

“My Anchor Holds”
Text: Psalm 124:1-8
Series: The Psalms [#30]
Pastor Lyle L. Wahl
November 21, 2010

Theme: **We Have Hope Because God Is Our Help.**

Introduction

Listen to, think about these actual, real-life situations.

- It’s gone way beyond unpleasant joking and teasing. Coworkers are openly sarcastic, trying to discredit a coworker. *Why?* Because he is a Christian and refuses to go with the flow of unethical, dishonest practices in the office.
- A 13 year-old boy is working with a tractor on the rolling hills of the family farm. The tractor tips over, killing him instantly.
- Two brothers are in business together. One secretly stashes away assets from the business. Tough times come. The business goes under. The dishonest brother comes out *well*, while the honest one is left holding the bag.
- And then, the time when one marriage partner tells the other that love is gone, and so he or she is leaving.

These are just a few of the many terrible and tragic situations I have seen, which people have shared with me over the years.

Question: “What do *you* do, how do *you* respond when experiencing the full force of these kinds of things?” Often there is initial shock and disbelief, followed by devastating fear, betrayal, and even raging anger.

Yes, as Christians we know that God is always there, that the Bible says He will never let us go. But at times these truths can seem empty, even meaningless. The *enemies* have the upper hand—whether people attacking you or terrible events crashing on you—and you don’t see anything solid to hang on to, or a certain hope for the future. You may have been there. You may be there right now.

The good news is that there is help, there is hope. We find it throughout Scripture, and certainly here in Psalm 124. This is one of King David’s Psalms. We don’t know the exact circumstances he had in mind, but he was reflecting on terrible troubles brought on by *enemies*. David used this Psalm to review the truth and his experience of a real, certain hope in God to hold him secure in the present and for the future. The succeeding generations who sang this Psalm could also do that.

A hymn sings,

Though the angry surges roll on my tempest driven soul, I am peaceful for I know wildly though the winds may blow, I've an anchor safe and sure that can evermore endure. And it holds, my anchor holds. Blow your wildest then, O gale, on my bark so small and frail. By His grace I shall not fail, for my anchor holds, my anchor holds.¹

Why could the writer of that hymn, King David and so many others have this kind of certainty? How can *we* know and sing with confidence, “*My anchor holds!*”? The central truth of the Psalm points us to the answer. *We can have hope because God is our help.* Yes, even in the most shocking, terrible, long, unending dark nights *we can have hope because God is our help.*

What Could Have Been Because Of Enemies.

Let's begin with looking at what could have been because of enemies. King David gives us several pictures of *what could have been*. He could have been devoured. Look at the first powerful image of this in verse 3, “Then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger was kindled against us.” This pictures a force, an enemy large enough to swallow you whole, with just one big gulp. In Psalm 35 David asked God to “contend ... with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me” (1). He also told God, “Do not let them say in their heart, ‘Aha, our desire!’ Do not let them say, ‘We have swallowed him up!’” (25).

Then there is a second powerful image of being devoured in verse 6, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us to be torn by their teeth.” From being swallowed whole in one big gulp to the slower, agonizing process of being torn and shredded, piece by piece. In Psalm 37 he told God “The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes at him with his teeth” (12). Swallowed in one gulp or shredded into pieces—the picture is of being devoured. That could have been the outcome for King David and his nation.

Jeremiah cried out to God as the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem,

“All your [Jerusalem's] enemies have opened their mouths wide against you; they hiss and gnash their teeth. They say, ‘We have swallowed her up! Surely this is the day for which we waited; we have reached it, we have seen it.’”²

What about us? Whether we face the attacks of tragic events or people, we can identify with these images, and the frightening feelings that go with them.

Then David tells us he could have been drowned by the attacks. Verse 4, “Then the waters would have engulfed us, the stream would have swept over our soul; then the raging waters would have swept over our soul.”

Waters. That was and is common and varied metaphor. There are the quiet, refreshing waters. In Psalm 23 David said that God led him “beside quiet waters” (2). But these are the opposite—raging, devastating waters. Along this same line King David writes in Psalm 69, “Save me, O God, for the waters have threatened my life. I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me.” (1-2)

When the enemy of circumstances or people strikes and keeps pouring it on, when wave after wave keeps crashing over you, there can be that scary feeling of being overwhelmed, of the raging torrent being way over your head, of being unable to get up for air, of drowning... feeling hopeless, doomed.

There is one more graphic picture, being dominated. Look at verse 7. “Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper; the snare is broken and we have escaped.” While this picture’s main point is escape, it also portrays the reality of being trapped, being under the control of, being dominated by the enemy.

What could have been included a life-long, generations-long domination by Israel’s enemies. A life without freedom, of looking over their shoulders, being held down, caged in, trapped. Many people today have feelings of being dominated by an enemy. Some think there is no *real hope* for them in those circumstances.

All of this is what could have been for King David because of his enemies. The enemies were really enemies. The tragedies did strike, sometimes severely. It is a picture of what could have been but was not. A picture of what could be for us, but does not have to be.

What Was Because Of God.

So, let’s move from what could have been because of enemies to what was, to what was because of God. God was the reason and the means of King David’s hope, deliverance and victory. The central focus of this Psalm is not the enemy, not David, but *God*. There is an air of victory in this Psalm. There is one and only one factor in the deliverance, *God*.

Go back to the opening verses. “‘Had it not been the LORD who was on our side,’ let Israel now say, ‘Had it not been the LORD who was on our side when men rose up against us.’” It will help us catch the spirit if we know the structure. Picture a group on their way to Jerusalem, or a group meeting in a Synagogue. The leader started by singing out verse 1, “‘Had it not been the LORD who was on our side,’ let Israel now say,” Then everyone joined in one loud chorus, “‘Had it not been the LORD who was on our side when men rose up against us.’” The LORD was the only reason for their survival and victory.

