



## Psalms of Trust

### Introduction

In past weeks, we have studied the wisdom psalms, thanksgiving psalms, and lament psalms. Very closely related to these are the psalms of trust, sometimes called psalms of confidence. Like the psalms of lament, psalms of trust express dismay over a situation which has caused suffering in the psalmist's life. However, instead of lamenting his trouble, the psalmist turns to God with a profound trust in His power to rescue His people from all their troubles. As in the wisdom psalms, the psalmist exalts the character of God and as in the thanksgiving psalms, he expresses thanks to God. The psalmist is certain that God hears the prayers of His people and will deliver them. The psalms of trust teach that "trust in the sovereign will of God is proper, whatever one's circumstances" (Andrew E. Hill, John H. Walton, A Survey of The Old Testament).

Last week we studied five psalms of trust.

- I. Trusting God's Righteous Judgment - Psalm 11
- II. Trusting God as Our Shepherd - Psalm 23
- III. Trusting God, Our Mighty Fortress - Psalm 46
- IV. Trusting in God Alone - Psalm 62
- V. Trusting God, Our Maker, Helper, Keeper, and Preserver - Psalm 121

### I. Trusting God's Righteous Judgment - Psalm 11

Psalm 11 was written by David, apparently when he was fleeing from enemies. Commentators have speculated concerning the situation in David's life which prompted this psalm, but we do not know for sure. The one certainty is that David had overruled human counsel and put his trust completely in the Lord.

- A. The Psalmist is in Grave Danger - Psalm 11:1-3

*In the Lord I put my trust* (11:1). David repudiates the counsel of friends that he flee to the mountains for safety. He questions how his counselors can even suggest such a thing. David's faith is not in mountains, but in the Lord! Verses 2 and 3 present two reasons why David was advised to run and hide.

1. The wicked were secretly preparing to attack him — 11:2

The mention of bows and arrows may literally refer

to being shot at, or it might refer to a fierce verbal attack.

2. The foundations were being destroyed - 11:2

David's counselors felt that the foundations of the nation, the Mosaic Law and the righteous rule of God, were being undermined by the enemy. If these were attacked, the nation might crumble. Then what would David do?

- B. The Psalmist has a Great Lord - Psalm 11:4-7

Instead of letting himself be discouraged by the unstable earthly situation, David looks to the Lord. His counselors had asked, *What can the righteous do?* (11:3). The answer is that the righteous can look to the Lord. David sees that *The Lord is in His holy temple, The Lord's throne is in heaven* (11:4). God looks down from His heavenly temple and beholds all mankind. Furthermore, God is on His heavenly throne, the symbol of His royal rule and authority to render judgment on the earth.

1. God's eyes behold and test all men - 11:4-6

*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good* (Proverbs 15:3). God sees all things and knows all things. The wicked may *shoot secretly at the upright* (11:2), but their behavior is no secret to God! He sees every deed and pronounces His verdict on both the righteous and the wicked. *The Lord tests the righteous* (11:5a) should be seen in the context of judgment. This is made clear in the verses which follow. Verses 5b and 6 speak of the condemnation of the wicked and all lovers of violence. They will be destroyed by the raining of coal, fire, brimstone, and a burning wind. But the righteous will be approved (11:7).

2. The Righteous Lord loves righteousness - 11:7

God is righteous. He loves righteousness. He will reward it. The meaning of the last line of the psalm is that the upright will see God face to face. "Although the idea of seeing God's face could mean only that the light of His favor will shine upon the upright, it is nevertheless hard to suppose that David is not thinking here of the believer's ultimate reward and bliss. Why? He has just spoken of a future judgment of the wicked (in verse 6). What is called for now is a parallel statement of what

the same all-seeing and just God will do for those who are righteous. They will see God! How glorious!" (James Montgomery Boice, Psalms). See also 1 John 3:2.

## II. Trusting God as Our Shepherd — Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is probably the most familiar of all the psalms and perhaps the most memorized chapter of Scripture.

The psalm presents the "Lord," our great "I am" (see Lesson 1), as our Shepherd. In Israel, shepherd was the lowest of all occupations. Shepherds lived with their sheep twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to lead, feed, and protect them through the summer heat, winter storms, many physical dangers, and their own stupidity which led them to wander from the flock. David, the writer of this psalm, had been a shepherd. He knew personally of the time, love, and endless selfless commitment it takes to care for the poor foolish sheep. David saw God as his Shepherd who led him, protected him, and provided for his every need. David later became the shepherd of Israel, as their king, making him a picture (or type) of the Messiah who was to come (Isaiah 40:11).

