

**Psalm 125**      **A song of ascents.**

<sup>1</sup> *Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures for ever.*

<sup>2</sup> *As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people both now and for evermore.*

<sup>3</sup> *The sceptre of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil.* <sup>4</sup> *LORD, do good to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart.* <sup>5</sup> *But those who turn to crooked ways the LORD will banish with the evildoers. Peace be on Israel.*

After the first five psalms 120 to 124, we have seen the songs of ascent range from calling to the Lord in distress, seeking help and assurance, asking for mercy and last week acknowledging that if Israel had been on the Lord's side, things would have been so much better. This week, the emphasis is on trust and dependence on the Lord for justice and peace. This psalm (Matthew Henry tells us) can be summed up with another Scripture... from Isaiah 3:10-11 speaking about the fate of Jerusalem and Judah soon be conquered by the Babylonians. *Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.* <sup>11</sup> *Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done.* It's going to be a short talk this week.

<sup>1</sup> *Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures for ever.*

Putting one's trust in the Lord can be a hard thing. It is natural for us to put our trust in things we can control, but often that trust is misplaced. When I buy a part for my car, I have put my trust in the manufacturer that it will do the job it is supposed to do. When we buy our food, we put our trust in the shop and the suppliers that the food is what it says it is and isn't poisonous or adulterated. We can be disappointed with the quality of products but unless it causes real harm, we can shrug and learn from our mistake putting our trust in those products. BUT. When it comes to trusting people, the results can be wonderful, surprising, harmless, or really bad, harmful and leading to wrongdoing.

It says this in Jeremiah 17:5 *This is what the LORD says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD'. Proverbs 3:5 says: 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding'. The psalmist is saying that those who trust in the Lord are like a rock, that endures for ever. The Word of God provides us with advice on how to live our lives and in following that advice, we put our trust that God will look after his obedient people regardless of circumstance, especially when things aren't going well through no fault of our own.*

<sup>2</sup> *As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people both now and for evermore.*

Mount Zion is where the Temple was built. It isn't the highest point in Jerusalem as the hills around Jerusalem, like the Mount of Olives to the east are all higher than Jerusalem. The strategic value of Mount Zion is that it is surrounded by hills yet is itself on a hill. The psalmist repeats the assurance that the Lord is eternal and will always protect those who put their trust in him.

<sup>3</sup> *The sceptre of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil.*

In our days we see this very thing happening. It's the persistent chipping away of Godly values so that even Christians find themselves doing the things that go against God's Word, because that's what everyone else is doing.

Being surrounded by people who are constantly swearing and taking the Lord's name in vain, has an effect on our own minds, so that we don't see it abhorrent but just stuff that other people seem unable to stop themselves doing. On another level, we now live in a society where views contrary to what a minority with loud voices proclaim is the only acceptable view are unable to be aired. We are bombarded with "Pride" month and no one can say that pride is one of the deadly sins and that there is nothing to be proud of by flaunting your private proclivities to all and sundry. If we say anything like what I just said, it would be seen by the vociferous minority who believe themselves to be the guardians of correct thinking on all matters – whether politics, morality, lifestyle, or even science – as unacceptable. We used to live in a country where laws were based on Biblical values. We now have very few born again Christians in Parliament, the Civil Service, Social Services, the NHS, Education, and other government agencies, so that what

was acceptable as normal Bible based morality has been replaced with humanist godless morality, where feelings matter more than facts and truth is whatever you think should be true.

When the psalmist speaks of the sceptre or rod of the wicked, he means those who rule over us. It doesn't matter what political party we may support, the standards of moral behaviour have deteriorated over the past 50 years and reverted to what they were in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century when politicians enriched themselves dishonestly and handed out jobs and privileges to their friends and relatives, while telling the electorate to do as they say but not as they do. That results in good people having to be corrupt themselves to get things done by corrupt officials. It is easy in theory to be black and white about what is right and wrong on matters that don't personally affect you. It's different when something personal happens and needs dealing with which cannot be fixed other than by bending the rules a bit. Being led into temptation is what we need to avoid and hence we pray for that constantly.

<sup>4</sup>*LORD, do good to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart.*

Taking a stand against evil by the righteous has elicited this plea to God. Those who put their trust in God will gain their reward, but preferably receiving it this side of the grave would be rather nice. The upright in heart may suffer a lot, like Job who lost his family – apart from his wife. Some may not suffer at all and go through life blessed by God. We'd all like God to bless us and keep us from suffering and evil men. Jesus says in John 16:33 <sup>33</sup>*'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 will have troubles to a greater or lesser extent. In being faithful and trusting in God we have assurance that God is with us and our reward will be in heaven with him.

<sup>5</sup>*But those who turn to crooked ways the LORD will banish with the evildoers. Peace be on Israel.*

We know that God is rich in mercy and forgiving towards all who confess their sins. The wicked evildoers have a destination – eternal separation from God. However the warning is for those who have compromised and gone along with the wicked for whatever reason - and there may be very good justifiable reasons – but without repentance and seeking forgiveness, the righteous can slip and fall by the wayside. How many Christians who gave their lives to Jesus at some point in their lives have stopped believing and have given up trusting in God? We all know some, and they may well have been badly hurt in some way, and believed that God has forsaken them because they believe he wasn't there for them when they needed him most. Others have wanted to do something the Bible says is wrong and stopped fearing the consequences. Once you lose your fear of the Lord, your relationship is broken and is only mended by repentance and reverence. Being a disciple can be tough. The ten commandments have three positive ones (Love God and worship Him alone, observe the Sabbath, honour your parents) and seven negative ones (do not make idols, do not misuse the name of the Lord, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet). The other laws relate to what to do in society – love neighbours, bring in the tithe, tell your children about the law, celebrate festivals, how to treat diseases etc; and a whole lot rules on what not to do. The problem for all of us is when we want to do something that is on the list of things we shouldn't do, and the psalmist calls these "those who turn to crooked ways". In the Old Testament repentance required a sacrifice to be made, and restitution if that were required. Forgiveness is expected from God who is merciful towards the penitent. We have Jesus to intercede for us, as he is the last and final sacrifice needed for our forgiveness. Jesus has paid the price for all our sins.

The psalm ends with *peace be on Israel*. An exhortation or wish rather than a promise. Psalm 122:6-9 which we looked a few weeks ago has a similar *exhortation* <sup>6</sup>*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May those who love you be secure. <sup>7</sup>May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.'* <sup>8</sup>*For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, 'Peace be within you.'* <sup>9</sup>*For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.*

Even today we continue to ask God for peace in Israel, surrounded by enemies bent on her destruction. Israel remains one of the few nations that exists now as it did 3,000 years ago with the same people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, speaking the same language as well. That makes it unique. Although there have been dark days in the history of Israel with deportations, persecutions, mass slaughter and expulsions from surrounding lands, yet there is today peace in Israel. Long may it last. Amen

