

- ***READ Psalm 121*** Beginning with **Psalm 120** and going through **Psalm 134**, we have a collection of Psalms that are all referred to as Songs of Ascents. These fifteen Psalms are traditionally recognized as being songs that were often sung as the people of Israel would make their way up to Jerusalem for the yearly feasts of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Some would even say that these songs might have been sung as the people walked up the steps to the temple in Jerusalem.
- Now, you might still be wondering about the whole label of these Psalms being songs of ascents. These Psalms are referenced as such because Jerusalem is a city literally up on top of a hill, so this journey that the people are making literally up to Jerusalem wasn't exactly the easiest of journeys. Take just a second and think back to a time when you might have been on a long trip that was difficult...what do we do sometimes to pass the time? Sometimes, we sing songs, and that's exactly what I think we have here in these 15 Psalms.
- Now, it might not be that these songs were originally written for the purpose of these journeys. It could be the case that they were just well known songs that someone recognized would be good for this specific purpose, and thusly we have them arranged in the Psalter in this particular way. We can look to four of these Psalms as having been written by David (**122, 124, 131, 133**) and then **Psalm 127** indicates that it was written by Solomon. Regardless of their original intents, these Psalms served a great purpose to help keep the minds of the people focused and motivated on why they were making this difficult journey. We can certainly relate to this idea, can't we? We sure can because each of us is on a journey to make our way up to heaven. We are look toward that place where we, too, can gather with the faithful and worship God.
- These Psalms can be just as useful for us as they were for these people on their journeys, and we are going to consider **Psalm 121** which looks at the direction in which we are looking as we make these journeys. **Psalm 121** begins with the statement *"I will lift up my eyes to the mountains."* This is the author saying that he or she would lift up his or her eyes towards the God whom they served. This simple statement could and probably did have a great impact on the mindset of the one who was on this journey, and we want to consider why this is the case this evening. Why is it important for us to look up as we are going along in this life? What type of encouragement or motivation could this give to the one who is journeying along? Let's take some time to consider these things, this evening.

I. Where we look will determine how we will go.

- A. Take a moment to put yourself in the shoes of the Israelite who was making this journey up to Jerusalem to worship.
 1. It might not seem like that big of a deal to us, but these journey's weren't all that simple for the Jew living under the law of Moses. It really isn't that big of a thing for a person today to make a long trip even across country because of the conveniences that we enjoy with modern technology with cars, trains, and planes. This obviously wasn't the case for the Jews on their journey's to go up to Jerusalem to observe these holy days.
 2. Where we can literally be on one coast in the morning and across the country on the other coast by the afternoon, these people had difficult journeys from their homes to Jerusalem. No smooth roads with nice cars with AC and radio were available to them. They had to deal with dirty trails up hills and and down through valleys. They had to deal with weather conditions of all kinds without much relief if things got rough.
 3. On top of that, this was a long journey that would've taken much time and a great number of their resources. For us, our trips can go quickly and often we are just put out some money. But for these Jewish peoples...they were out much time from the length of the journeys and there was much cost as far as resources and what they missed out on by making this journey.

4. With all of these things in mind...with all of the difficulties they faced in simply making these trips, I think we easily see the need for these songs of motivation and focus as these people were making their journey up to Jerusalem. They needed to be reminded to who it was that they were going up to worship. They needed to be reminded of where their focus was and what they needed to be looking toward.
- B. The same things are true for us, and we would do well to be reminded of these while we are on our journeys to heaven.
1. While we might have many of the modern conveniences that were not afforded to these people on their yearly journeys, our journeys in this life still hold many of the same obstacles.
 2. Consider first that our journey is one in which we will encounter our own set of difficulties and obstacles. The road we travel on is full of potholes and stumbling blocks in the form of temptations and trials. Satan and all of his evil workers are seeking to destroy us **(Ephesians 6:11,12; I Peter 5:8)**, and if they can do that through temptation then they won't hesitate to do so. And if we won't crumble to the temptations then Satan hopes that life will just get us down to where we might lose motivation and want to give up.
 3. But then secondly, there is the fact that this journey of faith in which we are trying to please God demands its own set of sacrifices on the behalf of each of us. In fact, our lives are to be living sacrifices that we are willing to offer up to God. **(Romans 12:1,2)** He demands that we give up ourselves so that we might serve His will and purposes.
 4. These things aren't exactly easy pills to swallow, and they can easily be things that can distract us if we allow them. They are similar to the things that could've distracted the Jews on their journeys. Just as they needed these reminders, so to we would do well to consider these words and encouragement to keep our eyes looking up because the other side of the coin just brings additional issues and struggles for our journeys.

II. When we are drawn by the world, we will look down and be made weak.

- A. How can we be drawn in by this world?
1. A simply fact of life is the fact that we are in this world, and simply being in this world means that we will be involved to some extend in the things of this world. This fact of life can't be argued or changed. Even monks and nuns are still involved in things of this world. So while we are in this world and a part of this world, we need to understand that what we do have control over is the degree in which we are involved and intertwined with the things of this life.
 2. I think it is no accident that Jesus's concept of discipleship comes with the demand that we give up our lives so that we might live to His. **(Luke 9:23; Galatians 2:20)** This world seeks to draw us closer to it and to fully invest ourselves into those things that this life has to offer. I think about the rich young ruler of **Mark 10:17-22** who wanted to know what he needed to do to have eternal life. Jesus said to put away this world, but he was so drawn to his wealth and this life that he wasn't able to look away from this world...so he put his head down and went away sorrowful. He was drawn to this world by his love for things of this life, and he continually looked down in life.
 3. Remember, this journey of life comes with many distractions and obstacles that seek to distract us from the goal that lies before us. The love of world, lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life can and will cause us to look down and take our focus away from heaven. **(I John 2:15-17)** If we allow these things to draw our attention and focus, then we will pass away when these temporary and empty things pass away.