Jesus taught about Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep in John 10:11, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.* The New Testament writers also referred to Jesus as our Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20 and 1 Peter 5:4). So, this psalm assures believers in Jesus Christ that He is lovingly caring for them, watching their every step.

### A. We Can Trust Our Shepherd to Lead Us - Psalm 23:1-3

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want* (23:1). Our Shepherd makes sure that we lack nothing we need. Sheep are the most helpless of all animals. They rely upon their shepherd to supply every need. Our Shepherd supplies nourishment, refreshment, rest, and restoration for our souls. All of these things are found in the precious word of God which is food for the soul and the water of life (Hebrews 5:12-14, 1 Peter 2:2, John 10:10-14, and Ephesians 5:26). Our Shepherd also guides us in the path of wisdom so we don't wander from the righteous way (Proverbs 3:17). He does this for His own glory (*for His name's sake*, 23:3b).

### B. We Can Trust Our Shepherd to Protect Us - Psalm 23:4

In ancient Israel, the sheep were wintered in the valleys where there was lush pastureland and plenty of water. But there were also threats from wild animals and sudden floods during storms. The restful shade of the valley could quickly become *the shadow of death*.

The shepherd used his *rod* to beat off attacks by wild animals; he used his *staff* to steer the sheep away from danger. Our Shepherd is always near in the valleys of our trials and sorrows. James Montgomery Boice (Psalms), invites us to notice that in Psalm 23, "The second person pronoun "you" replaces the third person pronoun "He" at this point (in the psalm). Earlier we read, *He makes me to lie down....He leads me beside the still waters.... He restores my soul.* But now, *I will fear no evil for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.* We are never so conscious of the presence of God as when we pass through life's valleys."

### C. We Can Trust the Shepherd to Provide - Psalm 23:5-6

After spending the winter in the valley, the shepherd led his sheep to the high tablelands for the summer. A good shepherd always went ahead to remove all dangers and prepare a safe grazing area for his sheep. And so our Shepherd prepares *a table* (23:5) for us. The enemy may surround us, but our Shepherd provides protection and prepares to meet our every need.

#### 1. *You anoint my head with oil* - 23:5

In the blazing summer heat of the ancient Near East, oil was a balm for cracked dry skin. Oil also was used by a thoughtful host to anoint the head of a weary guest, to soothe and refresh him. The shepherd used oil to help heal skin diseases of his sheep.

#### 2. *My cup runs over* - Psalm 23:5-6

Wine clears and soothes parched throats and was always provided for guests in the ancient Near East. It was a blessing to a weary traveler. David pictures an overflowing cup. His blessings overflow as he allows God to lead him in *paths of righteousness* (23:2 and 3).

As believers trust in their Shepherd, His *goodness* and loving *mercy* (Hebrew "hesed") will provide every need and protect them from harm. They will abide in His presence for the duration of this life and *forever* (23:6). Jesus said, *In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also* (John 14:2-3).

## III. Trusting God, Our Mighty Fortress - Psalm 46

Psalm 46 was Martin Luther's (16th century German reformer) favorite psalm and the one which inspired him to write the great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." The psalm "breathes the spirit of sturdy confidence in the Lord in the midst of very real dangers" (H.C. Leupold, Exposition of the Psalms). The danger and

deliverance which led the sons of Korah to write this psalm was probably an enemy attack on Jerusalem. Some commentators believe it was the defeat of Ammon and Moab recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:1-3. Others think it was the destruction of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, recorded in 2 Kings 18-19. We cannot know for sure if it was one of these or another occasion, but the important thing is that the psalm exalts God as our ultimate defense and refuge.

#### A. God is Our Refuge in Trouble - Psalm 46:1-3

Safety and courage come from trusting in God. When He is our refuge and strength, there is no need to fear, even when faced with terrible disasters such as those pictured in verses two and three: mountains sliding into the sea, stormy seas, and earthquakes.

#### B. God is the Defense of Zion - Psalm 46:4-7

These verses are a vivid contrast to verses two and three. The presence of the Lord is described as being like a peaceful stream flowing through the city (46:4), in contrast to the raging sea (46:3). *Fear* (46:2) is replaced with gladness (46:4), and moving and shaking (46:2-3) are replaced with *shall not be moved* (46:5).

