

“If It Had Not Been For The Lord”

Psalm 124:1-8

Our perspective is limited by what we know, by what we can see, and by our experience of life on this side of the grave. We can live confidently in the knowledge that God is our great Defender. We praise God for His protection and deliverance from overwhelming enemies and odds, inspiring confidence in God's people as a result. Someone has said, “If you can't be satisfied with what you have received, be thankful for what you have escaped.”

Someone else said, “Compare what you want with what you have, and you'll be unhappy. Compare what you deserve with what you have, and you'll be happy.” Every day should be Thanksgiving Day, so why has one day in the year been designated specifically as “Thanksgiving Day?”

Psalm 124 is part of a group from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134 that was sung as they journeyed to the annual feasts.

Once a year, they packed up everything and began the long walk up to Jerusalem.

“I will lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.” Psalm 121:1

“The Lord is your keeper, the Lord is your shade upon your right hand. The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.” Psalm 121:5

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” Psalm 133:1

The Psalms would carry them on their way as they journeyed to Jerusalem.

4 key words which make up the 4 thematic points of Psalm 124:

“If, Then, But, Therefore”

*“IF the Lord had not been on our side,
THEN we would have perished,
BUT the Lord has been on our side,
THEREFORE we will trust and praise Him.”*

David remembers the many trials and troubles they had experienced. Why is it that they remember all this bad stuff at such a time like this? We keep photo albums of birthday parties, engagement parties, and wedding ceremonies, not our trials and tribulations. Why remember the times when trouble came against us like a flood and threatened to drown our souls? Why remember those times when we felt hopeless and helpless?

He describes the moments in their lives when it all hung in the balances. Their life, their family, and their future were on the line. “When it could have all gone wrong, the Lord was on our side.”

The theme of Psalm 124 is deliverance. As the people of Israel journeyed to Jerusalem, they sang of how God helped them in ages past. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves how God intervened in the past. We should remember what a mess we would be in if it were not for God's involvement in our lives!

What might have happened if God hadn't stepped in?

The Lord was the deciding factor. He was the One who made the difference. Maybe you have come through some tough experiences this year. After all that has gone on in our homes and in our lives, the reason we are still here today is because the Lord has been on our side. If we forget what we have gone through, we forget that

God has been the One to bring us through. The Psalm is written as if someone barely escaped from danger but is now in a safe place and is relieved to be alive. Danger is described in three metaphors: a wild beast, flood waters, and a fowler's trap. God's people had been in actual danger, surrounded on every side by their enemies.

"If the Lord had not been on our side," then all sorts of bad things would have happened:

- The Threats Against Us

They would have been swallowed alive.

They are like someone whose feet are knocked out from beneath them, being swept along, helplessly, desperately grasping for things, trying to find something to cling to, feeling the strong currents begin to pull them under.

All these things and more would have happened, had it not been for the Lord's intervention.

"If the LORD had not been on our side...they would have swallowed us alive." Psalm 124:3

The image is used in Scripture of Leviathan - the great beast or sea monster. It represents all that can threaten and hurt us. This monster or dragon represents evil, a creature from which there is no escape. In the Middle East, wild animals were a common danger.

"If the Lord had not been on my side, I would have been swallowed alive."

"When their anger flared against us." Psalm 124:4

"...your enemy prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8

- The Troubles Around Us

They would have been swept away, like a person caught in a raging flood.

"...the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away." Psalm 124:5

Flash floods are common in Israel. Flood waters cause unexpected catastrophes. One minute, the world is wonderful and good. The next minute, your entire world is devastated. The Lord provides us with a solid foundation to keep us from being engulfed by troubles.

- The Traps Set For Us

"Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler." Psalm 124:6

They would have been shredded to bits by the cruel teeth of some ferocious beast.

- The Temptations Inside Us

They would have been snared by a trap.

"Our soul is escaped like a bird out of a snare" Psalm 124:7

The image of a bird trapped in a cage portrays us as a wayward bird that sees some bait and reaches out for it. If it hadn't been for the Lord, I would have been trapped by temptation. Each one of us has been in a situation where we had no idea how we were going to escape. Fowlers have many methods of trapping birds, and the devil has many methods of ensnaring our souls. When we feel caught, and it seems there's no way out, seek God's deliverance, and He will break every snare.

"The snare has been broken, and we have escaped." Psalm 124:7

A fowler would often sew a captured bird's eyelids together and keep it caged. The Fowler Is the Devil Himself! Satan has an army of some of the most crafty, skilled fowlers on earth. The Israelites praises God because they could have been devoured. Tell the bait-layer, the enemy of our souls, the devil, that God set us free by His blood, by His power, and we are free! A snare is like a pitfall or a strong hold... the Hebrew the word means "to have trapped, or trapped with a noose."

"If the Lord had not been on our side...we would have perished," and concludes, *"but the Lord has been on our side...therefore we will praise Him!"*

We made it this year because He took us through our troubles. We made it this year because He was the problem solver for every problem we had. We made it this year because He was a bridge over every rushing water in our lives. We made it because, for every heartache we had, He was a heart fixer. We made it because every time we fell, He picked us up. Every time we failed, He covered us with His victory. We made it because our help came from the Lord.

The song ends in affirmation: *"Our help is in the Name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."* Psalm 124:8

Some of us have been dealing with some snares. Some of us have been dealing with life's pitfalls. Some of us are just trying to get back up. Some of us battle feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

I will look toward the hills where my help comes from. The Lord is my light and my salvation, my strong tower, my Rock and my Refuge.

"I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth." Psalm 34:1

1. THANK GOD FOR HIS FORGIVENESS.

The greatest blessing that God has ever given to a mortal being is forgiveness of sins. God gave His Son to forgive our sins and save our souls. It is for this cause that Jesus came into the world. The apostle Paul said, *"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst..."* 1 Timothy 1:15

"For the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10

2. THANK GOD FOR HIS FAVOR.

"Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield." Psalm 5:12

"May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands." Psalm 90:17

"Bless the LORD, O my soul; all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all His kind deeds—He who forgives all your iniquities and heals all your diseases, who redeems your

life from the Pit and crowns you with loving devotion and compassion, who satisfies you with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." Psalm 103:1-5

God preserves our lives day by day. We make it too much a matter of course and not a blessing from God that we are not cut down this day by death.

"The angel of the Lord encamps around him that fears him, and delivers them." Psalm 34:7

"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Hebrews 1:14

It is comforting to know that "the angel of the Lord is near at hand," and for that, we should be grateful.

3. THANK GOD FOR FAITHFULNESS.

"The LORD'S loving kindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness." Lamentations 3:22-23

David thanked God for the blessing of food. He counted it among the wonderful things to be treasured in his heart. During the Vietnam conflict, two fine Christian parents in Kansas received word that their son had been killed in the war. It was a difficult experience to go through because the boy was only 19 years old. However, they decided that they would honor the memory of their son by giving a sizable check to their church. Some time later, the pastor of the church was telling about how the check had relieved some of the financial difficulty that the church was experiencing. There was a mother in the congregation who whispered to her husband, "Let's give a sizable check for our boy." The husband said, "What are you talking about? Our boy didn't lose his life in Vietnam." The wife said, "Oh, that's just the point. Let's give it as an expression of our gratitude to God for sparing his life."

George Herbert prayed, "Our Father, thou hast given us so much. Do please give us one more thing, a grateful heart."

We need a grateful heart that will be filled to overflowing with thanksgiving, a heart that will not cease to express thanks to God and to others all through the year.