

**Ascend:**  
**Trusting God when Your Circumstances Say “Don’t”**  
**Psalm 125**

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June 26, 2016

**Text Introduction:** We are considering Psalm 120-134 this summer. This is a collection of Psalms each bearing the heading, “A Song of Ascents.” The songs of ascents are a compilation of Psalms in the larger book of Psalms.

To what does this heading refer? Most believe that these are songs that worshippers sung as they made their way to Jerusalem (being on a higher plain) for thrice annual special times of worship.<sup>1</sup> If this is so, then we learn a great deal about what was on their hearts as they approached worship and thus understand what should be upon our hearts as we prepare to worship or just give attention to the subject of worship. This thought will guide us in the weeks to come. As we have been learning, this is not so much a practical guide to the “how to” of worship, but instead a theological mine for what prompts earnest worship.

Our Psalm today is Psalm 125.

**Text:** Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion.

It cannot be shaken; it remains forever.

<sup>2</sup>Jerusalem—the mountains surround her.

And the LORD surrounds His people,  
both now and forever.

<sup>3</sup>The scepter of the wicked will not remain  
over the land allotted to the righteous,  
so that the righteous will not apply their hands to injustice.

<sup>4</sup>Do what is good, LORD, to the good,  
to those whose hearts are upright.

<sup>5</sup>But as for those who turn aside to crooked ways,  
the LORD will banish them with the evildoers.

Peace be with Israel.

**Introduction:** The background to this particular hymn is captured in verse 3. “The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous.” The scepter of the wicked refers to a staff that represented sovereignty over a people. Several instances come to mind for Israel. The most logical is the foreign oppression that came to them through Babylon which led to a period of exile.

Their present circumstances did not square with the promises of God. That’s the precise question of worship presented by this text. How do we keep trusting God when our present circumstances say “Don’t?”

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<sup>1</sup> Other ideas include: Psalms that reflect entering the Promised Land the first time, re-entering after Exile, correlating to the climb up the steps to the Temple (one Psalm for 15 steps), and/or figurative for the journey back to God.

Now, before we get into this text, I just want to remind you that God has a history with His people that says we can trust Him even when the circumstances say otherwise.

- Nation of Israel leaving Egypt—The Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian Army behind them. The circumstances said “You can’t trust God.” But, God said, “Stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord.”
- Some years later Israel was ready to enter the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. Joshua 6:1 says “Now Jericho was strongly fortified...no one leaving and no one entering. Joshua 6:2 says, “The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Look I have handed Jericho over to you.’”
- Feeding of the 5,000—Jesus, knowing what He was going to do asked, “Where will we buy bread so these people can eat?” Phillip spoke on behalf of the disciples, “Even if we had 200 denarii (1 denarii was a day’s wage), we couldn’t even get started.” Another disciple said there was a boy with 5 loaves and 2 fish, but “what is that with so many?” And Jesus said, “Have the people sit down!”

The circumstances said “No way!” God said, “Way!”

How do you trust God when your circumstances say, “Don’t?” I want you to see three things today in Psalm 125.

### **God is the object of our trust.**

The Psalmist begins in verse 1 and 2 with 2 analogies. These two analogies were right there in Jerusalem for the worshippers to see. First, the one who trusts in the Lord is like a mountain that cannot be moved. In verse 1, the analogy is that the one who trusts is like a mountain.

The second analogy is God as the mountains surrounding Jerusalem. As the mountains surround Jerusalem so God surrounds His people. What are we leaning from these two analogies? God is . . .

- Powerful—He secures those who trust in Him.
- Personal—He surrounds those who trust in Him.
- Eternal—Then, there is a time element to it. Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, puts it this way: “God encircles His people—Always has, always will.”

We must base our trust in proper theology, not psychology. Two things related to security keep us from trusting God. The first is our own insecurity. The other is worse though—a self-security. May God move us away from both an insecurity and a self-security and move us to trust only in Him.

### **Evil is the obstacle of our trust.**

- Powerful
- Personal
- Temporal—But unlike God, evil is temporary. Tony Evans said, “Our problem today is that we have substituted relativism, pragmatism, existentialism, pantheism, and many other ‘isms’ in the

place of absolute truth. But all of these 'isms' will become 'wasims' one day when they are ultimately confronted with God's absolute truth."<sup>2</sup>

And therefore Limited!

I know sometimes we are hanging on to our faith by a thread. We seem to live somewhere between faith and doubt. We question our faith and trust our doubts. Turn that around. Those that trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion which cannot be moved. The Lord surrounds you. Not only that, but the evil of this world is temporary—it cannot last forever. Though evil may be the obstacle to our trust, it cannot not be allowed to overpower our trust.

Faith is not the absence of evil. Faith is revealed in presence of evil. We must base our hope in the fact that all evil is temporary.

**Prayer is the opportunity of our trust.**

We see this in verse 4 and 5.

- Powerful
- Personal
- Conditional—There is a condition placed in the prayer. "Do good to those who do good."

Can we trust God when everything about the circumstances say "Don't?" Actually, the greatest story we know says, "Yes."

It was Friday. There were taunts. "He saved others, let Him save Himself." The sky grew dark. He cried out with a loud voice, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" Eventually He breathed His last. When it was evening a man named Joseph asked to take His body and bury Him. He took a great stone and rolled against the entrance of the tomb.

I believe that Satan thought he had won. I believe Satan believed that he had destroyed the Son of God and disproved prophecy.

It looked bad. It looked like evil had won. The circumstances said you cannot trust God. But, as we so often quote at Easter time, "Sunday's coming!"

**So What?**

We must worship anyway! We worship because of our faith in not only the greatness of God, but the goodness of God. We worship God in the belief that, in the end, God wins, and all those who line up with God win, and all those who line up against God lose.

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Evans, *America: Turning a Nation to God*, p. 32.