in Psalm 125 from the Scottish Salter. They and the Lord that firmly trust shall be like Zion Hill, which at no time can be removed but standeth ever still. We'll stand together and sing Psalm 125 to God's praise. They and the Lord that firmly trust shall be like

[31 : 35] Zion Hill, which at no time can be removed but standeth ever still.

Ah, from the heart of Jerusalem, the heart and sound away, the Lord is full of the soul, from henceforth and for it. More elements wrought upon the law of justice men shone all night, let righteous men stretch forth their arms unto iniquity. Do not do all those that be good, thy goodness, Lord, impart, and do not good to those that are upright within their heart. But ask for such a stern aside after their crooked way. God shall be forth with wicked men on Israel. He shall still to stay." glory, majesty and authority throughout all ages now and forevermore. Amen.