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Psalm 124 "The Lord Is on Our Side" October 7, 2018

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 124.

Psalm 120 through 135 are a series of very short Psalms that are called the Songs of Ascent, sometimes the Songs of Degrees. It just depends how you translate the Hebrew word. But they are all sung as both a nation and as families would head up to Jerusalem for those three long weeklong feast days every year: Pentecost, Passover, Feast of Tabernacles. You always read going up to Jerusalem, even when it's down south, because Jerusalem sits on top of a hill, so everything kind of -- every road runs up. You can't really say I'm going down to Jerusalem, because you'll end up going up. So these are Songs of Ascent. This morning we just wanted to look at these eight verses that David wrote that really focus on one subject.

Sometimes when you teach, studies can be complicated. They're intricate, one thing depends on another, one point kind of relies upon getting the previous one, and those can be hard. This one's not hard. This is one point. You know the old three points? This is one point. And here's the point: It is a good thing that the Lord's on our side. That's the point. And can you imagine moms and dads and kids singing it on the way up to Jerusalem for a week of worship to say, hey, God's on our side. And that's why we're heading where we are.

So in the lyrics of the short Psalm, the Lord is on our side is driven home by considering what would have happened if He hadn't been, or what would we have been like. What perils in our life would we have faced that we could not overcome? He mentions people, he mentions circumstances, and describes those without the Lord as sitting ducks, so to speak, although those aren't the words that he uses. And yet if the Lord is on our side, we can anticipate victory at every turn. So it's beautiful Hebrew imagery, poetry, but it is designed to leave the truth imprinted on our hearts and minds that God is with us. The advantage that we have is God's with

us.

Verse 1 says this in Psalm 124: "'If it had not been the Lord who was on our side,' then Israel could now say -- 'If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then we would have been swallowed up alive, when their wrath was kindled against us.'" David looking back over his history, or the history of the people I think, called to mind how many enemies would have liked to have taken out Jerusalem. Every year returning here to worship, there had been fierce enemies. There had been folks filled with wrath. They fought people much greater than them. They would have been destroyed. God stepped in. If you've read the Old Testament, a lot of those fights aren't fair, because God's on one side, and yet you want to be on the side He's on. They would have been destroyed. Israel even to this day is a small little nation in the midst of very angry and bitter enemies, rivals who would like nothing more than to see them destroyed, and yet they are not. And whether they know it or not, we know it, the Lord is with them. He has a plan and a future for the country.

Paul would later write to the Romans, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" That's a pretty cool verse, isn't it? I hope you've remembered that one. It's Romans 8 what? Anybody? Uh-oh. Uh-oh. You want me to wait until you find it? No. Verse 31. It's not fair, I got notes. It's all right. Don't worry. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Because of sin, strife and animosity and wars and rumors of wars, infighting and interpersonal conflicts are a way of life in the world. It's what you expect to find. It is what resides there. And yet for God's people, He would like to deliver us from that. And the answer that makes all the difference is the Lord's on your side.

I'm sure that you've had someone in your life that, no matter how hard you tried, they just don't like you. If for no logical reason, then maybe it's just the way you look, or the way you talk, or the way you stand, or the way you breathe, or that you breathe. I don't know. You just rub them the wrong way, and as a result they oppose you every chance they get. Never have a kind word to say. It really is the result of sin. And it is made worse when you as a Christian live in a godless world. And you're attacked not just for you, but for Who you align yourself with. And so we read in verse 2, "If the

Lord had not been on our side when men rise up against us." I'm sure there are people that probably don't like you that have never met you. They don't like you because they've heard their opinions from others, their negative comments. They haven't spent one minute with you personally, and yet they can't stand you already. Other people do you the favor of waiting to meet you before they decide they don't like you. But the root is always the same. It's the warfare that sin brings to the life of man. It's jealousy, it's competition, it's personality conflict. I remember my kids coming home from school when they were young, angry that someone had said something about them that wasn't true, and you would think when you got older that would go away. It doesn't, because sin doesn't go away.

Now, David isn't just talking interpersonal relationships, although he certainly had a lot of struggles in that in the place God put it. But even the nation itself was constantly facing warfare. Sin is the evidence of the wrath of man. I guess would be the evidence of sin I should say. Jesus when He spoke to the disciples in Matthew 18 said, "It is inevitable that offenses will come, but woe to those by whom they come." In fact, he went on to say, "If you receive one of these little children in My name, you'll receive Me, but if you offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it would be better for you to have a millstone hung around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea." Swimming with cement floaties. Woe by those who offenses come. Let's face it, we offend people. Even if you try to never offend them, you'll offend them. Eventually someone's going to be upset by what you did or didn't do, what you said or didn't say. It doesn't take much. I thought you were mad at me. You didn't say hello. You just walked right by.

