

A Sure Way of Escape

Psalm 124:1-8

Halifax, May 7, 2000

One of our greatest problems is that we think there is no escape for us (I Cor. 10:13).

- Then we give up and seek the world's solutions.
- What's worse, sometimes we listen to the propaganda machine of the world and abandon God's ways to join hands with the world. This always leads to disaster.

Trusting God for deliverance involves two things:

1. receiving and walking in His counsel
 2. trusting in Him alone (calling upon His name)
- Ill> You really can't have one without the other.
 - Can Israel pray to God for help and reject His counsel not to go down to Egypt?
 - Can Israel receive God's counsel (and obtain help from no one) and win her battles without calling on God's name?

Henry- See how careful David is to highlight the goodness of God and to give all the glory to Him rather than to himself as conquerors usually do.

- He here magnifies the greatness of danger they were in, and of the ruin they were on the brink of (v. 1-5)
- He gives God the glory of their escape (v. 6-7 with 1-2)
- He takes encouragement thence to trust in God (v. 8).

- "In singing this Psalm, besides the application of it to any particular deliverance wrought for us and our people, in our days and the days of our fathers, we may have in our thoughts the great work of our redemption by Jesus Christ, by which we were rescued from the powers of darkness."

Calvin believes that David is intentionally being general here (with reference to God's many deliverances of His church).

- David shows the weakness of the church here in its uncertain and changeable condition to teach the faithful that its stability is not to be found in its own intrinsic strength, but that it had been preserved by the wonderful grace of God; and so he wishes to habituate us to call on God in the midst of dangers.

Kidner suggests that David writes this Psalm at the time when the Philistines had thought to destroy Israel as recorded in II Sam. 5:17ff.

- The Philistines were a grave threat at this time, having recently slaughtered Saul and Jonathan.
- This was no mere raid, but a threat to put an end to David and the hope of Israel.
- But God gave David the victory in a miraculous way (the mulberry trees).

Several vivid pictures are employed.

- That of a monster big enough to gulp up its prey in one bite.
- That of a raging torrent (II Sam 5:20), also Isa. 8:7.
- The net, which would describe the enemy as already having a grip upon us and already in a domination, position. (II Sam 5:18)

The rising up referred to may have been that of Saul, or of the Ammonites and Syrians (II Sam. 10:6-8) or that of Absalom and his partisans (II Sam. 15:2-13).

- 0. “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side,” let Israel now say—**
- 1. “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us,**
 - 2. Then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us;**

When facing danger, our fear is immoderate, but after the danger has passed and we are delivered, we look lightly on the calamity- and Satan deceives us by this artifice so that we will minimise the grace of God.

- The danger is therefore amplified to teach us to:
 - Rejoice in God’s past mercies
 - Depend on Him for His future mercies (look to Him for help)
- The more desperate the disease appears to have been, the more does the skill of Physician appear in the cure. (Henry)

Verse 1 is left hanging- for us to fill in the blank.

If it had not... (*loo-leeh y*)

- Calvin translates this “But for Jehovah, who was on our side, may Israel now say.”
 - The emphasis being that the deliverance from nothing other than God’s aid.
 - Calvin observes two things here:
 1. That the Lord had been at hand to deliver His people and had taken their part.
 2. That being already in a desperate condition, they could not by help from any other quarter, or in any other manner, have escaped the danger.

Gen. 31:42-

- I Sam. 25:34 David says to Abigail, “unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!”
- Ps.4:16-18 “Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? Unless the Lord had been my help, My soul would soon have settled in silence. If I say, ‘My foot slips,’ Your mercy. O Lord, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.”
- Isa. 1:9- “Except the Lord of hosts had left us a remnant”
 - This is very important indeed; compare to Romans- there is a remnant only because God has decreed it to be so.

Note that it was *Jehovah* Himself who was on our side- if it had not been Him (if it had been someone else) we would be ruined. Happy the people whose God is Jehovah, a God all sufficient. Let Israel say this to His honour and resolve never to forsake Him.

- Nothing else matters but to have God on your side.
- Abide in His love. Do nothing to keep Him from blessing you.
- Like Ahab, we have a terrible time accepting this and feel compelled to look to Egypt for help.

“Now” is not in the original— it is rather the particle of entreaty (Heb. *Na.*) which means “Oh that Israel would say”

Men rose up against

- Heb. *Adam* is used for *man* so as to say, *mankind* and therefore to include all men as our enemies (as Jesus, “You will be hated by all men for my sake.”)