Because God was in the midst of Zion *the city of God* (46:4), which is Jerusalem, she would not fall. When nations came up against her, God overthrew them by His mighty power. *The earth melted* (46:6) pictures the helplessness and powerlessness of those who oppose God. Zion was secure because *The Lord of hosts* (in Hebrew, "Jehovah Sabaoth"), the commander of the armies of heaven (2 Kings 6:16-17) was her protector. The God who chose, called, loved, and preserved Jacob (Romans 9:11-13), the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, was her refuge (46:7). These are powerful reasons to feel secure and not fear.

#### C. God Will Be Exalted on the Earth - Psalm 46:8-11

The psalmist invites us to *behold the works of the Lord*.

##### 1. God is the conqueror - 46:8-9

The psalmist invites us to see and celebrate what the Lord has done. He is the true commander-in-chief of Israel's armies. His armies destroyed their enemies. God is the mighty conqueror who never negotiates with the enemy. By His power He imposes peace: *makes wars to cease* (46:9).

##### 2. God is to be exalted - 46:10-11

In verse 10, God speaks, *Be still and know that I am*

*God*. This is a call to surrender to Him, a call for God's enemies to lay down their arms; a call to God's people to lay down their fears and acknowledge and exalt Him. The time for surrender is today! The day will come when all shall surrender to Him, even those who resist Him now. Therefore, *Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts* (Hebrews 3:7-8, 15 as quoted from Psalm 95:7-8). God's promise is, *I will be exalted in the earth!* (46:10b), and God always keeps His promises.

Verse 11 is a repetition of verse 7, confirming the psalmist's trust in the *Lord of hosts...the God of Jacob*. Surely it gave comfort and courage to the people of Israel to be reminded that Jehovah Sabaoth was with them; that the God of Jacob was their refuge (46:11). It is also a great comfort and encouragement for God's people today. Have you put your trust in the Lord of hosts? Have you made Jacob's God your refuge?

### IV. Trusting in God Alone - Psalm 62

This is a wonderful psalm which tells of David's confident trust in the Lord as he waited quietly for deliverance from his attackers. In the psalm, David contrasts trusting in God with trusting in man and material things. David chose to trust in God and he calls all of God's people to do the same. He also gives us the reasons to do so.

#### A. God Alone Overcomes Our Enemies - Psalm 62:1-4

A literal translation of the first line is, *My soul waits in silence for God alone*. In the original Hebrew, the word "ak" occurs at the beginning of this verse and also verses 2, 5, and 6. "Ak" is usually translated "only" or "alone," and when it is placed at the beginning of a sentence, as it is in all four of these verses, it is to give special emphasis to the word. So in Psalm 62, David is emphasizing that his soul waits for God and for God "alone" (62:1,5). God and God "only" is his rock and his salvation (62:2,6). This is David's main point in the psalm, and so he repeats it again in verses 5 and 6.

When David's enemies attacked, sought to destroy him, and lied to accomplish their evil plans (62:3-4), David refused to withdraw his trust in God (62:2).

#### B. God Alone is Our Refuge - Psalm 62:5-8

In verses 5 and 6, David speaks words of encouragement to his own soul, repeating thoughts previously given in verses 1 and 2. He adds that God is his glory, his rock of strength, and his refuge. Do you find your glory and strength in God alone? Do you follow David's advice in verse 8 to *trust in Him at all times*? Do you *pour out your heart before Him because He is your refuge*?

## C. God Alone is Our Hope - Psalm 62:9-12

God alone is our hope because man is nothing and God is everything!

## 1. Man is a vapor - 62:9-10

David has expressed that there is nothing to fear from man. Now he shows that there is nothing to hope for from man either. Whether a man is of low or high position, he is nothing more than a passing *vapor* (NASB, *lighter than breath* - 62:9). All men and women are so insignificant. If they were to be weighed, they would not even tip the scales! So it is foolish to trust in their power of men and in the oppressive works they do. Riches are not to be trusted either: *Do not set your heart on them* (10b).

## 2. Power and mercy belong to God - 62:11-12

David had learned two things from God: power belongs to Him and mercy belongs to Him. David has written that human power is weak and will fail every time. Only God is strong and has the power which can be trusted.

In the last verse, David writes of God's *mercy*, the Hebrew "hesed," referring to the lovingkindness He shows to His people through His promises and the fulfillment of them. "Hesed" incorporates God's goodness, mercy, love, and grace. David reminds us that God will render justice to each person. Those who wish to receive His mercy ("hesed") are to put their trust in God and not in other people or in material things.