Have you ever had someone honk at you for no apparent reason other than you didn't step on the gas a microsecond as the light was about to turn green? Let's go, let's go, let's go. You can't really drive and expect not to offend someone. Slow down to let someone merge into the traffic and the guy that you let in loves you, and the guy behind you hates you, and now blames you for missing a light two miles down the road. We've seen it in church. Paint a color on a wall and someone doesn't like it, and we get letters. Have someone speak for you when you're on vacation -- I didn't like him.

Have the kids come up and play music -- oh, it's too loud. Forget the fact that worship is about the heart, not about the notes or the volume, but -- it's too short, it's too long. Why do you have a beard? Where's your hair? I don't like that shirt. You laugh. I'm not laughing. I actually am kind of laughing.

It's good to know the Lord is on your side. We live to please Him and He fights our battles. But I just love the picture of thousands of pilgrims heading up the walkways to Jerusalem, and they're steep walks up and down the city in Jerusalem. Nothing's flat. But just to see a whole family saying, oh, the Lord's with us. If He hadn't have been, oh, man, we'd have had it, but He's with us.

People problems are certainly the most difficult challenges as Christians, made more difficult by the fact that usually the -- if you're in the church, the people you have most trouble with are supposed to be saved. I know you doubt that they are now, but they are. I heard someone say with a tongue in cheek, the church is a perfect place to be if it wasn't for the people. But really think about that, would we really have a church?

How many times in David's life was he in danger of men who hated him? I think you'd immediately go to Saul and you think about, here's a guy who spent seven and a half years of his life with only one goal: Kill David. Just kill David. Kill David. Hey, it's Tuesday, what are you going to do? Kill David. Thursday, next week, next month, it's on the calendar, kill David. It's all he cares about. David was popular. He was jealous of his popularity. If the truth be known, and you read through the scriptures, David was by far Saul's most faithful servant. He couldn't have found a greater man to support him than David. Turned on him. Years later David's own son Absalom would seek to drive his father from the kingdom, certainly drove him out of his house and out of the city, in a failed coup attempt that would eventually cost Absalom his life. David was under constant pressure as the king from his own citizens. He was under constant pressure by the enemy. They were positioned at every border; the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Moabites. Even the Philistines came -- that was uncalled for. Even the Philistines came at his inauguration, II Samuel 5. Tried to take David out before he was ever made king. Yet every time Saul got close, Absalom got close, God

intervened. And I think David wrote this with a heart of great gratitude, as he with his family, gathered in Jerusalem.

God is with us. Isn't that good to know? Because in a world that you feel completely like we're the minority, we're not. God's with us. At your job when you're the only Christian, and you feel kind of isolated, no, no. God's with you. It should be a good T-shirt, don't you think? God's with me. A little arrogant, but good, biblical. God's with me. And David recognized that and he knew that, and took some comfort in it. In fact, he said, if He had not been with us, and he began to look over -- at all the working that God had done. God wasn't just with him, God was actually involved for him. But he writes there at the end of verse 3, if the Lord hadn't been with us, the world, even when their wrath is kindled, would be turning against us. That's the kind of life we have to live in a world that doesn't know God.

Spurgeon wrote in this verse 3 in his notes, "The world is filled with wrath, but that wrath is heated up seven times more like Nebuchadnezzar's fire when it comes to dealing with the believer." It's exasperated by the fact that you believe in God. You want to live a godly life and do things right.

In verse 4 he turns from people to the consequences and the circumstances that would have overwhelmed him, had not the Lord been on his side. Then he said, the waters would have overwhelmed us, the streams would have gone over our souls, and the swollen waters would have gone over our soul. Now, you know that at least in Hebrew, whenever something's repeated, it is repeated for emphasis, especially in poetry. It is really like an exclamation mark in English. So when he said the waters would have gone over us, the water would have gone over, he's not stuttering, he is emphasizing. And that's the way the language itself works. Had the presence of God not been with us, we wouldn't have been able to overcome the deepening waters that surround our life. The difficulties that have started as a trickle, but now are life-threatening, flooding our souls and overwhelming our sensibilities. Man, if the Lord wasn't with us, there's all kinds of stuff in life that can take you out. But if He's with us, then no matter what comes our way, we can stand. You see, God wasn't just an answer to his prayers, He was the only answer to help. If He had not

been on our side, we would have been doomed, swallowed up in trouble, overwhelmed in a flood, carried away in a torrent. Pretty descriptive words. But I think we can relate to them. Circumstances in your life can certainly sometimes just spring up from it seems nowhere, like a flash flood, and you feel like you're going to drown. Cause us to lose hope, cause us to despair, much like a tired swimmer wondering if he can get back to shore.

