

Dec. 4, 77 A.M.

OUR OMNIPOTENT HELPER

Psalm 121

INTRODUCTION:

We have a Psalm that declares something about the pilgrims on their way to the city of Jerusalem. They are climbing the steep paths as we discover and they express their Christmas creed. My help comes from the Lord made Heaven and earth. Help comes not from the hills. But from him that made them.

This is a wonderful Psalm on the power and the oversight of God. And it talks about the pilgrim, it talks about the city, and it talks about the eternal security of the citizen in that city.

I. THE SOUL OF THE CITY

V. 1 "I will lift up mine eyes from the hills, whence cometh my help. The city is a very large corporation. It is engaged in business. Collecting taxes, expending revenue. Street improvement, police and fire protection.

A city in a city. Our city of Chesapeake is no greater, no smaller. It is no colder, no warmer. No more tender, no more cruel than the people who comprise its citizenary. Without its people, the city of course would become a mass of brick, stone, steel, wood. The city cannot survive without intelligent leadership. And many of these things as fellowship, make up the soul of the city. We need honest collection and disbursement of taxes for

the benefit of the people. Now there are all kinds of people who are involved. Each and everyone with a soul. True, it is that some of them are still in the rough. And it will take a mason of unusual skill to hew them into shape.

Here in our church, for instance, we are a vital part of the soul of Chesapeake, and we help to reconstruct this city. And we are here if we want the right kind of a city. Like the kind of a city you like.

We are to work at the work that is at hand. It isn't the city that is wrong, many times - it is you that is wrong. Now God planted this church on this corner in this great city. For the purpose of accomplishing something through our lives. Now this great church was started back in 1890's and it has been here at the heart of this city.

Again and again, this church has had to face the question - shall we stay here in the heart of this city, or shall we move out? God put us here - it is our stewardship and our calling to stay here and to do the work of God and stay in the city.

Now Jesus sitting down on the Mt. of Olives, overlooking the city of Jerusalem - the Scripture says, he wept over that city. I believe that he looks over (this city) here, and I think looking down on this area here, he perhaps weeps over this city. The Gospel message, if it is to be planted in the world, must be planted in the cities. The Apostle Paul demonstrates this - he did not go just to the country, the rural areas and stay. But he went to the heart of the empire. His burning desire was to go to Rome, and preach the Gospel there. But Paul knew that the destiny of the Christian faith, rested in the building of churches in the hearts of the city.

Now sociologists tells us today that this is still true - as though so go the cities, so go the nation. And so go a culture. Now this is our concern today. And something is happening in our cities.

It started back in World War II or maybe World War I - the break-up of the concentric city. At the heart of the city, there used to be great institutions that held the life together. There were the financial institutions and there were the cultural institutions like schools and churches. And the city was built around and developed around these great centers. Now following World War II especially, the urban sprawl began to take place. There was a jump into the suburbs. The growing of the (shopping centers). And this meant the breaking up of the heart of the city. Now to get the anchor back to the heart of the city - how can we revitalize the cities. How can we face the great culture, the economic problems. Now the church ought to be part of the solution.

Now we have a call and a mission here in the heart of this city. The business, the trade, and the marketplaces, even amidst the crime and the sin of the city. We believe that the church has a place here.

Look all around us today and you will see how many have fled the city. Some of the major congregations have fled the inner-city neighborhoods. They voted to sell out and move to the suburbs. All about us, this has been happening. In the past few years. Because when I first became pastor here, ¹⁹⁵¹ we had some thriving churches down in Berkley - Berkley Avenue Baptist. Evangelical, The Christian Church, and all were powerful in that section. And they moved out - one by one and left the area. Abandon their buildings. And gone to

the suburbs. Campostella, right over next door to us. The church there - the Methodist, the Baptists, sold out and moved to the suburbs. They moved out, they said, where the people were. And so constantly all around us, we find that there are churches that are doing that. Arbor Grove Church moved out. And has gone out to Level Green. And we have church after church that is leaving the area.

But do you know that there are perhaps several thousand people, right here within a mile or two circle, of this church today. They are all around us. And we believe God put the church here in a New Testament way.

Now to do this, to love the church, the soul of the church and the soul of the city here - it takes some kind of dedication and commitment. That is going to be far beyond what ordinary people are committed too in ordinary churches. The ordinary churches are going to give up. It takes the kind of commitment that some of you make each week. There are some people who drive 10 miles. And some people who pass a half a dozen churches to get downtown, because they believe that there ought to be a witness down in this section.

Now I believe that there ought to be a great demonstration of the love of Christ where people of all kinds can come and find fellowship and acceptance in our church.

Now, most churches tend to take on the characteristic of the neighborhood.

I went out sometime, some weeks ago to a beautiful new suburban church.

