

The Lord Is My Keeper

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[0 : 0 0] Life is a journey. This is probably one of the most cliched statements you can make, but I make no apology for opening my message this way. After all, it is true. Life is a journey, and one which is not always easy. We face many ups and downs. The path is not always clear, and at times we may not actually know where we're going. Our Psalm tonight is a song of ascent. These were the songs that people of God would sing as they made their way up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. This great songbook within a songbook takes us on a pilgrim's journey from the stress in Psalm 120 to the great joy of a journey complete in Psalm 134. From the cry in my distress I call to the Lord, to the exultation, bless the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord. Along the way, we see a diverse songbook of laments, thanksgiving, songs of confidence, of wisdom, and of celebration. Our own journey through life can only benefit from and absolutely require a book of Psalms that expresses the full spectrum of life's experiences and emotions. The Psalms give us permission to express ourselves fully and honestly before God in all our failures, in our struggles, and in our doubts, in our confessions and our repentance, in our rejoicing and in our thanksgiving. God has provided us with an invaluable resource and anatomy of all parts of the soul, as John Calvin called it. So tonight, if you're struggling with a journey, if you feel like you're about to stumble, if the days seem like a slog and the nights leave you sleepless and tired, if you're fearful of what may lie ahead, if in all this your question echoes that of the Sammet, where does my help come from? Let us turn to this Psalm and receive the great encouragement that we see there. Thomas started a series, Five Cool Greek Words Last Week.

Well, this evening I've got a cool Hebrew word for you, Shammar. This word translated as keep in our text carries a deep and rich meaning. It appears several times in this Psalm, emphasizing God's active and continual role as the keeper of his people. In verse four, we read, He who keeps Israel. Again, in verse five, the Lord is your keeper. In verse seven, the Lord will keep you from all evil, and in the same verse, He will keep your life. Finally, in verse eight, we read, the Lord will keep your goings out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore. Clearly, this repeated use of the word keep is central to understanding the heart of this Psalm. But what does it really mean for the Lord to keep us? What is this Sam telling us about God's relationship with his people?

The Hebrew word Shammar carries idea of guarding, protection, persevering, or watching over. It's a word that suggests active and careful attention. When God keeps his people, he is not simply a distant observer or an indifferent caretaker. His keeping is personal, intentional, and constant. It's the same word used in Genesis two, where God places Adam in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it. There, Adam's task was to guard and take care of the Garden. In a similar way, God guards and takes care of and preserves his people.

This word also has covenantal overtones. In many places throughout the Old Testament, God promises to keep His covenant with his people. For example, in Deuteronomy seven and nine we read, Know therefore that the Lord your God is good, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him, and keeps His commandments to a thousand generations. God's keeping, therefore, is not just a general protection. It is rooted in his steadfast covenantal love for his people. He watches over us with the commitment and faithfulness of one who has made a binding promise to us, a promise that he will never break. When we look at this Psalm in this light, we begin to see the word keep is not passive. It's dynamic, it's protective, and it's deeply relational. God is actively involved in guarding his people at every moment under every circumstance. In Psalm 121, God is presented as a vigilant protector of Israel, His covenant people. But the scope of this watchful care extends beyond the nation of Israel. It encompasses all of God's children. For those who have with us who have placed our faith in Christ, we are included in this divine care. Just as

God kept Israel, He will keep us today. I'd like to propose three aspects of the Lord's keeping of His watchful care, which we can see from this passage, and that can encourage us and keep us going on our journey. So my three points will be God's watchful care, that is His keeping, is without interruption, it is without exception, and it is without limitation. So firstly, the Lord's keeping is without interruption. In verses 3 to 4, we read, He will not let your foot be moved, he who keeps you will not slumber, behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. We are reminded here of the profound nature of God's vigilance. Unlike us who grow weary, who need rest, who are prone to distraction, God's care is constant and unbroken. He does not grow tired or inattentive. There is never a moment when God is not actively involved in the lives of His people. This truth stands in contrast to the gods of other nations, as Elijah famously challenged the prophets of Baal, taunting them that perhaps their God was asleep. But not so with our

[7 : 47] God, His protection and care are unceasing. We do not have a God who takes naps. He does not go for a lie down while we struggle along the road of life. We have a God who is watching it over us at all times, and not as Beth Midler would have us believe from a distance, but He's close and involved, caring for us, holding us, protecting us. In times of distress, we may not always feel this. I'm sure many, if not all of us, would acknowledge the truth of the statement that God is with us. But if we're honest, and we should be, are there not times when we feel like this is not the case? In times of sadness, confusion or despair, how many of us have asked, where are you God? Why are you not there? Why won't you help me? Why don't you hear me? These are deeply human questions, questions that often emerge in the dark valleys of life. And yet in the midst of these struggles, these psalms give us permission to be honest before God, to bring these heartfelt pleas before Him. Sam 121 reminds us both God's promises. He is not a distant deity, but an intimately involved