By His power and "hesed," God has reached out to save us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you put your trust in Him? Are you trusting in Him moment by moment every hour of every day of your life? Practice makes perfect.

**V. Trusting God, Our Maker, Helper, Keeper, and Preserver - Psalm 121**

Psalms 120-134 are designated as the "Songs of Ascents," also called "Songs of Degrees" or "Pilgrim Songs." Most commentators believe that these were songs sung by those making the journey to the temple at Jerusalem to celebrate the great annual feasts of Israel. All Jewish men were required to travel to Jerusalem three times a year, for the Feast of Unleavened Bread (connected with the Passover), The Feast of Harvest (Pentecost), and the Feast of Ingathering (Booths). The pilgrims sang as they traveled in anticipation of their return to Zion and the sanctuary of the Lord. (See Psalm 134.) It is probable that these psalms were also sung by the exiles as they returned from captivity in Babylon in 536 B.C. In fact, some scholars believe

that some of the "Songs of Ascents" are of a later date and were added at this time.

The Pilgrim psalms express hope, unity, and trust in the Lord. Psalm 121 is a beautiful song of trust and has been a favorite of Christians who travel far from home. It is a very short psalm, but it is powerful in proclaiming God as our helper, keeper, and preserver.

## A. The Lord is Your Helper - Psalm 121:1-4

Put yourself in the place of the psalmist. Imagine having walked for days along rough, dirt pathways which wind endlessly through scorching desert plains, damp valleys, and rocky hillsides. You have sore feet and aching muscles. Your eyes have been on the path ahead to watch for rocks and potholes. Then you look up! In the distance, you see Mount Zion, your destination. There you will rest your body, enjoy fellowship with your Hebrew brothers and sisters. There you will worship the Lord. This pilgrim song may have been written at such a time as the psalmist reflected upon God's goodness to himself and his fellow travelers all along life's way.

In the first four verses, the psalmist makes three observations about the Lord, from whom his help comes. First, He is the maker of heaven and earth. The One who made all things would certainly have the power to help in any and all situations. Secondly, *He will not allow your foot to slip* (121:3). He is in control of all things. He knows your path and He will see you through to the end. Thirdly, He never sleeps. He is always there to help you. He even helps you when you sleep (Psalm 127:2).

## B. The Lord is Your Keeper - Psalm 121:5-6

He is *your shade* (121:5), your relief from the ravages of this world. He is "your covering against every calamity" (James Montgomery Boice, [Psalms](#)). He will protect you from dangers that arise *by day or by night*.

## C. The Lord is Your Preserver - Psalm 121:7-8

God is your "soul-preserver." Although we live in the midst of an evil world with trials and temptations all around, He will see you through to the end. Yes, problems will come, but God will keep you safe through them all. Your soul will come through unharmed. That is a *forever* (121:8) promise!

**Applications**

1. Psalm 121 does not imply that no one ever slipped or fell (121:3) on the journey to Jerusalem, or that no one ever got sunstroke (121:6), or was held up by robbers (121:7). The pilgrims were not exempt from

evil, just as believers today are not. “The pilgrim must understand that everything that invades his or her life is under God’s watchful care and providence ... Often things happen in the life of the pilgrim which would not be his or her choice. But the psalm is not pointing in this direction. The direction is upward, toward God. The believer must recognize that (all of) life is a gift from God” (David G. Baker, “The Lord Watches over You: A Pilgrimage Reading of Psalm 121”). As you continue your pilgrim journey here on earth, will you remember to keep looking up to God instead of always looking down at the potholes?

2. Psalm 11:3 seems especially appropriate to our times. *If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?* Does it seem to you that the foundations of our nation and church are in danger of being destroyed? Does this cause you to fear? All of the psalms we studied last week have shown us the solution to the problem. God, the maker of heaven and earth, is still on the throne and He sees and knows all things. He is in control (Psalm 11:4-7). He is our Shepherd who guides and cares for us in the midst of all dangers and enemies (Psalm 23). There is no need for frantic activity to market our churches and manipulate the direction in which our nation is going. *Cease striving and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10). When we still our souls and turn to God, then we may confidently say, *The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah* (Psalm 46:11). David knew this from personal experience, as we saw in Psalm 62, as did the pilgrims of Psalm 121.

Where does your soul look to find peace in troubled times? Do you look to the mountains, to new and innovative church or social programs, to a political agenda, to other people, to your “self”? Or can you honestly say, with the writer of Psalm 121, *My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth?*

