

The Song of Ascents

Focus for the Journey

Pt 1 - Psalm 120

Greater reliance upon the Lord one of the areas we want to focus on...“Apart from me you can do nothing” - I want to help us focus upon Him through this series of messages

Background

- The “**Song of Ascents**” is a group of 15 Psalms (120 to 134)
- Hebrew **Definition** for “**Ascents**”- *elevation*, that is, the act (literally a *journey* to a higher place, figuratively a *thought* arising), or (concretely) the condition (literally a step or *grade* mark, figuratively a *superiority* of station); specifically a climactic *progression* (in certain Psalms):
- No one knows for sure what is the **significance** of the term...many interpretations have been given - here are a few of them:
 - Some say the Levites, would sing one psalm on each of 15 steps leading to the temple. (Ezekiel 40:22 - seven steps - Ezekiel 40:37 - eight steps (fifteen in all))
 - These psalms were sung by the Jews who ascended from Babylon to Israel in the times of Ezra the Scribe. (coming back from captivity)
 - These psalms were sung by the Jews when they would "ascend" to Jerusalem to the Holy Temple three times annually for the festivals.

Bottom Line: The word is used in the OT both literally as in a “**journey to a higher place**”, but also figuratively as in “**a thought arising**”. There is a common thread - It is people on a journey toward an experience with the Lord (the temple, the feasts, up to Jerusalem after captivity)...and these songs of ascent stir us up and act as reminders to lift our focus “**a thought arising**” on the Lord as we make our way on the journey. **The “Song of Ascents” = Focus for the Journey**

Psalm 120:1-7

I call on the LORD in my distress, and he answers me. 2 Save me, O LORD, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues. 3 What will he do to you, and what more besides, O deceitful tongue? 4 He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows, with burning coals of the broom tree. 5 Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar! 6 Too long have I lived among those who hate peace. 7 I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war.

Let's talk about Distress

- **Distress** H6869 *tightness* (that is, figuratively *trouble*);

The distress mentioned in this psalm is similar to what we experience - THINGS THAT WE CANNOT CONTROL

- *vs. 2 Save me, O LORD, from **lying lips** and from **deceitful tongues**.*
- *vs. 5 Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar!*
 - The word **Dwell** used here does not denote a permanent abode, but it usually refers to a temporary lodging, as when one is a traveler, a pilgrim, a stranger, and is under a necessity of passing a night in a strange land on his way to the place of his destination
 - **Meshech** “that my sojourning is protracted” - and **Kedar** ... he dwelt among rude and barbarous people, like the inhabitants of Mesech and Kedar:
- *6 Too long have I lived among **those who hate peace**. 7 I am a man of peace; but when I speak, **they are for war**.*

In this world (on our journey or pilgrimage) YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE

John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

We can never question THE LOVE OF CHRIST - It is the basis for conquering trouble or any other thing

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? **Shall trouble** or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Trouble provides the opportunity for God's glory. The greater our distress - the greater His glory in deliverance

- Jehoshaphat was far outnumbered, had no power - **BUT our eyes are upon you**
2 Chronicles 20:12 O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.”

2 Chronicles 20:15-17 He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.....
17 You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you,

2 Chronicles 20:22 As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.

- There are some instances **where ONLY God can intervene**
2 Kings 6:26-29 As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, “Help me, my lord the king!” 27 The king replied, “If the LORD does not help you, where can I get help for you? From the threshing floor? From the winepress?” 28 Then he asked her, “What’s the matter?” She answered, “This woman said to me, ‘Give up your son so we may eat him today, and tomorrow we’ll eat my son.’ 29 So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, ‘Give up your son so we may eat him,’ but she had hidden him.”
- The Lord takes us through situations **so that we might rely fully upon him**
2 Corinthians 1:8-9 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Psalm 50:15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; **I will deliver you, and you will honor me.**”

Psalm 143:11 **For your name's sake, O LORD,** preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.

So the question is” “Who do I call upon ***in*** my distress?

(***in*** - that is while we are experiencing it - ***not before or after*** distress)

- The focus here is not the avoidance of distress - but our response to distress
- On this upward journey, the Song of Ascents says “I CALL UPON THE LORD”
- It is a message of dependence, hope and confidence in Him

In Your Distress, Who Do You Call Upon?

Yourself? ...or do you realize there is a rock that is higher than I?

Psalm 61:1-2 Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. 2 From the ends of the earth I call to you, **I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.**

Chariots & Horses? ...or the saving power of His right hand?

Psalm 20:1-9 **May the LORD answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. 2 May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion...6 Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; **he answers** him from his holy heaven with the saving power of his right hand. 7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. 8 They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm. 9 O LORD, save the king! Answer us when we call!**

To man who is often unable, or uncaring? ...or do you cry only to the LORD?

Psalm 142:1-5 **I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. 2 I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble. 3 When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me. 4 Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. 5 I cry to you, O LORD;**

...And He Answers [Hears] Me

Not only does He hear, but He cares, and He has the power to do something - He **answers** me

H6030 A primitive root; properly to *eye* or (generally) to *heed*, that is, *pay attention*; by implication to *respond*; by extension to *begin* to speak; specifically to *sing, shout, testify, announce*:

Psalm 3:1-8 O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! 2 Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him." Selah 3 **But** you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. 4 To the LORD I cry aloud, **and he answers me from his holy hill.** Selah 5 I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. 6 I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side. 7 Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. 8 From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people. Selah

Isaiah 59:1 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.

Other Encouragements for Calling Upon the LORD

Our distress is KNOWN & SEEN by Him

Psalm 31:7-8 I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the **anguish** of my soul. 8 You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.

He is WITH us in trouble - not just a distant observer

Psalm 91:14-15 "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. 15 He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.

His is a PRESENT help

Psalm 46:1-3 God is our refuge and strength, an **ever-present help in trouble.** 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

He NEVER FORSAKES those who seek Him

Psalm 9:9-10 The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of

trouble. 10 Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

He is CLOSE to those brokenhearted and crushed in spirit

Psalm 34:17-19 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their **troubles.** 18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;

He is MERCIFUL and hears even when we have not been faithful

Nehemiah 9:26-27 “But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. 27 So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were **oppressed** they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.

Our cry goes into his ears

Psalm 18:6 In my **distress** I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, **into his ears.**