Creator who knows our frailty, who understands our weakness, and who promises never to leave or forsake us. When we have these questions, it's vital that we turn back to the promises of His Word, to meditate on these great truths about our Lord, and to treasure them deeply in our hearts. Not only does the Word of God remind us of this truth, but God also provides His people, the church, as a tangible means of His care and presence. The ministry of our brothers and sisters can serve to remind us that the Lord is watching over us, even when we feel alone. If you're here tonight and you've been asking any of these questions, then I encourage you not to struggle alone. The Psalms teach us to be honest before God, but we should also be open with one another. Galatians 6 instructs us to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. How can we do this if we don't know one another's burdens? The Christian journey is not a solitary walk. We are called to walk together, supporting and encouraging one another. I understand that it can be very difficult to share our personal struggles with others, but the blessings of doing so are great. When we open up, when we allow others to be instruments of God's grace, it reminds us that His care is unceasing. God often uses companions on the journey to show us that He is not distant nor asleep, but is actively working through His people. Through the prayers and support and encouragement of our fellow believers, we can experience the reality that His keeping is indeed without interruption. He never sleeps. His eyes are always upon His people.

We see this most fully in the person of Jesus Christ. In Christ we see the fullness of God's care, His presence and protection for His people. We see the uninterrupted care of the good shepherd. Consider how Christ Himself embodied the constant, unflinching care of God. Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, entered into our human experience. He knows what it's like to be weary and burdened, yet He never once faltered in His care for those entrusted to Him. In John 10, 14, Jesus declares, I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me. The image of the shepherd is one of tireless vigilance, a shepherd who watches over his flock day and night, protecting them from harm. The good shepherd will never abandon his sheep. His care is perfect and without interruption. And it's even uninterrupted by death. On across there Jesus bore the weight of our sins, taking upon Himself the punishment that we deserved. In doing so, He secured for us eternal protection, a salvation that can never be taken away, even in His darkest hour, when He cried out, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Christ was fulfilling the plan of God for our salvation. At that moment, He was ensuring that we would never be forsaken. Christ endured separation from the Father so that we might enjoy an unbroken fellowship with the Father forever. Christ's resurrection is the ultimate demonstration of God's uninterrupted care. Death, the greatest enemy, could not hold Him. His victory over the grave assures us that nothing, not even death, can

separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father, ever living to intercede for us. His ministry on our behalf is ongoing, unceasing. He is constantly watching over us and His care never wavers. In Christ we also find a perfect example of God's intimate presence with His people. The name given to Jesus, Emmanuel, means God with us. As I've said, unlike some deist notions of a distant God who winds up the universe and just lets it run, the incarnation of Christ reveals that God has come near. Jesus walked among us, experienced our struggles, our sorrows and our temptations. And even now, though He has descended into heaven, He has not left us alone. He has sent us the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, ensuring that we are never without God's presence. So when we speak of God's keeping being without interruption, we must see that this is fulfilled most fully in our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the ultimate assurance that God is not distant, not asleep, not uninvolved in our lives. He is the good shepherd, the saviour, the constant intercessor and the one who will never leave us or forsake us. As we walk the journey of life, we can be confident that Jesus walks with us. He knows our struggles and sorrows and He promises to guide and protect us every step of the way. The unbroken care of God that we see in Psalm 121 points us directly to the unbroken care of Christ who watches over His people with a love that never fails. Secondly, the Lord's keeping is without exception. Turning to verses 5 and 6 we read, The Lord is your keeper, the Lord is your shade on your right hand, the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. This is a beautiful promise that extends God's protection to every moment of our lives. Whether by day or night, the Lord will keep us. For the ancient Israelites on Pilgrim into Jerusalem, the journey was often long and perilous, filled with physical dangers. The midday sun in the near east was not a gentle heat, but a severe oppressive force that could easily overwhelm the traveller. This was not a casual stroll through green pastures on a pleasant summer's day. No, the imagery here is one of a gruelling hike under blistering heat, where the sun poses a real risk to the body. The Lord, however, is described as your shade on your right hand.

[17:21] This means He is near. He is close enough to provide protection to shield us from the harshest elements. Again, His presence is not distant or passive, but actively engaging in guarding us from harm. Just as the sun's heat was a threat to the ancient traveller, there are situations in our lives that can feel oppressive, overwhelming and dangerous.

