

Osaka International Church - Sunday 18th July 2021 – Pastor Alistair McKenna.

Psalm 121 (New King James Bible)

Title: **God cares personally for His people**

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—

From whence comes my help?

² My help *comes* from the LORD,

Who made heaven and earth.

³ He will not allow your foot to ^[a]be moved;

He who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴ Behold, He who keeps Israel

Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵ The LORD *is* your ^[b]keeper;

The LORD *is* your shade at your right hand.

⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,

Nor the moon by night.

⁷ The LORD shall ^[c]preserve you from all evil;

He shall preserve your soul.

⁸ The LORD shall preserve^[d] your going out and your coming in

From this time forth, and even forevermore.

Welcome & Introduction.

Hello everybody at Osaka International Church. My name is Alistair McKenna, and if you have been attending the Church for a few years, then you will know me.

If you are new, then I need to introduce myself. I was the senior Pastor at O.I.C. for exactly 5 years and left just before lock down in the U.K. on the 28th February 2020, about 16 months ago.

Although God guided myself and Wendy to return home to the U.K., we do miss you, and have not forgotten about you all.

Both Wendy and myself had the **best 5 years of our Christian Ministry at O.I.C.** and we are both grateful for your continued prayers.

We are active members of **St. Thomas Baptist Church in the city of Exeter, in the county of Devon, England.**

It is from this Church building that I am recording this sermon for you.

We are praying for O.I.C. at this difficult time, but we know that God has plans for you.

Jeremiah 29: v. 11 says “ **For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope...**” (N.K.J.)

When Todd asked me to preach a couple of sermons to be recorded and sent out to Japan, my heart was immediately drawn to **Psalm 121** for my first message.

Psalm 121 is one of the many Psalms that the Bible describes as **Songs of ascents**, and they are also described as **“Pilgrim Psalms”**.

The reason for this is that these Hebrew songs were sung on the way to Jerusalem to celebrate the main Jewish festivals.

To get to Jerusalem from anywhere in Israel involved travelling up a long steep hill. Hence the word "ascent", which means to go up.

During Old Testament times every committed Jew made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem at least once in his life time.

The people travelled in large groups, called Caravans. There were many dangers on the way, such as exposure to heat, thirst, hunger, illness, accidents and attacks by robbers.

At night when they camped, they posted guards on the nearby hills to guard them from possible attacks.

It is out of this background and experience that this Psalm was written.

The key phrase in this Psalm in the original Hebrew translation appears 6 times.

It is translated in English as "God keeps" and "God preserves".

It is from this main theme that I present to you the four essential truths contained in this Psalm.

1. God Keeps Us. – v. 1-2.

The Psalmist confesses that his help comes from God and that his dependence is on Him. The writer then goes on to say why he could fully depend on God.

The writer could depend upon God because He is the creator of heaven and earth.

The God of the Bible has absolute control over all that He has created. He has the authority and power to keep us.

I know that bad things happen to good people, but God still has absolute control and power over everybody. He only allows things to happen for His sovereign purposes.

It is only as we look back on our lives can we see the keeping hand of God upon our spiritual journey.

I have just completed a small book, it is only about 100 pages, but it tells the story of God's keeping hand upon my life and Wendy's life as we have tried to follow God on our journey to Heaven.

If you read it, there is one thing that is clear and that is that God keeps His promises and He provides for His people.

God can do this because He is the maker of Heaven and earth.

There is a second reason why God keeps us.

God keeps us because He is a "Covenant Keeping God."

God made a covenant relationship with His chosen people, the Jewish nation.

Quote Genesis Chapter 17: v. 1-8. In N.K.J.

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I *am* Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. ² And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."

³ Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: ⁴ "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. ⁸ Also I

give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

In those days when a covenant was made between two people, they confirmed the agreement by cutting animals in half and both parties walking through the middle of the animals together as a sign of the covenant.

The sign was that if one of the parties broke the agreement then they could be cut in half like the animals.

However if you go back to Genesis chapter 15 and read verses 7-21, you will discover that Abraham was not required to walk through the cut animals. **It was only God Himself that took that journey.**

This meant that only God Himself has the responsibility of keeping the covenant.

It is a covenant of **GRACE**, that depends upon God Himself to keep us.

The covenant is not based upon our merit or worthiness, it is based upon God’s covenant love for His people.