- Gallup's - Edwin Hughes Scotland -

Ch must take seriously The Rise of Cities!

2000 - "Home of Man" - 5 wards

Revolution Boston Phil - 50,000

1 million - London 2

1900 - 11

1950 - 75

1976 191

1985 278

10th 1950 (2) New York & London

1970 (8)

1985 (17) - (25 Tokyo - Mexico City (14))

Country people at heart

90% Pop - Country 10% City

1960 $\frac{1}{3}$ " City

Does more " than country

New dominant

Growth of cities - Ch. must take seriously!

As a world today we are becoming city dwellers!

Shut shop if we live to our selves.

Vision of city as out to let -

Record of Ch responding to Rise of cities is disappointing -

Forefront of things in city -

Ch be "sign post" of humanity -

Problems & Problems in city -

1st 1st day working class...

Good to Factory, Traders, Working class, -

Ch - lined up with oppressors -

Bigger the city the smaller the organization -

Regain vitality -

Look to future -

City - anti christian divine -

City - Great things create independence

Ch. not mirror social discontents of city -

New Body - global city!

Not go back to Tribal type -

if there is no hope for the city -

.. at all -

if The script takes the view that

The Holy city is to be built &

will work - we ought not be

dispaired

Ch to be light of world not

side show on scenes -

Food - shelter - work -

City not built for economics -

" but people!

Ch - Faithful company - light of world -

Pray to be of service to city -

And they have all new facilities. They have a beautiful little sanctuary. But you know, I do not see a single gray-headed person in the whole group. Why - because they tend to be alike. They are all living in the same kind of houses. They are all in the same kind of bracket. They are the same kind of folks. And they are typical of that community church.

There needs to be a church in the downtown - at the heart of the city, where everybody is welcome. Where you can find a congregation of all ranks - from all backgrounds. And that is why we ought to be here.

Many people say to me sometimes, that one of the most impressive things about the South Norfolk Baptist Church - are the people that we have. You see everybody here - of all ages. And when we come to the foot of the cross, and find the ground level there, we are just sinners saved by grace.

Now to do this job, in the city, we are going to have to use every means we have of preaching, of teaching, and of multiplied ministries, of missions, etc. Jesus did not tell us to qualify all of the folks, or just to help the deserving ones. But he told us to bring a cup of cold water. That seems to me what we are trying to do, in this city.

There is care about our Christian work. How to maintain our congregation. How to hold on and to reach other people. When we know that suburban churches seem to be very attractive and they make an appeal even to our members. You come, we are little, we need your help.

What are the elements of care that are hidden, my friends, in the work in which we are trying to do. That Christ is trying to work through us.

In this Psalm, it is one of the most popular perhaps in the Bible. But it explores all the moods of the human life. Here is a word that speaks to our immediate condition. And here is a situation as the pilgrims go up to the city = the city of Jerusalem. To the soul of the city. And he says, V. 1, I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. Brethren, you do not go to Jerusalem without lifting up your eyes. You can't go to Jerusalem looking down in the valley - you have to look up. Look up to Jerusalem. You come to Jericho, the Mt. of Olives, Bethany, you are coming - and you are looking up all the way. Now is the help of the city found in the hills. Is that where his power is. That is one of the questions that is being asked. From whence shall my help come.

And this was a man who was always finding himself face to face - perhaps with an adversary. To whom shall I go. What can protect me now. Can I postpone this decision.

The tragedy is that we search sometimes, often too late for the answer to this. We do not find it soon enough.

In the state of Oregon, there was an old abandon church, that was put up for sale. There had been no services in it for years. And the denominational

heads decided to sell the property. And dispose of it. But there was a storm of protest. And the local paper was full of letters written by upset citizens. Why, they objected to the sale of the historical landmark. The man who had one time been it's pastor remarked, that (if) the people had shown that much interest in it while it was alive, it would not have been abandon. So it is with men and their concern for salvation. Not until the last minute, when they had lost everything - do they ask with any real intensity - from whence shall my help come.

V. (2) - My help cometh from the Lord, who made the Heavens and the earth. The omnipotent helper is described here.

There is a difference in a man's vision. Where there is no vision the people perish. The world was made by men of vision. Isaiah said, I saw the Lord high and lifted up. The vision changed his life. Daniel opened his window to the holy city and that vision changed his life. Peter says, we were the eye-witnesses of his majesty. It transformed his life as a believer.

Did you ever look at a sunflower growing in the field. And the wind will blow this way or that. And did you ever notice that the sunflowers always turn their faces toward the sun. And what we need to do is to change the circumstances in our life and in our city by turning our look toward Him in all of our human experiences.

All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We need cleansing.

Where will the weary soul find this cleansing. We find it only in one place.

