

# The Pilgrims Progress

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Date: 14 February 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if we could, this evening with the Lord's help and with the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of Psalms, Psalm 121.

Psalm 121, and if we would just read again the first two verses. Psalm 121 from the beginning.

A song of ascents. I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

I'm sure that many of us have read John Bunyan's classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. And if you haven't read it before, or if you haven't read it for a while, I would encourage you to do so.

Because next to the Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress* is one of the best books to read and to enjoy. And it was Spurgeon. We all know who Spurgeon was, a great preacher in the 19th century in London.

[ 1 : 09 ] He encouraged his congregation to read the *Pilgrim's Progress* at least once a year. Because he believed that in doing so, that his congregation would be reminded of where they have come from and where they are going to as they journey through life.

And as many of you know, in the book, the author John Bunyan, he paints the picture of a man who had come to know the Lord by reading his Bible. And the whole story, the whole of *Pilgrim's Progress* is about this one man who's on a journey.

He's on a pilgrimage. But you know, what always strikes me about *Pilgrim's Progress* when I read it, is that when the main character, when he meets someone new and they ask him his name, he would often reply and say, at first I was called Graceless.

But now my name is Christian. I have come from the city of destruction. I am going to Mount Zion. I am a pilgrim, he says. I am going to the celestial city.

You know, this beautiful statement of faith, it's often repeated in the book, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, where Christian is always saying, at first I was called Graceless, but now my name is Christian.

[ 2 : 23 ] I have come from the city of destruction. I am going to Mount Zion. I am a pilgrim. I am going to the celestial city. And of course, this confession of a Christian, it's certainly the confession of all Christians.

It's the confession of every pilgrim who is travelling towards the celestial city. And you know, that's what comes across so clearly here in Psalm 121, because Psalm 121 is a Psalm that maps out for us the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

And as you know, and as you can see from the title of this Psalm, Psalm 121, it's part of a group of 15 Psalms called the Songs of Ascents.

And they're the Psalms that are numbered from Psalm 120 all the way through to Psalm 134. And they're called the Songs of Ascents because they were sung by all of the Lord's people as they ascended towards the city of Jerusalem for the annual festivals that were held there, the festivals of Pentecost, Passover, and the day of Atonement.

And it's said that the Lord's people, they were all gathered together in their family groups. They were gathered together as neighbours, and they were all congregated together at a central point in their village or town or city.

[ 3 : 42 ] And from there they would leave as one people, and they would begin their pilgrimage towards Jerusalem. And you know, they would travel from all over the nation of Israel, and they would ascend towards the temple in Jerusalem.

And the temple, as you know, it was situated in a high mountain called Mount Zion. And so these songs, they're Songs of Ascent, because they're rising up towards the temple in Jerusalem.

They're Songs of Ascent, but they're also Pilgrim Songs. But what's interesting about Psalm 121 is that the title, it literally reads, A Psalm or a Song for the Ascent.

It's not a song of Ascent, but Psalm 121 is the song for the Ascent, implying that this is the Pilgrim's song.

That's the Pilgrim's song because it maps out the Pilgrim's progress, issuing promises to every Pilgrim who is progressing on their journey towards the celestial city.

[ 4 : 48 ] So Psalm 121 is the Pilgrim's progress, and it issues to us promises. Promises to every Pilgrim who is travelling towards the celestial city.

And the first promise I want us to see, the first promise for the Pilgrim's progress is the Lord's support. That's the first thing we see in verses one and two, the Lord's support.

I'll read it again. Where the Psalmist says, I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Now the journey to Jerusalem, it was a long journey. And you can almost imagine all these Pilgrims walking for miles and miles and travelling for days and days.

And they're travelling over the landscape of Israel, where they would have to walk over mountains. They would have to walk through valleys. They'd have to walk alongside reverse.

[ 5 : 47 ] And as you'd expect, they would encounter difficult terrain. They would have to battle all the elements of the weather as well. They would have to deal with and even guard themselves from the prospect of rubbish, or even being attacked by wild animals.

The journey to Jerusalem was a difficult journey. And yet it was all about getting to the temple to worship the Lord. But you know, if we were to consider the condition of a pilgrim as he progressed in his journey towards Jerusalem, if you could see this pilgrim, you would look at him and you would say, he looks tired.

His legs would have ached. His feet would have been sore. He would have been hungry and thirsty from all his traveling. And yet despite all these things, his heart's desire is still to gather together with the Lord's people in Jerusalem.

And you know, applying it to ourselves and to you. Maybe for you this evening, you've been on this journey for a long time. It's been a while since you started following the Lord.