Then is not:

- a particle of time (as if to say “now if we call on Him, then He will help us,”)
- nor is it term of logic (Its because He was on our side that we weren’t swallowed up.
- It means, “at that time,” When the cruel men rose up against us.

Alive, not *quick* like the KJV has.

- This is a reference to that terrible judgement of Korah in Numbers 16:32-33.
- See Psalm 55:15 where a similar phrase is used.

Here again is that confession of weakness- that they would have been swallowed up alive their enemies were so much stronger than they were.

- This suggests both violence and great advantage of power (all they have to do is swallow).

In this Psalm we confess our own weakness and inability.

- How many times the church would have been destroyed by now if the Lord had not been on our side.
- It is He who constantly preserves us from our enemies. In this case, the enemy mentioned is man.

How do men rise up against us?

- By bodily persecution and murder (very common today).
- By vain philosophy (evolution, political theory, feminism, mysticism, etc.)
- By enticement (corruption, idolatry, materialism)

Why did they rise up against us?

- One reason is their pride (they want to be self-sufficient and the Christian declares that we are not).
- See how Jesus was hated because He was the Light, and the light exposes man for what He really is. Therefore, the light hated and the more it shines, the more it is suppressed. However, interestingly, there is also a certain attraction to light.

3. Then the waters would have overwhelmed us, The stream would have gone over our soul;

4. Then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul.”

5. Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth.

- God in His wisdom chooses to let us experience the threat of our enemies and our danger. In fact, He uses danger and oppression to wake us up that we might call on Him lest we be found indifferent and asleep. Graciously, He uses warnings to wake us up.
- Here is the picture of a swollen river that takes out everything in its path. This is how our enemies are pictured.
- NOTE: I am not suggesting that you should all be paranoid, always thinking that folks are out to get you. That is not the point here. It is rather that we need to be woken up to the real battle that is all around us. The temptations and the ungodly counsel are all around you and you must recognise that these are against God.

Calvin- “He only truly attributes his deliverance to God, who acknowledges himself to have been lost before he was delivered.”

The waters are said to overwhelm- to sweep away our lives, our comforts, all that is dear to us.

The disciples on the sea would have been swept away by one more wave, but the wave never came.

- “And so it has been again and again with the Church of God. Persecution for three long centuries did its worst; false doctrine has many times, from the earlier centuries down to the present, threatened to submerge the faith we held; worse still, corruption, vile and loathsome, has fastened on the life of the Church, so that religion has been hateful in men’s esteem, as if was in the pre-Reformation ages. But the heart of the church has remained sound amid all; the Lord was on her side, and so she has escaped as a bird.
- The nations and the World may adopt this language as well for the times when God has delivered them (in wars etc.)

Swollen- proud is the actual word employed here.

- waters are used because of the idea of swelling (pride), and because of the threat they pose to those who fall under their power
- In the sphere of the physical this word means to boil, in the personal sphere it means to act in a proud manner.
- The root word is also used to refer to:
 - Presumption of those who assume too much authority for themselves. (false gods- Ex. 18:11, Babylon (Jer. 50:29), Egypt (Neh. 9:10)
 - Rebellion or disobedience- asserting one’s own will to the point of rebelling against authority as in Deut. 1:43. David accused of this pride in I Sam 17:28.
 - Rebellion related to wilful decision (Ps. 19:12-13- keep from presumptuous sins, cleanse from secret sins.
- This pride is what we see in those persons that God raises up at times and allows to go very far in opposing us, and whom He then strikes down so that his own power may appear the more illustrious in our deliverance.

Blessed be the Lord (Jehovah)

- It is of God’s mercy that we are not given up to them.
- We are not capable of defending ourselves.
- We would have drowned when their attacks came.
- He could justly have given us up to them (we deserve it).

We rob God of His due if we do not return thanks to Him and give Him the glory for our deliverances- and especially when the escape is very narrow.

Teeth- A rhetorical transition where the flood is now called a devouring beast.

- This also shows that the only way they could have destroyed us would have been if God had given us up to them.

6. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped.

Note that the figure is changed again.

- This time we are caught in the grip (already overtaken- I Cor. 10:13).

