

PSALM 121
Matthew 14:22-33
Psalm 121

Hoffman Harvest Festival Worship
August 10, 2008
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I was visiting onetime with a person who told me about some problems he was having with an internet company; there were some problems with some wireless hardware, as well as getting a strong and consistent signal, in some rental property he owns. It was causing some major concerns for him, as well as for customers renting this vacation unit.

In frustration and disgust this man finally called this company's tech-support number to try to get some help. One tech person became defensive about their company and equipment, he made insinuating comments that the problem must be the laptop computers being used.

In another call to a different tech-support person, this man asked the tech if she had a dog in her office since he kept hearing some barking in the background. She admitted she was working from her home with her dog and children around. Again, this tech was no support.

Finally, in complete frustration this man asked for the number of the CEO, the head of the company. When he called this company head, when he explained the situation and his frustration, it was then that action finally started to happen.

Some new router hardware was shipped to him; a plan to change this equipment and troubleshoot the exact problem was put in place. Finally, after many exasperating calls to people who were of no help to him, his system now is up and running.

One of the realities in life is that often times, to get action and to get things done right, you need to go to the top; to the one in charge; to the one who has the power to help. Many times those in surrogate positions can only make decisions to a limited point. Yet the owner, the CEO, the one in charge can often make the big decisions and get things done.

Psalms 121 in many ways proclaims that same message. It says that when you're troubled, when you need help, you need to lift your eyes to the mountains, to the Lord, to the maker of heaven and earth. It says that for help in life—the very top is the only place to go.

The truth is that God is the owner, the creator, the CEO of this world. He is the only one who never slumbers, who watches over you at all times, who will not let your foot slip. He is the shade who will protect you from the hot sun by day and the moon by night.

God is the only one who can keep you from all harm; only he will watch over your whole life—he will *"watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore."* If you're going to find help and constant support in the challenges of life, look up to the creator of all things.

You know it's interesting today how we all often think we can handle life by ourselves; we can look to talk shows and the self-help ideas in this world to help us. It is amazing how self-help books, pop-psychologists, and new-age religious gurus have become the rage among many.

Now it's not that there are no truths in these things or that some of these plans and ideas won't help you. We can often learn some very helpful things from them. Yet just like an internet service tech, these suggestions may simply troubleshoot our problems or challenges for awhile.

However, in order to change and replace the hardware, to change and rewire our lives, that only comes when we go to the top. Only God, through Jesus Christ, can take our burdens, put them to death on a cross and offer us forgiveness, freedom and new life.

Only Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, can assure us that he is with us always. In other words, we don't need to get frustrated calling and staying on the line with tech support. Rather, through prayer we can always speak directly to God, the creator of all things.

In Christ our God never slumbers or sleeps; he is there for us always no matter what we are going through. What a wonderful assurance this is to know God's love, care and protection in our daily walk through life.

Most of you here, I'm sure, know the story of Tony Dungie. Tony, of course, grew up in a Christian home in Detroit and his mother made sure the family was grounded in biblical faith. Tony's faith in Jesus grew even stronger when he began hanging out with a group of Christian teammates while playing for the Pittsburgh Steelers.

This group of professional players worked hard on really building their faith in Jesus; on truly walking the talk of being a Christian. Tony Dungie says that the influence and help of this group helped to change his life. In fact, friends told him he was like a whole new person.

After retiring as a player along with some years of being an assistant coach, Tony became head coach of Tampa Bay in 1996. After 13 losing seasons he led them to four playoff appearances in six seasons; an amazing 54-42 record. However on January 12, 2002 Tampa Bay suffered a crushing loss, 31-9, to the Philadelphia Eagles. Two days later he was fired as head coach.

At that time in his life, Tony says, "it was hard to remember God's promises from Romans 8:28, that all things work together for good to those who love him. But I also," he says, "tried to remember the promise in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9—that despite all of our troubles, God will never abandon us."

In 2002, of course, Dungie took over as head coach of the Indianapolis Colts. Yet then in 2005, as the Colts charged toward the postseason, Tony and his family experienced every parent's nightmare when their oldest son, James, 18, took his own life.

Although the reason for his son's suicide remains unknown, Tony says that this experience only reinforces his belief that life has its peaks and challenges—yet God is there always. And then, of course, on February 4, 2007, Tony's Colts defeated the Bears and won the Super Bowl.

Tony Dungie's life has been one of looking for his help from God, the maker of heaven and earth. Tony was certainly tempted to only rely on himself, on his money and fame, to get him through the tough times. Yet only God watches over him and won't let his foot slip.

Now one other very important message from Psalm 121 is found in the words, *“I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?”* The Psalm writer is not saying that God lives in the mountains or that he is even off in the clouds somewhere.

Rather, he is talking about how important it is, when you go through troubles, to keep your head up. It is important each day to look up to God; to look up to his love, power and saving help.

Have you ever noticed that when you go through some problems or challenging times how easy it is to look down and focus on all the roadblocks, and potential potholes, that could be in our way? Looking down we are easily afraid; all our eyes can see is the dangers around us.

This is what happened, of course, to the disciple Peter. As he got out of the boat, as he kept his eyes on Jesus, he was able to walk on the water. Yet when his eyes went down, when all he saw was the wind and waves, he immediately sank into the turbulent waters below.

Jesus however reached down his hand to Peter. He didn't wait for Peter to get his faith together or reach up to him. No, Jesus reached down to Peter, and Peter took his hand. And as Peter's eyes were lifted up again to Jesus, Jesus lifted him above the storms to walk on the water again.

The Psalm writer, and other Biblical stories, all remind us to lift our eyes high like looking at a mountain; to look up and see that only God is the creator of heaven and earth, only he can help us. Lift your eyes to Jesus so he can lift you up to his loving arms of protection and care.

Max Lucado, well-known pastor and writer tells the story in his book, *“Facing Your Giants,”* about the importance of keeping your eyes focused on the right things. He shares how he was competing in a half-Ironman triathlon. After the 1.2 mile swim along with the 56 mile bike ride, he didn't have much energy for the 13.1 mile run.

In asking a fellow jogging next to him how he was doing this man responded, “This stinks. This is the dumbest decision I ever made.” Max Lucado, upon hearing this man's whining and complaints said “goodbye” to him. He knew if he listened too long to these negative thoughts he would start agreeing with him.

Rather he caught up with a 66 year old grandmother. Her tone was just the opposite. “You'll finish this,” she encouraged. “It's hot, but at least it's not raining. One step at a time...don't forget to hydrate...stay in there.” He ran next to her until his heart and spirit was lifted up, and he was able to make it to the end.

My friend, who are you listening to for counsel in your race through life? Are you focused on all the negatives? Are your eyes focused on all the problems in this world—the economy, the unrest in our world, the political craziness, a problem in your job and family? Where are your eyes focused?

Psalm 121 says, *“I will lift my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.”* Wow, this is really good news. May you trust your life to Jesus this day by faith. May you have the assurance that *“the Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore.”*