And it's been a while since you started so journeying in this wilderness. And maybe by now you're getting a little tired of the journey. You've taken a few knocks over the years and they're beginning to take their toll on you.

[ 7 : 11 ] Because there have been many pitfalls, many trials on this path, trials that you never saw coming. And yes, like this pilgrim, there were times in which you experienced the mountaintop of blessing.

But there were also other times where you were made to go through the dark valleys. And sometimes in your experience, you had, you were brought along the side, the still waters.

There have been difficult and different terrains in your providence. There have been hard paths that you've had to endure. And yet the wonderful thing like this pilgrim is that you've come from the city of destruction.

And you're going to the celestial city. And even though it hasn't been an easy journey, it's a journey that you wouldn't change for all the world. Because what gets this pilgrim and what gets every pilgrim through their journey and what enables them to keep going and to take another step forward.

You know what enables us to keep going is that we have support. We have support. We're not on our own. No matter how lonely we may feel or how helpless our situation may seem.

[ 8 : 23 ] We know that in the journey, there's always one who promises to help us and support us along life's journey. And the Sabbath, he's reminding us that the Lord is our support.

He's the one who helps us. He's the one who aids us and directs us and guides us and gently encourages us and even pushes us and prods us along the journey. And he upholds us along the road.

And you know, without him, we would fall. Because the Lord is the one who strengthens and sustains us. And you know, when we consider this pilgrim, he's 100 percent certain as to where he's going.

He knows where he's going. He knows that he's going to be with the Lord and gather on Mount Zion with all of the Lord's people. But whilst he's on his journey, it seems as when you're reading the Psalm, it seems that if it's as if the pilgrim, he's looking behind him.

And he sees that he's come from the city of destruction and he's looking ahead of him and he sees the celestial city in the distance. And his longing is to get there. And he knows that it will be through much tribulation that he will enter the kingdom.

[ 9 : 33 ] But the wonderful thing is he knows that the Lord will get in there. And as this pilgrim looks around, as he scans the surrounding landscape with all the mountains and the valleys and the hills and the rivers.

He looks at all of it. And then he opens his mouth with praise to the Lord. He sings this song for the ascent. And he says, as it is in verse one, I will lift up my eyes to the hills.

Where does my help come from? He asks. Where does my help come from? Where is my support? But you know, this pilgrim, he wasn't looking to the hills for his support.

He wasn't wondering where the Lord was on his journey. He knew where the Lord was. He knew that the Lord was with him. But as this pilgrim journeys on towards the celestial city, he looks at all the hills around him.

Because these hills, these hills were all the high places that were used as shrines and altars to worship the idols of this world. They were the hills of idolatry.

[ 10 : 39 ] They were the things that we put before the Lord. They are the things that we put instead of the Lord. They are the things that we substitute for the Lord. And you know, maybe this pilgrim, he had spent his life worshiping idols and the false gods of this world.

But now having left the city of destruction and begun his journey towards the celestial city, he's discovered that no one can support him like the Lord can. He's discovered that all these false gods and these idols and even people that he may have put his trust and support and comfort in, they never provided anything for him.

Each and every one of them failed him. And this pilgrim is asking, where does my help come from? Where do I find my support in life? Where do I find my help and my comfort?

And he says, not from these hills, not from these high places of idolatry and all these shrines, not from other people. No, no, he says in verse two, my help, my help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

His help, our help, our support comes from no one else but the Lord, the covenant God of Israel, who is the maker of heaven and earth.

[ 11 : 59 ] And you know, this is something we should note that throughout this Psalm, the pilgrim, he refers to God using the covenant title Lord. And you know, it's a title that highlights to us that the Lord has revealed himself to his people.

He has entered into a covenant with them. And it's the title of the covenant King. He is the Lord, the one who keeps covenant. And the emphasis that this pilgrim is making is that his eyes are no longer looking to these hills of idolatry and all these shrines and altars.

His eyes aren't looking there. No, no, he says, my eyes are looking to King Jesus. He's the one who keeps covenant. Jesus is the covenant King. He says who created the heavens and the earth.

And he's also the covenant King who was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And you know, my friend, whilst we're on our journey, whatever journey you're on tonight, whatever you may be going through, this is where we need to lift our eyes to.

This is where our focus needs to be. We need to lift our eyes to Jesus. Not to, we don't look to the left or to the right. We don't look to idols or to people.

[ 13 : 15 ] No, no, we need to lay aside every sin and weight that doth so easily beset us and look to Jesus because he's the author and he remains the finisher of our faith.