For us here in Lewis, blistering sun might not be a familiar challenge, but despite our milder climate, we each face our own daytime struggles, our own suns that can be beating down on us. Whether it's a toil of working a job, be fine frustrating. The anxiety of unemployment. The strain of difficult family relationships. Or the exhaustion of balancing life's many responsibilities. The Lord promises to be with us in these daily hardships. He is our shade, providing relief and strength as we face these burdens. We are not left alone to endure the heat of the day. And likewise, God's protection extends to the night. The moon shall not strike you by night. Just as the sun's heat symbolizes the hardship of the day, the moon here represents the struggles we face at night. In ancient times, some believed that the moonlight could cause harm, often associated with mental or emotional disturbances, what we might call today insomnia or anxiety or depression. Perhaps you know what it's like to lie awake at 2am, your mind busy with fear and worry. The concerns of the day linger into the night, making sleep impossible. I'm sure there are many here tonight who are familiar with the nightly struggle. The dread of going to bed, knowing that rest will not come easy. Yet even here, the Lord is your keeper. He watches over you through the long, quiet hours of the night. Whether that's physical exhaustion, emotional turmoil or spiritual distress, the Lord is present. His watchful care is constant, and it covers every moment, every trial and every fear. What a comfort to know that there is no exception to God's care for us. It doesn't matter what time of day it is, what kind of struggle we're facing or how deeply we feel lost or alone. God's protection is total. This Psalm reassures us that we are kept both in the bright light of day and in the darkness of night. There is no place, no situation and no time where God is not fully present, actively guarding us. In the daily grind of life, whether you're managing difficult relationships, pushing through an exhausting job or lying awake at night, anxious about the future, the Lord is your keeper. His care knows no exceptions. He shields you by day and he watches over you by night. There is not a moment when his protective hand is withdrawn. As you reflect on this, consider how comprehensive this promise is. The challenges he faces today or tomorrow, none of them are beyond God's care. His protection doesn't falter when we are weakest or when our struggles seem overwhelming. His protection is total. His keeping is without exception.

Again, in Christ, we see God's unwavering protection and presence and extending to us in a way that surpasses even the Samus experience. Consider that Jesus is the ultimate keeper of His people. He not only shields us from the temporal dangers of life, but he secures our eternal safety. When Jesus declares in John 10, 28, I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of His hand. He was expressing this very truth. His care is without exception and his grip on His people is unfailing. While the Samus speaks of protection from the dangers of the sun and moon, Christ provides an even greater assurance. He not only guards us in the day-to-day struggles of life, but he also protects our very souls from the powers of sin, death and hell. In Christ, we are kept in the most profound sense. His sacrifice on the cross has shielded us from the full weight of God's wrath, which we rightfully deserve for our sin. Jesus took upon Himself the punishment that should have fallen on us. In the heat of God's righteous judgment, Christ becomes our shade, protecting us from that which would otherwise consume us. This is the ultimate protection of His care. He not only protects us from earthly trials, but also from eternal condemnation. Christ's resurrection is the ultimate display of His power to protect His people from even the greatest enemy, that is death. Again, while the Samus speaks of protection from the sun and the moon, Christ's victory of the grave assure us that His protection knows no bounds. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Through Christ, we are shielded from eternal death and given the promise of eternal life. His resurrection guarantees that we are safe in His hands forever. In the trials of our daily lives, we see Christ's care. As a good shepherd, Jesus doesn't merely offer general protection. He walks with us personally through every moment of suffering, temptation and trial. He knows the harsh heat of the day, for He Himself was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. Christ endured the exhaustion, the weediness, the loneliness and the toil that we face, but on a much bigger scale. And He did so perfectly, without faltering, so that He might be our perfect saviour. So whether we face the heat of life struggles or their cold loneliness of night, Christ has already walked that path and promises to walk it with us. Christ's care extends into the night, the moment when we feel most vulnerable and alone. In Matthew 11, Jesus invites us to come to Me, all He laver and our heavy laden, and I will give you rest. He is the true and better rest for our weary souls, offering us peace that surpasses all understanding, even in our darkest hour. So whether it's sleepless nights filled with worry or deep emotions, with spiritual struggles, Christ is present, offering His rest, His peace and His comfort. His care is not bound by time or circumstance, it is ever present, for He has promised, I am with you always, even to the ends of the age. So when we speak of God's watchful care being without exception, we must look to Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment of His truth. His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ongoing ministry at the right hand of the Father, ensure there is no moment, no struggle and no danger that escapes His attention or His protection. In Christ, God's care for us is absolute, eternal and without exception. And finally, the Lord's keeping is without limitation. In verses 7 and 8 we read, The Lord will keep you from all evil,