So for us today, worshipping at O.I.C., God’s covenant with us is based upon the work of **Jesus Christ**, who was sacrificed for our sins, He took our place, He was our substitute sacrifice.

Quote 2 Corinthians 5: v. 21. (N.K.J.)

²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Although our relationship with God is based upon what Jesus Christ did in His death, we are still responsible and accountable to God for our lives.

King David in the Bible, tried to cover up his sin. He actually arranged for somebody to be killed by putting a soldier on the front line of battle.

However David was confronted by the prophet Nathan who gently exposed David’s sin. (**2 Samuel 12: v. 1-15**)

David then repented of his sin and we find his repentance prayer in **Psalm 51.**

Although God forgave David for his sin, **God held him accountable for his actions.**

The son through David’s adultery died, even though he sought God in fasting and prayer. (**2 Samuel 12: v. 15-23**)

David’s son Absalom tried to kill his father, David escaped, and his son took over as the King. In the end David’s son Absalom died in battle, and David returned to Jerusalem.

Even though God forgave David, he had a very troubled life.

It is very clear from the Bible that God keeps his covenant promises, but He makes his people accountable for their sins.

God disciplines those whom He loves, and that discipline relates often to the seriousness of the sin.

May God help us to walk in step with His Holy Spirit, to honour His word and live lives that are worthy of the name of Christ. (Christians = Christ’s people)

Our lives need to reflect the life of Jesus.

2. God keeps us with diligence. – v. 3-5.

God watches over His people carefully and diligently. God doesn't look after us from a distance. His protection is immediate and personal.

If our house is on fire, we telephone the fire department and they come to put out the fire. If we are being robbed in our home, we telephone the police for help.

But God is not like the Police or the Fire Department, He is already there in our particular situation, He is keeping us with his **diligent care.**

God is at hand 24 hours a day, and His eyes are upon us, ready to help us.

There are two things in these verses worthy of note.

In verse 3 we are told that God will not allow our feet to be moved, or stumble.

What does this mean?

The slipping of the foot was a common danger in the mountainous country of Canaan. A person could lose his foothold very easily.

When we slip our foot on a mountain track, we can easily fall and hurt ourselves.

We have nothing to grip on to when we slip. We could break our leg or injure our foot.

It is in these difficult times that we need to reach out to God for His help.

God promises in this Psalm that when we reach out to Him, He will be there to hold on to.

In Psalm 73: v.18 we are told that the wicked are set in "**slippery places**", however God keeps the feet of His children from slipping.

Sometimes Christians wander into slippery paths through their careless choices and actions. Nevertheless, God is ready at these times to reach out and keep us from slipping, if we will only reach out for Him.

The second truth in these verses is that God is a shade for His people.(v.5)

In v. 5 we are reminded of the closeness of God upon our lives. God is so close that His shadow falls on our right side protecting us from the heat.

God keeps us from things in life that seek to make us lazy and not effective for Him.

When we cry out to God, He protects us from things that will destroy our testimony as believers in Christ.

Quote John 10: v. 28. (N.K.J.)

²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

3. God keeps us at all times – v. 6 & v. 8.

In v. 6 and 8 we are told that God is going to keep us in the day time and in the night time. It also says that God will also keep us in eternity.

This is very encouraging.

The day represents the times when we are awake and alert and able to go about our normal work, whatever that might be.

The night stands for the times when we are handicapped and helpless.

God will keep us in times of **our strength** and in times of **our weakness.**

In v. 6 the writer refers to the sun and the moon. The sun refers to the most powerful circumstances that we might face in life. The moon refers to the emotional life that we sometimes go through.

Bereavement is an emotional experience, but God will help you through that experience, if you reach out to Him.

We face many emotional experiences in life, but God is able to help us in those situations.

There is a song that we used to sing about 20 years ago. It was written by Don Meon. Here are some of the words.

God will make a way, where there seems to be no way.
He works in ways we cannot see, He will make a way for me.
He will be my guide, hold me closely to His side.
With love and strength for each new day, He will make a way.

The writer then refers to God keeping us when we go out and when we come in. This is a reference to the unknown experiences of everyday life. When we go out each day, we don't really know what is going to happen. However God knows what will happen and He is able to keep us and protect us.

Unknown situations obviously bring a certain amount of fear into our lives, but knowing that God is going to keep us in those situations will give us **confidence** and **assurance** that He has gone before us and will keep us.