Maybe this morning you are in church, wet from the neck down, trying to tread water. And yet if the Lord be with you, you can stand on a rock. You can stand on a rock. Severe illness comes into your life with an uncertain future, and the waters rise. Someone in your life abruptly dies and they were too young to die. You spend years faithfully working at a job that you've devoted your life to, only to find out they've decided to lay you off without warning, and now later on in life you have these great financial hardships to face. Your wife or your husband all of a sudden decides they've had enough of you. I mean, there are some pretty shocking things that happen in life that we don't anticipate. We don't mind when they happen to other people. "Oh, I just don't want that to happen to me," and then it does. Difficult times unannounced that bring fear and anxiety and stress and distress and leave you overwhelmed. How good to be able to stop in all of that and say, yeah, but God is with me. God's with me.

Deep waters are a good reason to go to church. You know, the Bible is filled with injunctive to hang around together so that you can help one another when the water gets a little too deep. Paul wrote to the Romans in the first couple of 10, 12 verses, "I can't wait to see you so that I can be comforted by the mutual faith that you and I both have." He writes to the Corinthians, second letter, first Chapter, "I can't wait to see you and thank you for the prayers that you've been praying for me that have been able to restore our souls and keep us going." God's presence is found amongst the saints.

So there are times in life when you see no way out and wonder what in the world happened and the wheels have fallen off, and all you have left is this: God is with me. It can't just be a proverb; it has to be a reality. You learn the reality in the day-to-days of life. God is with me. God is with me. You try to work it out on your own, you hang onto -- what is it? -- the proverbial rope

at the end of the line. But one thing is certain: The God you serve isn't leaving. He hasn't forsaken you. He knows what's going on. He's doing things for good. He's a good God who gives good gifts. Isaiah said of the Lord as the Lord was speaking to the people, Isaiah 43, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And when you pass through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you won't be burned. Neither will the flame come near you." Because why? God is with us.

You read of the boys there in Daniel who were told to worship an image of a king that wasn't God. They refused. They were threatened with death. They decided that would be better than disobeying. They get thrown into a very overheated oven. And as the king looks in, he doesn't see three men walking, he sees four men, and they're not bound, they're loose, and they're not hurt and the fourth one looks much like the Son of God. Five verses later, or four verses later, in Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar speaks up and says, "Blessed be Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego. God has sent His angel to take care of His servants who trusted in Him." God was with them. He didn't leave them. He didn't forsake them.

Psalm 34 verse 7 says, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them." It's true for you too. It's true for you today. It's true for you right now. God is with you. If you're with Him, He's with you. I can rest knowing that everything works together for good. I can stand fast knowing every trial I face He has to first approve. I can know that He doesn't waste my suffering without purpose. I can rejoice in the fact that God is standing on my side of the fence, and without Him I would have been toast long ago.

I think before we met the Lord as Christians, we were all bound and determined to live independent lives, independent of God. I'm going to live my own life, make my own way, captain of my own ship. Somewhere along the line, the waters got pretty deep. The trouble got high. Maybe the doctor said, nothing else we can do; or the stockbroker called and asked for a margin call that you can't afford; or your spouse walks out the door. Whatever happened, life turned sour, and as a result, you turned to the Lord. From that day forward, He hasn't left your side. And it is just like God to stay with

you. We might have been overwhelmed, but now I'm standing on the rock. It's good to know, isn't it, that God is on your side? I -- I like the fact that even in life, there are people you can call on.

We had a joyous occasion at our house this week. The little water bib that feeds the ice maker on the refrigerator had been leaking for probably two months into the back of the cabinets, and we didn't see it, or heard it. So the whole wall of cabinets is wasted. There's mold and we had to remediate -- it's a mess. I said to the Lord, where were you, Lord? The waters have overwhelmed us. So now we have holes in the walls it's pretty.