A party of people were going down in a coal mine. A lady wearing a white dress. A friend said, you ought not to wear that. She asked the guide, can I wear this white dress. He said, yes, there is nothing to prevent you from wearing it down in the mine. But there is much to prevent you from wearing a white dress out of the mine.

As we go out in this old world, and we find our garments soon stained. There is one place that we need to know that our help comes from looking up.

II. SENTINEL OF THE CITIZEN

Guards

The sentinel of the citizens - from the soul of the city, we take a moment now to look and see who watches over these pilgrims and these citizens.

V. 3 - He will not let your foot slide from the path. There is no drowsiness on his part.) This guard as he watches over you. Who does not know how days differ. Even in the life of common ordinary experiences. We go from the golden sunlight of joy sometimes - to the blackness of woe. The grass of the meadow to the mirey clay of the marsh. From the hot dust of the road to the steep ascent of the mountain. From the waters of the cold river, to the warm brooks that flow.

And here is one who says in every detail - I am with you all the days - and all day long, even unto the end. I will not suffer your foot to be moved. Nor will I slumber while I am overseeing.

V. 4 - The same one who watches over the individual, watches over the whole city. He says the Lord keepeth Israel and he will not sleep at his post. What a wonderful message.

X A little girl was taken sick one Christmas and was carried to the Hospital. She heard the story of Jesus, coming into the world to save. One day the nurse came around at an unusual hour, and took the little child by the hand and whispered to her that she needed to be quiet and not talk. And the little child says, ^{!!} I am having a real good time here. Ever such a good time. Suppose I had to go away from here just as soon as I get well. I'll take the good time along, some of it anyhow. Did you know about Jesus being born?"

Yes, replied the nurse - I know. But you must not talk anymore.

You did, I thought you looked as if you didn't. And I was going to tell you. Why, how did I look ? - asked the nurse. Oh, just like most folks. Kinda glum. I shouldn't think you'd ever look glum if you had knowledge about Jesus ever being born.

V. 5 - A shade upon thy right hand. This is a tremendous verse of Scripture which he says is comfort and refreshment.

Isa. 32:2 - The shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Now the right hand means that God is near. And never far.

So God is so near and he is never going to let you be very far away from him. V. 5.

X
Hudson Taylor came into the church, stepped on the platform, opened his Bible and said - Friends, I will give you the motto of my life. And he turned to Mark 11:22 - 'Have faith in God.' The margin says, 'have the faith of God.' But Hudson Taylor says reckon on God's faith to you. He continued, all of my life has been so fickle, sometimes I could trust and sometimes I could not. But when I could not trust, then I reckoned that God would be faithful.

Now this is a powerful idea when we think of the guidance in life's choices. Life is full of choices - every day we stand at the parting of the ways and we ask which way shall I take. In our strength, we find no answer, no guide. In Him, we find - here is the way, walk in it.

How can we find that guidance in Him. It is found through surrender and prayer. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths. If you are choosing a career, you ought to pray. If you are choosing a life mate, you ought to pray. If you are making smaller choices, to choose every morning - each morning we ask God to help us make the right choices for that day. There are two roads for life. There are two ways. One is right and the other is wrong. One ends in Heaven and the other in Hell.

Therefore, God is going to be your shade he says here.

V. (6) - ¹¹ The sun shall not smite thee by day and the moon by night. ⁷
The heat of the day, the sun. The moon, the cold moisture at night. The moon and the sun - great blessings. Of power, of help, or hurt.

Isa. 27:3 - As he kept Israel in the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day. That screened them from the heat of the sun, from the pillar of fire by night. Which defused warmth on the whole camp. And there was no coldness or dampness. No frost to fall upon them. Here is our omnipotent helper. He takes care of the citizens of this city. There will be no harm - day or night.

III. SECURITY OF ^{The} YOUR CITIZENSHIP

(Suitcase) Come & Go

We've been talking about the omnipotent helper. Who takes the soul of the city, and he's the helper - not the mountain. He cares for the citizens. Does not sleep or slumber. And now finally, he gives the protection and security that is needed.

V. (7) - ¹¹ He shall preserve thy soul from evil. And he shall preserve and guard your soul. That means you are safe in every respect. That his soul is protected.

v. 8 - He is going to guard in all of his ways, if you will notice his past, your leavings. His presence, your coming back. Your now And your future - from this time forth, and even forever more.

As in the early days, a great Christian in Britain who had been driven by land and sea, was in a terrible storm. And someone cried there is no path open to us. Let us perish. We will be driven into the sea from the land. And this famous man said, have ye so little faith, my commrades. Lifting his eyes to Heaven, he prayed. I thank God that the way to Heaven is still open.

When there is no other way to look for help, we may look up.

Now, we ourselves, cannot determine the number of days or years that we shall live. But all of us can determine what we do with our days and our years that we are granted.