B. How does this make us weak?

1. These things make us weak because instead of setting our minds on things of God **(Colossians 3:1-4)**...we have our minds set on those things of this life. When this happens, we are left unprepared for that time when Christ is revealed. Our preparation for that last day is greatly hindered and will be found incomplete because we haven't invested in those things that are truly of value and substance. Jesus said what He said for a reason in **Matthew 6:19-21**. If we are drawn to this world then we will constantly be looking down and around at the things of this life, and our preparations will only be for the here and now.
2. That might not sound all that terrible until we consider that if our heart is truly drawn to the things of this world then what is to stop us from sacrificing the things of God for the things of this world. If I am drawn to this world and things of it, then I will invest the majority of my time to ensure that my life in the here and now is all that it can be. I will sacrifice my time, money, and spiritual health if it means that I can have the best life in the here and now. All of this focus and attention on this life will only result in a very poorly prepared realization of the next life in judgement. While we're busy looking around and down in this world, our journey is still make its way to the end, and that end will be the present before we know it. We will have nothing in the end because we were drawn to this life. We will end up having the same end as Demas had in **II Timothy 4:10**.
3. We will have no spiritual treasures in heaven waiting for us. In fact, there will be no heaven because no investment in the future is always accompanied with little to no effort for spiritual health and excellence in the present. If I am invested in this world and this life, then I will plant roots in these temporal things and the only strength I will gain is for the here and now. That means when true trials come...well...we will be very ill prepared to face them. I think it would be accurate to say that we will have an end much like that of Lot's wife. Jesus used her as an example of not being consumed with this world **(Luke 17:32,33)**, and we need to recognize that she failed because she didn't keep her eyes looking up to God, but she wanted to look down and around and everything she had here. She couldn't stand to give it up. She was fully invested. He had deep roots in this life, and she paid the ultimate price for it. She was made weak because she was drawn only to the things of this world. Even Lot himself hesitated to leave the city because he was drawn to it to a degree. However, his wife was fully invested and she was unable to keep her eyes straight ahead and looking up because she was drawn to this world and its lusts. **(Genesis 19:12-26)** Again, the words of Jesus ring true, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." **(Luke 9:62)**

III. When we are drawn to God, we will look up towards Him and be made strong.

A. We must allow ourselves to be drawn to God.

1. We must conform the way we live this life to what Paul says in **Colossians 3:1-4**, "Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." This ought to be the way we live. If our focus is on heaven, then we must keep our focus looking up to that place where we want to be and where God is.
2. This means that we must keep our eyes fixed and focused on Jesus. The text we read at the beginning of the assembly directed our minds to remember Jesus and to be focused on Him so that we might lay aside those things of the world that might draw us away from Him and ensnare us. **(Hebrews 12:1,2)** We can keep our focus and eyes fixed on God by remember the resolve of Jesus and all of those who have gone on before us having died in faith. **(Hebrews 11)** When we allow this to be our way of living, then we set ourselves up for success and victory because we serve a God who will strengthen us to overcome.

- B. This is the point of **Psalm 121**. It is a reminder of the God whom they were seeking to serve and the power that He possesses to strengthen those who desire to serve Him.
1. We are to keep our eyes lifted towards God because He is the great God of heaven whom we serve and hope to be with. We are made strong because He is the one from whom true help comes. **(v.2)** He is the God who will not allow for His faithful one to stumble and slip. He is ever present and prepared to provide for the needs of His people. **(vv.3,4)**
 2. The God we have our eyes fixed upon truly is our keeper who protects us from the evils of day and night. **(vv.5,6)** He is a God who will not allow for His children to be overcome by evil, but He will keep and protect our souls. He will guard our ways always. Whether we are coming or going on this journey, we can be assured that God will be there to guard us in all that we do as long as we keep our eyes looking up towards Him. **(vv.7,8)**
 3. If we are drawn to God and keep our eyes ever focused on Him then we will come to be strong as He is strong because He will be with us always. He truly will not allow our feet to stumble and fall for He is faithful to be with His children always. It isn't that we are strong of ourselves on this journey, but it is that we are going along this journey with the great God of heaven as our leader and source of strength.

While our journeys might look quite different at times, it is wise for us to consider those songs that kept the Jews focused as they sought to go up and worship the Lord their God. These songs of motivation were invaluable to them in their efforts, and I hope that this Psalm will help for us to remember where our focus ought to be. We must be ever vigilant to keep our eyes on the prize of heaven and on pleasing our God so that He might be with us and strengthen us all along the way. When the way gets difficult, may each of us naturally react to seek the strength of the Lord from whom our help comes.

PRAYER *Our Father in heaven...we humbly bow our heads before you and willfully acknowledge that you alone are the one true and living God. You alone are the one from whom our help comes. May each of us be always aware of our need to keep our eyes looking up toward You as we go through this life. May You strengthen us to withstand those things of this world that may seek draw our attention away from you, and may Your hand of strength always be with us as we are resolved to make our way towards that land of promise. Thank You Father for Your provisions, and may Your Son come quickly so that we might be with You in heaven. But, Lord, if your patience continues, we pray that those who might need to repent and come to You would do so. We love you Father, and we pray that you will be with us throughout this week and onward. It is in Jesus's name we offer this prayer, amen.*