And so the first promise for the pilgrim's progress is the Lord's support. But the second promise we receive or the second promise for the pilgrim's progress is the Lord's safety.

The Lord's safety. That's in verses three and four. He says, 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.

You know, the first thing we should notice when reading these verses is that the psalmist moves from using the first person pronoun in verses one and two to using the second person.

In verses one and two, he says, my eyes and my help. But now he says in verses three and throughout the rest of the Psalm, he says, your foot and he who keeps you.

[ 14 : 23 ] And it's the singular you. So as the A.V. would have it, thy foot, he that keepeth thee. And the singular use of the pronoun, it's important because the psalmist is emphasizing that this is not just his experience, but this is the experience of every Christian pilgrim as they walk on the road towards the celestial city.

And he says that it's a personal experience. It's a personal experience because, you know, the Lord is one who deals with us personally and intimately.

And the psalmist is reminding us that we have the promise that the Lord not only cares about where the eyes of the pilgrim are looking, but the Lord is also concerned about where the feet of his pilgrim are going.

Because he says in verse three, the word moved in verse three, it means to slip or to slide or to stagger. And you know, when thinking about it, it would have been easy for this pilgrim to trip or to fall or to break a bone while walking on all the uneven surfaces.

But he says that the Lord was watching where his feet were going. And the Lord was watching where our feet are going as we're treading in our journey. And the psalmist reminds us he will not let us be moved.

[ 15 : 43 ] He will not let us slide or stagger or slip. And even when we're going through the valley of testing, he says he won't let go. When we're going over the mountains, he won't let us slip off.

When we're treading through the rocky places in which our foot could go at any moment, the psalmist reminds us we will not stagger. When there are ruts of temptation in the road which would cause us to fall, the Lord who supports us, he says, is also the Lord who will keep us safe.

He will not let us slip. He will not let us slide. He will not. We will not be allowed to fall. We cannot fall away.

You know, my friend, my friend, the Lord will not let your foot slip. You will not fall through his fingers. You cannot slide through his grip.

And the psalmist reminds us that you will not. You cannot. It is impossible for you to be separated from the maker of heaven and earth. And you know what Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans?

[ 16 : 53 ] He brings us to that wonderful chapter in Romans 8. And Paul, he stresses the safety that we have as Christian pilgrims who trusted this covenant King Jesus Christ.

And Paul asks us, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? No. Distress? No. Persecution? No. Famine? No. Nakedness? No. Peril? No. Sword? No.

No, he says, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, says Paul, that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, neither height nor depth nor any other creature he says shall be able to separate us.

Nothing shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. But then you have to ask, why? Why can't we be separated?

Why can't we can't our foot slip? Why can't we fall away? Why can't we slide through his grip? Why can't we slip through his fingers? And the psalmist says in verse 4, behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

[ 18 : 13 ] You know, this is the wonder and glory of our covenant King, that like Job, he has made a covenant with his eyes, in which the Lord promises to continually watch over his people.

He will not slumber, he says. He will not rest. He will not stop. He will not hinder for a moment. Why? Because we are far too precious. Precious to him.

And you know, we're worth far more to the Lord than we will ever comprehend or understand. Because we've been redeemed. We've been redeemed not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with his own precious blood. And the Lord loves his pilgrims with an everlasting love.

And his love and his covenant, it compels him to make sure that you get to Zion. The Lord wants to make sure that you get to the celestial city.

And his love compels him to make sure that you don't slip out of his care and that you come home safely.

[ 19 : 24 ] You know, that's the care this covenant King has for his people. And you know, the language which the psalmist is using here, it's the language of a shepherd looking after his sheep.

Because you know, the priority of a shepherd was to watch over his flock and to keep them safe. And I'm sure that as these pilgrims journeyed towards Jerusalem, as they journeyed through the land of Israel, ascending towards Mount Zion, I'm sure it would have been a common sight for them to see shepherds watching over their flocks and keeping them safe from going astray and protecting them from any possible attacks from animals.

But you know, it didn't matter how good these shepherds were, they couldn't always stay awake. It didn't matter how much they cared for their flock, it didn't matter how much they loved their sheep.

They couldn't always watch them, it didn't matter how experienced they were. They couldn't always be ready for an unexpected attack. But you know, the psalmist says that when it comes to the covenant King, he is the good shepherd of his people.

Yes, every pilgrim can claim as we were singing in Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. But you know, it's one thing to say the Lord is my shepherd.