Now some of our loved ones put in a long life - more than a usual span of years. And as we think of those long years that have been spent, we look at our own years that are to come. What are we putting into our years. What are we filling our lives with - is it the right things. Are we under the hand of the omnipotent helper.

On the outskirts of a little town in Tornoto, there was a little mission church. The congregation wasn't very small. And they didn't have a full time minister. But the man that preached there, on weekend, said that about one block from the church lived an old man well up into his 80's - almost 90.

He used to plant and care for a little flower garden. Which surrounded the church. Many were the beautiful flowers that grew there. One day he said, I asked him, why he spent so much time fixing up the flower beds. After all, he wasn't being paid to do it.

The man said, I must keep my life full of the right things. I wondered after awhile about that - just what he meant. As God gave him health and years, he would use them for others. And the little extra things which he did. I think he had found the secret of holy living.

But fill your life full of the right things.

We thank God for those hills that we can raise our eyes. But we thank God for the God he made and created those hills.

Dr. Samuel Maddox, was a son of a missionary to Brazil. And Sam told the story about his family arriving down there in that country that was not very friendly to missionaries. The first thing, they empounded all of their personal belongings at the custom house, he said. Our furniture, clothes, everything - and they levied some \$2,000 in duty against them. Now, that was more than their total salary for the year in those days.

We moved into a little rented house. Father went out and gathered up packing

boxes, and we just got by. We slept on the floor. Strangers, in a strange land, and all alone. We felt like then, he says, my little brother got sick. We took him to the Doctor. And he called in some specialists - 4 specialists. And yet the brother died. It was a heart-breaking experience on the new mission field. We had the funeral and when it was over, he said, we had a tremendous doctor bill and then we had a great funeral bill. Because they thought we were wealthy Yankees and they sent huge bills and he said, my Daddy just didn't know what to do.

Our first month's check came from the Foreign Mission Board - \$175 for that month. So my father called the family together, and we sat on our boxes in a circle, and he said - what shall we do. We believed the tithe was the Lord's. We do not even have clothes, and they are impounded. We do not have furniture and we owe \$2,000. We have not paid these bills. There is the doctors bills and the funeral bills. What shall we do.

But then my father said, but I believe God is the first creditor.

I think we ought to take out the tithe first. And we had a vote. And the whole family agreed. So we took out \$17.50. The next Sunday, in the little church we put it in the offering.

When the people in the church saw what we had done, they knew about the problems we were having. They began to talk. And pretty soon word got out, some friend went to the custom house. He said, this is not right to have this kind of duty imposed against these people. They came here in the name of As a result, they cut the bill down to 10% of what it was.

Then a Christian doctor heard about the bill, and he went to see the specialists. And they learned the facts of the matter, and they just wiped out the debts. That is alright they said, ^{1/} we can do this for these good people. ^{1/} They are God's people. When the funeral director learned about the situation - he said, I will ^{1/} just charge them my actual expenses. ^{1/}

Then the tears in his eyes, Sam Maddox said, you know - that is the way God began to work. When we did his will. When we obeyed him. And it was not - he said, but a few months before my father was able to pay off all that we owed. And we got our things out of customs.

We had maintained our integrity and our self-respect. And the people respected us for what we had done. And he said the (work exploded.) And there was a boom in that mission. All because the family decided to tithe and to claim the promise of God.

I think we all ought to remember what Sam said, as he wept, (you just can't outgive God.) ^{1/}

I want to say to you this morning, you can't outgive God. You cannot personally and I cannot. We cannot do it as a church. And if we are going to march and (make our church great in 1978) it must be in faith, commitment, and surrender. Only Heaven knows what will happen next year. God will open the windows of Heaven because he is our omnipotent helper.

I wonder if there is someone here - you are not a member of any church. But you feel this morning, somehow, like saying - I'd like to become one. I'd like to follow Christ in this service today. I wonder if there is a fellow Baptist here who would like to say I'll make this my church home by moving my letter.

Or is there someone here of another demonination. Who will say, I believe I have found the church I can believe in. And that I believe is doing what God wants done.

Or there is someone here who has already been immersed as a believer, and you would like to be received today. If you are not a Christian, come and accept Christ as your Saviour.

I will lift up mine eyes. Our omnipotent helper is still available. And through all your way, in his kingdom, he will keep you even for ever more.

Maker of mountains—

Creator of their beauty and their might,
I lift my small and human heart to Thee,
Fill it, I pray, with something of their might,
Their steadfastness, their high serenity;
Sweep it with canyon winds, and wash it clean
With clear cold water from the eternal snow,
Let these bright torrents purge it, let all mean
Desires and passions leave it—let me go
Back to the lowlands, back to the crowded days,
Poised and sustained, and ready for my part,
Let me go back, schooled in the mountain ways,
Bearing their old vast secrets in my heart.¹