[26 : 43] He will keep your life, the Lord will keep your goings out and your coming in from mistime forth and forevermore. In these closing verses, the psalmist expands the scope of God's protection, making it clear that there is absolutely no limit to His watchful care. The language here is comprehensive and all encompassing. First we see that no evil can fork God's protective care. The Lord will keep you from all evil. Evil in this context can represent all kinds of harm, spiritual, physical, emotional. But the promise is at nothing, no force of darkness, no scheme of the enemy can ultimately defeat God's plan for His people. We live in a fallen world where evil is a reality. But even here, God's promise is to keep His people. This does not mean that we will not face difficulties, that we won't suffer. Indeed, Jesus himself said that we would have trouble in this world. But it does mean that no evil will ultimately prevail over those who God keeps. His care extends beyond temporary affliction into the eternal security of our souls. Next, the psalmist assures us he will keep your life. This is a profound statement. It reminds us that even death, which seems to be the final limitation for human beings, cannot stand against the watchful care of the Lord. God's care goes beyond this life. He keeps not only our physical well-being, but also our very souls. Death, which is the greatest enemy we face, cannot rob us of God's protection, for He holds our lives in His hands. As the Heidelberg Catechism famously put it, what is your only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own, but that I belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. The phrase you're going out and you're coming in speaks to the totality of our lives. It covers every aspect of our daily existence, from the most mundane tasks to the most significant

moments. Whether we are stepping into a new venture, dealing with everyday routines or encountering unexpected trials, God is with us. The expression of going out and coming in indicates there is no situation, no place, no activity outside of God's protective gaze. We can trust that

He is present in every detail of our lives, watching over us in every moment, both large and small. And finally, the time frame that we see in Versailles is perhaps the most remarkable of all, from this time forth and forevermore. God's watchful care does not have an expiration date. It is not limited by the seasons of life, by changing circumstances, or even by the grave. His care stretches from now, in the present moment, into eternity. What comfort this brings us? No matter where we are on life's journey, whether we are in the prime of life, enduring hardship, or even facing death, God's care is constant, un-failing.

He is the eternal keeper of His people, ensuring that nothing will separate us from His love. Again, in Jesus Christ, we see the full extent of God's protection, a protection that extends every boundary, be it spiritual, physical, or eternal. Christ is the one who has overcome all evil on our behalf. At the cross He defeated sin, Satan, and death itself. Colossians 2:15 tells us that Jesus disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him. The evil forces that stand opposed to God's people have been decisively defeated in Christ. While we still encounter the evil effects of this world, its power over us has been broken. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has ensured that no evil will ultimately succeed against those who are in Him. He who is in you is greater than He who is in the world. Not only does Christ keep us from evil, but He keeps our very lives. Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. Through His own resurrection, Christ guarantees that death is not the end for those who belong to Him. He will keep our lives eternally, raising us up on the last day to share in His victory over death. His watchful care extends beyond this temporary life, securing our place in the new heavens and the new earth, where death and evil, where pain and suffering, where the struggle will be no more. Christ's watchful care is with us, and all are going out and are coming in. He is with us in every day moments of life, just as He has promised, I am with you always, even to the ends of the age. He walks with us in our joys and our sorrows, in our trials and our triumphs. There is no aspect of our lives that fall outside of His care. We have a Savior who is intimately involved in every detail, always present and always protecting. Finally, we see Christ's care is also without limitation in time. Hebrews 7:25 assures us, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Jesus' intercession for us is eternal. His work of keeping and protecting His people will never end from morning forth, and forevermore we are secure in Him.

So as we bring everything together, we are reminded that the Lord's keeping is without interruption. Our God does not slumber, nor does He sleep. It is without exception. He watches over us in every circumstance, from the heat of the daily toil to the restless nights of worry. And it is without limitation, no evil, no death. Nothing in all creation can separate us from His care, now or forevermore. All of this is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who has defeated sin, who has defeated death, and who has defeated evil on our behalf. In Him we are safe and secure for eternity.

[35 : 12] If you'll forgive me for mixing metaphors, I'd like to finish with a verse from Hebrews 12, where the author speaks not of a journey, but of a race. Yet the metaphor still applies as we think of our Christian pilgrimage. Looking unto Jesus, the offer and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne. As we run this race, as we walk this road, we look to Jesus, the one who not only began our journey of faith, but who will bring it to completion. He endured the ultimate trial, the cross, so that we might be kept from all evil and held secure in the loving care of God. And now He sits at the right hand of the Father, where He continues to watch over us, interceding for us. He keeps us from this time and forevermore.

On this journey of life, with all its ups and downs, when the path ahead seems unclear and the daily struggles seem too much to bear, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Creator of Heaven, who will keep you. He will keep you, your going out and your coming in, from this time forth and forevermore. Amen.