Drop down to the close of the Psalm, verse 8. “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” Turn back to Psalm 121:2, “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” Psalm 46 opens,

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride” (1-3).

Again, Psalm 121, “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (1-2).

God gave David great abilities, resources and opportunities. He was responsible to use all of those wisely and faithfully. But his trust was in God, not in the abilities, resources and opportunities. The reason and means of hope and victory was God. It has not changed from then to now: hope, deliverance and victory for us has its reason and means in God. *We have hope because God is our help.*

History gives us the record of God’s deliverance, of what was because He was David’s help. Take another look at the pictures King David gives us.

- He was *not* swallowed, *not* torn apart, *not* devoured.
- He was *not* overwhelmed, drowned by the raging torrents.
- He was *not* kept in a corner, caged, dominated.

The history of David does not record constantly calm waters, but it *does* record God’s deliverance of him out of the storms and tragedies he faced. And so he wrote in Psalm 34, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (19).

We have hope because God is our help. You may be tried and tired, wounded and weary, distressed and discouraged, laughed at and lonely, but God, your helper, will not allow “the righteous to be shaken”³, “your feet to slip”⁴, “you to be tempted beyond what you are able.”

God is our help. Yes, we know this. But when trouble strikes, it is easy to look at myself and ask, “What am I going to do?” “What can I do?” We can jump into the fight or flight options on our own. We want relief, we want this to go away or to get better, and we want it *now!* Real hope and deliverance is found in consciously calling out to God, hanging on to Him, trusting Him. Yes, there *is* hope. The anchor holds and you *are* secure in Christ. He *will* take you through so you are not destroyed. He will take you on to victory. *You have hope because God is your help.*

What Response Is Due God Because Of What He Has Done.

There is one more part of the Psalm, and that is what response is due God because of what He has done for us. First, we should give praise and thanksgiving to God for His work, His deliverance in the past. Listen to King David's testimony for himself and the nation as we look at the opening verses one more time. "'Had it not been the LORD who was on our side,' let Israel now say, 'Had it not been the LORD who was on our side when men rose up against us.'" The again in verse 6, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us to be torn by their teeth." Once more in verse 8, "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth."

We should praise God, express with all of our being our love, wonder, joy at His greatness, for His wonderful deliverance out of the destruction that could have been. Praise and thanksgiving, publically acknowledging who and what God is to us, what He has done for us. Psalm 98 opens with a call to praise,

"O sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done wonderful things, His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him. The LORD has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God" (1-3).

King David began Psalm 145 with

"I will extol You, my God, O King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable" (1-3).

Then hope and confidence for the present and future are also due God because of what He has done. We tend to look only at our side of hope and confidence. Why we need it. Can we have it? How can we have it? But there also is the other side. The side of our standing firm being something that is due God because of that He is and all that He has done for us.

Sometimes hope seems totally beyond us. A story is told of a man who had serious health problems. After one appointment, the doctor took his wife aside and told her, "There are some things you have to do for your husband. If not, he has no hope; he will die. You have to follow these set menus for all meals—no exceptions, no substitutions. He will be taking a good number of medications; you must check and keep the schedule carefully. He needs plenty of rest—that means no household or yard chores. You have to sanitize your house from top to bottom, and keep it that way. Remember, you have to do all these things if there is to be any hope for your husband."

On the way home, her husband asked what the doctor had said. She answered, "Dear, you're going to die."

Coming back to reality, sometimes hope seems totally beyond us. Come back to the final verse once more, verse 8. “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” The Psalm opens with looking back to trouble and God’s help. But the conclusion is couched in the *present*, “Our help *is* in the name of the LORD.” David looked at what faced him, and from his own history he knows he has solid, certain help in God, and so solid, certain hope.

This is not trite, *smile and be happy* thinking. It is examined, realistic reliance on God to hold you securely, even when facing the most horrific circumstances. “God *is* my help” ...today! “God *is* my help” ...tomorrow! “God *is* my help” ...always! God never changes. God always keeps His promises to keep His people. God is the forever faithful One.

Conclusion

Just as I don’t know the details about the enemies King David wrote about in this Psalm, so I don’t know all the specifics of what you are facing ... what threatens to devour, drown, dominate you. But I do know that if Christ is your Savior, *He is your help*. I know that no matter how wild the storms may rage against you, God will keep you, give you hope and take you through them. *We have hope because God is our help*.

Bow your head and close eyes as I lead us in talking to God about this. You may be facing troubles right now which are raging against you, even threatening to overwhelm and devastate you. Bring them to God, specifically. Yes, He already knows everything about you and them, and you may have poured your heart out to Him many times, but bring them to Him in these moments. Tell Him about them, how you feel, what you fear.

[Pause]

Now think with God about your view and attitude to the troubles, tragedies, the miseries you face. In these situations our focus may be on our great problems more than on our great God and His provisions. If you tend to do this, talk with God about it now. Ask Him to impress on you that *He is your help*, that *He does* hold you securely. Ask Him to free you to real hope and confidence in Christ.

[Pause]

Now, ask God to help you know concretely and to feel that He is with you in this, and is your help in this; that He and His love are your anchor which will always hold. Ask Him to help you move from fear, distress, and perhaps even anger, to faith, His peace and love. And, finally, even though your view may be through a very dark and clouded lense right now, thank God that *you have hope because He is your help*.

[Pause]

¹ Daniel Brink Towner, W. C. Martin. *My Anchor Holds*. Public domain.

² Lamentations 2:16.

³ Psalm 55:22.

⁴ Psalm 66:9; 121:3.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:13.

© 2010 Lyle L. Wahl

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995
by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.