[ 20 : 45 ] It's another thing for the shepherd to say about his sheep and to say that they're my sheep. And that's what Jesus says about us. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

I give to them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall they be plucked out of my hand. Do you know my pilgrim friend, the beauty of our good shepherd is that he is so unlike every other kind of earthly shepherd because he never slumbered and he never sleeps.

His flock are far too precious for him to let anyone else look after them. No other shepherd is good enough than Israel's shepherd. His flock are so precious that he must watch over them himself.

And his care for them is such that he will not take his eyes off us for a moment. And you know, the wonder of it is, is that this shepherd, he doesn't tire of watching us.

His eyes don't grow dim. His vision doesn't become blurred because we're his focus. You are the apple of his eye. You are the apple of his eye. You're precious in his sight.

[ 22 : 01 ] And for that reason, you will not slip from his hand. You're safe in his care and keeping. And you know, what a promise. What a promise for the pilgrim is progressing towards the celestial city that you have the Lord support.

You have the Lord's safety. And thirdly, you have the promise of the Lord shelter. The third promise for the pilgrim's progress is the Lord's shelter.

That's what we see in verses five and six. The Lord shelter, he says, 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.

You know, on our daily journey towards the celestial city, this pilgrim is reminding us that we need to cling to the promise that it's the Lord is protecting us. You know, the Psalmist, he reminds us by saying the Lord is your keeper.

The Lord is the one who watches over you. He's the one who guards you. He's the one who protects you. And again, it's the idea of a shepherd protecting his sheep, in which you could say the good shepherd, he watches over his people.

[ 23 : 13 ] He shelters, he shelters them under the shade of his right hand. That's what he says in verse five. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade on your right hand.

And you know, it's an expression, this expression, the Lord is your shade on your right hand. It's an expression that's often used in the Bible. We often see it described as under the shadow of your wings.

Under the shadow of your wings. And it's an expression of protection and care and compassion in which the Lord is his one. He's watching over his people. He's sheltering over his people.

And the Psalmist says he does it by day and he does it by night. He says, whether it's from the heat of the sun by day or the piercing cold of a clear moonlit sky by night, he says, we have the promise that the Lord is protecting us.

The Lord is sheltering us under the shadow of his wings. We have the promise of shelter and refuge. Shelter and refuge when the heat of the sun comes in the form of temptation.

[ 24 : 18 ] And we have the promise of shelter and refuge when we have the cold dark nights of trial and affliction. You know, by day or by night, we have this promise that the Lord remains our shelter.

And you know, that's what we're singing about in the opening Psalm, Psalm 91. He that doth in the secret place of the most high recite under the shade of him that is the almighty shall abide.

The Psalmist says, I off the Lord, my God will say he is my refuge still. He is my fortress and my God and in him trust I will.

You're my friend as pilgrims. We have the promise of the Lord shelter. We have the promise of the Lord shelter and every day of this journey, every day of this journey, we can pray to our kinsman, Redeemer and say to him, just like Ruth said to Boas, we can pray to our kinsman, Redeemer and say to him, spread your wings over your servant for you are my redeemer.

Spread your wings over your servant for you are my redeemer. It's a prayer for protection. And my friend by day or by night, the Lord promises protection.

[ 25 : 41 ] He promises to be our shelter. And so for every pilgrim who's progressing on towards the celestial city, we have the promise of the Lord support, the Lord safety, the Lord shelter.

And lastly, the Lord security, the Lord security. So we see in the last two verses, he says, the Lord will keep you from all evil.

He will keep your life. The Lord will keep you're going out and you're coming in from this time forth and forever more. And you're up until this point.

We've we've been reminded of what the Lord has done throughout our pilgrimage so far. We've we have the promise of the Lord support, the Lord safety, the Lord shelter.

But now in these verses, these closing verses, we've been reminded of what the Lord will do for his people as they continue on their journey towards the celestial city. Because we have the promise of the Lord's security that he will keep his people.

[ 26 : 46 ] He will keep them from all evil. He says he will keep your soul. And he will keep their going out and they're coming in. In all their journeying, he says the Lord will keep them, whether they're at the beginning of their journey, having just left the city of destruction, or whether they're nearing the end of their journey, just arriving at the celestial city.

The Lord promises that he will keep them. He will keep them whether in life or in death, the Lord will keep his people. And you know, this word keep.

It's key to the entire Sam. If you were to give this Sam another title, it would be the keeper Sam. Because the word keep, it's mentioned six times in the Sam.

And it reminds us that the Lord is our keeper. He's the one who does the keeping. That's what we see in this. Even to read again from verse three, he says, he will not let your food be moved.