Has escaped- (mah-lat)

- KJV has *is escaped* which better conveys the idea of a change in state and not just a single escape.
- Here is our liberty as God's children. Just as Israel escaped out of Egypt, so we have escaped from the world and are now free.
- Prov. 11:21 "Though they join forces, the wicked will not go unpunished; but the posterity of the righteous will be delivered."
- Often refers to escape from death:
 - I Sam 19:11; 23:13- escape from a personal enemy
 - II Sam. 19:10- escape from a national enemy
- Daniel 12:1- The final judgement is described as a time of escape:
 - "At that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book of life.
- Jer. 39:17-18 "But I will deliver you in that day," says the Lord, "and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid. For I will surely deliver you and you shall not fall by the sword; but your life shall be as a prize to you, because you have put your trust in Me."
- Amos 2:13-16 "Behold, I am weighted down by you, as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down. Therefore, flight shall perish from the swift, the strong shall not strengthen his power, nor shall the mighty deliver himself; He shall not stand who handles the bow, the swift of foot shall not escape, nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself. The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day," says the Lord.
- *Escape* is not found in the strength of the horse (Ps. 33:17), the might of another nation (Isaiah 21:6), riches (Job 20:20), or in one's own understanding.
- *Escape* is possible only for those who call on the name of the Lord.

Not only was it that our enemies are stronger in power and force, but also in policy as they set the snare for us and we, like a helpless bird lay in the trap.

- We are greatly inferior to our enemies.
- We are, therefore, miraculously preserved.

Snares

1. There are many
 - Temptations to sin, to misbelieve, to unbelief, to compromise with the world, to doubt, to pride, and many others.
2. The end of them all is the same
 - To separate the soul from the living God and so to destroy it.
3. And these snares are of various kinds
 - Sometimes the soul is captured by means of another that seems to be at liberty
 - A man who has a religious reputation (used to tempt, decoy, others astray).
 - Always there is an attractiveness in the bait, something that appeals to us.

A bird

- The word here used signifies a little bird- a sparrow.

Broken- The snare is now broken...

- likely a reference to Babylon when not only were the people allowed to escape, but Babylon itself fell.
- Note that it is called a snare.
- They would try to catch us and entrap us.
- But we have escaped.

- Think of times when this would be true...
 - The exodus
 - The resurrection
 - When queen Athaliah tried to take over.
 - When Israel was too intimidated to go into Canaan.
 - When Asa had to withstand the enemy
 - When Jehoshaphat had to withstand the enemy.

The snare is laid for God's people to bring them into sin and trouble and to hold them there.

- We are as unable to help ourselves out of the snare as a little bird is.

It is broken by:

- some powerful word
- some startling providence
- some gracious working of the Spirit.

Are you in the snare today?

- God will set you free if you will cry out to Him.

C. H. Spurgeon

I would say again to you netted ones—you that are really caught in the trap and held fast, “On, that the Lord would come at once and set you free!” I think he will—yea, I am sure that he will if you cry to him to do so. I have heard of a sailor who had been in prison, that, after his release, he had money in his pocket, and going over London Bridge he saw a man selling birds—thrushes, larks, and so on. “What do you want for the lot?” said Jack. I forget how much it was, but Jack found the money; and as soon as the birds were his he opened the door and let them all fly away. The man called out, “Whatever did you buy those birds for, and then let them all fly away?” “Oh,” said the sailor, “if you had been in prison, as I have, you would be sure to set everything free you could get a-hold of.” You and I ought to display the same kind of feeling towards all bonded souls. I am sure that the Lord Jesus Christ is more tender-hearted than we are; and therefore he will certainly come and set free all prisoners who beg him to open their cage-doors. He is the great Emancipator; show him your bonds, and beg for liberty, and he will grant it you.”

8. Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.

The church cannot expect safety except as she is helped by God.

- God wishes to animate us with the assured hope that our life is in perfect safety under His divine guardianship.
- We must be purged of all false confidence so that we trust in God alone as we fight against Satan and the world.

David had directed us to depend on God in our personal affairs in Ps. 121:2, and here in our public affairs as the church. (My help (Ps. 121) vs. our help (here)).

Name

- God’s name has to do with His names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word and works.
 - It refers in fact to His whole person.
 - But it also refers to Him especially as He is revealed (we know His name).
- However God is manifested (Ps. 5:12, 20:2)

Our help

- Hosea 13:9-11 “O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me. I will be your King; Where is any other, that he may save you in all your cities?”
- Deut. 33:26 “There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, Who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. The God of Jacob is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”
- for the future as well as for the past.

Creator

- Until we recognise that God has the whole world is under God’s power as the Creator; we will be filled with disquietude.
- Take great comfort that we have such a God on our side for our help.