When Moses was called by God to do a big job for Him, His main concern was that **God's presence** was going to be with him all of the time.

God may not call us to do a big thing like He did for Moses, but He will call us to do something, and whatever that might be, we can be assured that God has gone before us and He will provide and protect us along the way.

Finally in this section we are told that God will keep us for all eternity. (v.8)

God will keep us in **life** and in **death**, and **after death**.

If you are a Christian today, then you have a wonderful future in Heaven with Jesus.

Jesus will keep you here on earth and forever in Heaven.

Sometimes we are so pre-occupied with things on this earth that we forget about the fact that we are only on a journey to Heaven. Earth is not our home.

We are citizens of Heaven, our visa to this new country is through Jesus Christ.

Paul in Colossians 3: v. 2 tells us to "Set our minds on things above and not on things on the earth."

It doesn't matter how difficult the journey is if we know we are going to Heaven.

God promises to keep us on the journey and also in eternity.

A verse in an old Christian songs says this:

" O who would mind the journey, when the road leads home..."

I know that many of you are going through a difficult time at O.I.C.

I can identify with you and I am upset too. However God will keep you and bring you through this difficult time, and He will bless you as a Church and as individuals if you **remain true to His word the Bible.**

The temptation in the difficult times is to leave the difficult place and go where you think it will be much nicer and easier.

However God doesn't want you to leave, He wants you to stay and support O.I.C. through this difficult time.

Thirty six years ago I attended a Church in Edinburgh, Scotland. It was the weekend of my interview to attend the Faith Mission Bible College.

I had to make a decision about giving up my home, my job, and my security in order to attend Bible College and follow Jesus for the rest of my life.

The Church were teaching the children through a famous Christian book called **“Pilgrim’s Progress”**

The Title of the talk was a warning about **“ Bypath Meadow”**.

They had a very large picture poster with a rocky road, full of large stones, and pilgrim was about to travel on this road.

By the side of the road, there was a sign. The sign read **“ Bypath Meadow”**.

In that Meadow were beautiful flowers, green grass and lovely mountains.

It was a very attractive place.

However it was the place of temptation, it was **NOT** the road God wanted Pilgrim to travel.

Yes Pilgrim was on a rocky road, but he had to travel on that road to get to the heavenly city.

I broke down in tears because I knew that God was speaking to me.

I was tempted not to follow on the rocky road. But I knew that God had called me to travel a difficult road towards Heaven.

I am so grateful that I made the right decision not to be tempted to follow other desires, but to follow God’s path.

My challenge to all of you at O.I.C. is to persevere, and to continue on this difficult road, and not to quit.

God will keep you and strengthen you as you reach out to Him.

4. God keeps us from all evil. – v. 7.

We have to be very careful with v. 7.

This verse does not mean that God will prevent any suffering in our lives or bad things from happening to us.

What this verse means is that God will keep our souls from the effects of evil.

Quote Matthew 10: v. 28. (N.K.J.)

²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in ^[h]hell.

The Bible is clear in its teaching that there is a Heaven to gain and a Hell to avoid.

In Hell punishment for sin is eternal, and there is no escape from this eternal evil.

However God will keep the Christian soul from the evil of eternal punishment.

Conclusion and Application

The writer of Psalm 121 asks a question. He looks to the hills around himself and says **“ Where does my help come from?”**

In those days all of the idols and false gods were placed on the top of the hills.

Today in Japan, many of the Temples are on top of the hills.

They are attractive looking places and many Temples have wonderful gardens.

However Shinto and Buddha offer false hope.

They are created gods, not the creator God of the Bible.

These gods are man -made and offer a solution to life devised from evil hearts of unbelief in the true God, who is the God of the Bible.

If you follow these gods, they can not keep from all evil and your soul will not rest in peace but receive punishment for all eternity.

However today the God of the Bible is offering to keep you here and now and for all eternity.

God has paid the price for your soul, by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die on a cross for your sins. If you admit your sin and turn to Jesus for help, He will forgive you and give you peace in your heart for all eternity.

Q. **Will you trust Jesus today?**

If you already are a Christian today, and I know that most of you are, then you must believe that God will keep you now and forever.

We walk by faith, and not by sight.

We must not carry our burdens alone. We need to give them to our loving, caring God who will strengthen and uphold us with **His righteousness.**

Amen.