He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. 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.

[ 27 : 55 ] The Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and you're coming in from this time forth and forever more.

And the word keep, it means to guard or to watch. In the sense of a shepherd protecting his sheep. And you know, as the pilgrim song, as it comes to its conclusion, you know, we've been given the greatest promise.

That our shepherd promises that he will keep us. He will garden us. He will watch over us. He will protect us in all our goings out and all our coming in. Everything we do in our sojourn here on earth.

This shepherd will be our keeper and he will protect us from evil. And you know, this is our greatest security as the Lord's people. This is our greatest assurance that he will do it.

And this is a certainty. He says the Lord will keep us and the Lord will keep us because we can't keep ourselves. And you know, we're reminded of that fact every single day.

[ 29 : 07 ] We cannot keep ourselves. That without him, we can do nothing. But with him, all things are possible. We can't provide protection over our own lives.

We can't guard our own hearts and minds. We can't save ourselves, but the Lord promises to do it when we trust him with everything. Because he promises to us that he has begun that good work in us.

And he will bring it on to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. He promises that he has taken us from the city of destruction. And he will bring us through this journey all the way to the celestial city.

He promises that grace has brought us safe thus far. And grace will lead us home. And I find the Lord promises that his security, as it says in the closing words of the Psalm, security is from this time forth and forevermore.

Why? Because he's our keeper. And because he's our keeper, we are being kept. We are being kept.

[ 30 : 17 ] And the first step of a pilgrim after leaving the city of destruction is that they're being kept. The first step after being saved is that you're being kept.

And my friend, we are being kept. And as Peter says, every Christian pilgrim, they have an inheritance. It's waiting for them.

It's an inheritance that's in the corrupt of Lundyphile that faded not away, reserved in heaven for them. But until we get there, he says, you are being kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

My Christian pilgrim, what a great and precious promise we have for this journey. We have wonderful promises that even though it's through much tribulation, we will enter the gates of Zion.

We see in this song for the ascent that we have the promise of the Lord's support. We have the promise of the Lord's safety, the promise of the Lord's shelter, the promise of the Lord's security.

[ 31 : 17 ] Therefore, our confession is to be that of Bunyan's pilgrim. At first I was called Graceless, but now my name is Christian.

I have come from the city of destruction. I am going to Mount Zion. I am a pilgrim. I am going to the celestial city. And you're my friend, whatever situation you're in tonight, keep going.

Keep going because you are being kept. You are being kept. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.

O Lord our gracious God, we marvel at who thou art. A God who gives to us great and precious promises. And we thank thee, O Lord, and we praise thee, that we are able to cling to them.

That we are able to claim them as our own. And that we are able to acknowledge thee for each and every one of them. That they are sealed to us by thy spirit. O Lord, we pray that as we go on in this wilderness journey, that we would lift our eyes even beyond the hills of this world.

[ 32 : 27 ] And keep our eyes firmly fixed upon Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. We confess, Lord, that how often our vision is clouded, clouded by the distractions of this world, the sins of our own heart, and even the things that are around us.

O Lord, we pray that thou wouldst give to us a new vision. Enable us to see Jesus clearly. Enable us, Lord, to confess that he is the one who keeps covenant.

And that he is faithful to his people. Lord bless us then together. Remember us as homes and families in all our different situations. That we might bear one another's burdens.

That we might pray for one another and love one another. That we might so fulfil the law of Christ. O Lord, remember our homes, especially those who know thee not. All that our longing is that they would come from the city of destruction.

And that they would come onto this wonderful journey that leads towards the celestial city. That all are the one who is able to save to the uttermost. And our prayer is, Lord, that thou wouldst intervene in their lives and draw them from darkness unto thine own marvellous light.

[ 33 : 39 ] O do us good, then we pray, keep us on the journey and go before us, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of that Psalm, Psalm 121.

Psalm 121, we'll sing the whole Psalm. I to the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come my need. My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made the whole Psalm to God's place.

I to the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come my need.

My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made the whole Psalm to God's place.

Thy beauty alone, that's my norwell, is slumber that the keys.

[ 35 : 05 ] Behold me, that keeps its rye, its slumber, no door sleeps.

The Lord be keeps, the Lord thy shade, all thy right hand does stay.

The unburned by night, he shall not smite, nor yet the sun by day.

The Lord shall keep thy soul, he shall preserve thee from all ill.

Haste forth thy going out on day, God keep forever well.

[ 36 : 21 ] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, and forevermore. Amen.