But thank the Lord He knows, right? He's on our side, if you'll place yourself at his side. You can't -- He can't force himself into your life. He's a near and present help in time of trouble. He knows what we need before we ask. He's God Almighty. If the Lord had not been with us. The word "iahlanu" (ea-la-nue) is a word that means the Lord in the past tense of the word "Emmanuel." Iahlanu. It's literally Emmanuel, God with us, but it's a past tense of that word. So that David's confession is the Lord has been with us, in the past tense. I've seen it time and time again.

Luther wrote of this Psalm, "We need to hear it twice as David repeats himself in verse 1 and 2, because when there is danger, we know fear without measure. When it is past, we think less of it than we used to. Satan's ploy is always to diminish and obscure God's grace. If the Lord hadn't been with us all those times, we'd have been cooked. And He reminds us of that to be so. We take it for granted. We shouldn't.

I think King Asa was 25 years old when he became a king in Israel. He did some cool stuff. He took the people back to the place that God wanted them to be, made a lot of enemies in the process, but he reformed the nation, the worship. In the midst of all of the good things he was doing, the Ethiopian armies came against him with a million-man army. They're mentioned as such in the Bible. With armor and chariots. And Asa did the smart thing: He prayed. But his conviction was, the Lord is on our side. He said in II Chronicles Chapter 14, as he cried to the Lord, God, I know that it is nothing for You to help us. You don't need many. You can help with few.

So help us, Lord, so we can rest in Your name, and go out against this multitude, because You're God. You won't let man prevail against You. But You're with us. The Lord's on our side. The result was, verse 12 and 13 of II Chronicles 14, that the Ethiopians were overthrown by those from Judah. The people pursued them miles down the road. They were overthrown. They didn't recover. They were destroyed before the Lord, and they were carried away. When King Asa came back from that battle, happy, relieved, thankful, a prophet came out to meet him named Azariah. And he said, "Would you listen to me, Asa?" And he said, "I will." And he said this to him: "The Lord will be with you while you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He'll be found with you; but if you forsake Him, He'll forsake you." So God is with you, if you want Him to be with you. It is nothing for you to help. By many are few, by weak are strong. We go out against them in your name. The natural advantage was that God was with them. Outwardly it looked disastrous. Inwardly it couldn't have been better. The Lord will be with you if you're with Him. That was what the prophet said to him. This is how God works.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews said that God promised to never leave us or to forsake us, and then he said, God is your helper. He declared it to be so. He quoted out of Psalm, I think, 118 in it would be Hebrews 13, I guess. Paul wrote the same thing: "If God be for us, who can be against us? If God justifies us, how can anyone lay a charge against the elect?"

This morning, with David and many others, you can leave this place not whispering, but shouting, "The Lord is with me." He's not going to leave you. He hasn't forsaken you. His plans are good. He'll see them through. He will finish the work that He started. He's the author and the finisher of your faith. He will keep you from falling. No one will snatch you from His hand. And one day He'll present you faultless before the presence of God with exceeding joy.

So this little Psalm ends with, "So bless the Lord, who has not given us as prey into their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of a fowler; the snare is broken, we've escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." No need to worry, no need to fear, God is our helper. The Lord is His name. If you're confused about which Lord I'm serving, it's the

one who made the heavens and the earth. Trouble wants to grind you down and trap you in, but praise the Lord, the snare is broken. And David reminds himself of how big the God is that he serves. I know much of life, when it gets right down to it, is too difficult for to us handle on our own, so it's good to be in the hands of the Lord, don't you think?

When the early church faced great opposition, the first couple of years when the church was born, in Jerusalem Peter and John were arrested and severely threatened and later beaten, told that they can't preach anymore in Jesus' name. In fact, the first time they arrested them, they said, this is a verbal warning, but if you don't wise up, it'll get worse, and it did. The opposing forces were in rule. They were the ones in power. The courts were stacked against them. They returned to their own company to report the trouble that they had found, and the ultimatum that they had been given, and the church gathered around them to pray and asked the Lord not for deliverance, but for boldness. In the face of this warning, help us.

The One who is on our side created the universe. He can withstand and overcome whatever you're overwhelmed by. The word "impossible" doesn't apply to Him. Difficult, He doesn't know that word. And David did the smart thing: He began to think about everything that might have happened had the Lord not been with him, only to conclude, hey, but He is. Experience bred confidence. It's not a vain hope.

Spurgeon wrote on the last verse of this in his Bible, "It's not a vain confidence that you can have in a Lord Who has made everything that you see to be comforted by the fact that He can prevent everything you don't see." God is able.

So here's your Psalm for the week, just eight verses. Try memorizing it. I'm going to ask you next week. Romans 8:31 and this verse, okay?