

“What Is My Faith Actually In?” // Psalm 121 // *When It Doesn't Feel Like Christmas #2*¹

OFFERING / BIG GIVE (VAMP THROUGHOUT)

We're going to continue our time of worship by the giving of our tithes and offerings. Last month during our *Lasting Legacy* series we spent 4 weeks exploring what God's Word says about **faithful stewardship**, and at the end of those four weeks we challenged you to ask God what **ongoing sacrificial gift** would represent him having first place in each of our finances, and then to make a **Stewardship Faith Commitment** to solidify that gift.

I'm encouraged to report that **2,750 Summit families** made one of these **Stewardship Faith Commitments**, representing **over 8,000 people** who have committed to growing as faithful stewards this year. And my favorite part? There were several kids and students who made personal commitments...talk about creating a lifelong legacy! To start this faithfulness when you're young and build it over a lifetime? Summit, let's put our hands together for our kids!

A few other numbers to celebrate:

- Of the 2750 families who made a commitment, **635 committed to giving** for the first time! That is a huge step of faith in their walk with God.
- And I was encouraged to see that we had **1,020 Summit families commit to tithe**—meaning they had given before, but they

decided to *bring* God their firstfruits and invest a tenth of their income into his kingdom this year.

- And I was **blown away to hear** that **992 Summit families committed to give sacrificially beyond the tithe**. This is amazing.

Summit, you are such a generous church...and I, as your pastor, want to say thank you. Not necessarily for your giving, but for the way your giving represents your commitment to fully follow Jesus in this shared mission he's given us. **There's nothing that brings me, as your pastor, more joy than that.**

But I didn't just wanna give you an update; I wanted to give you the chance to start participating in that *right now*. I told you that **everything you give to TSC in December** will go directly to what we are calling our five **Legacy Lanes**, supporting the ongoing kingdom ministries we have in these, as well as future some God-sized dreams we have for each of them. They are:

- International Missions
- Domestic Church Planting
- Local Outreach
- Growth and Expansion
- Leadership Multiplication

Now, remember, automatically, throughout the year, 35% of everything you give goes into these 5 lanes. Automatically. But in the month of December, 100% of everything given to our church goes to them.

This is a chance for us to really start BIG in making a kingdom impact. As always, there are three ways you can give here at Summit, and this applies whether you made a commitment or not:

- summitchurch.com/give

¹ Sources consulted: Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries); James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: Volume 3 (Psalms 107–*

150), Baker Books; Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*; John Sailhamer, *NIV Commentary*.

- Text "GIVE" to 33933 (with either of those, you can set up a one time gift or a recurring one, which is what I've done)
- Give in person at your campus (you should see someone with a bucket on your way out as you leave).

OK, grab your Bibles and a pen to take notes if you have one, and check this out:

BUMPER: *When It Doesn't Feel Like Christmas*

Psalm 121, if you have your Bibles... Christmas is a season in which we're supposed to enjoy and celebrate what's right in our lives, but a lot of us can't escape thinking about what's wrong. I know for some of you the Christmas season brings up a lot of pain--questions about why life has taken some of the turns it's taken, or struggling with loneliness because of someone who is gone this year.

So, we've been doing a short series in the book of Psalms called, "When it doesn't feel like Christmas." And today, we're going to look at a Psalm that presents a question to us when life takes an unexpected turn, and that question is: **What is your faith actually in?**

Faith is easy to talk about, but sometimes harder to show when it's tested.

In the summer of 1859, Charles Blondin (PIC) dazzled crowds by walking over Niagara Falls on a tightrope 160 feet above the roaring waters. It was nearly a quarter mile distance he had to walk. Literally

² Commentators often call this "the travelers' psalm." It comes up again and again as a sort of blessing or benediction (even in contemporary times) for people as they begin a long journey. **James Montgomery Boice:** "David Livingstone, the famous missionary and explorer of the continent of Africa, read Psalm 121 ... as he worshiped with his father and sister before setting

1000's of spectators packed the shores to witness this daring feat, and he did it multiple times, each time adding another dramatic twist--like once he walked blindfolded, once he did it on stilts, once he even cooked (PIC) an omelet as he walked across. Each time he completed the quarter mile journey, the crowd erupted in cheers. Blondin then announced that for his last journey, he would attempt to push a wheelbarrow across. He asked the crowd how many thought he could do it. Everyone cheered and was like, "Of course you can!" Blondin then said, "OK, then who volunteers to get into the wheelbarrow?," at which point, the crowd fell deathly silent. It's one thing to say you have faith--that's easy. It's another thing to actually get into the wheelbarrow.

Psalm 121 shows us what it's like to actually get into the wheelbarrow when life takes an unexpected turn. So,

Psalm 121²

Instead of starting with vs 1, start with the little description before the title: **A Song of Ascents.**

The Psalms of Ascent are 15 psalms which Jewish pilgrims would sing together as they approached Jerusalem on pilgrimage. Jerusalem, you see, was situated on top of 6 hills, all about 2,500 feet above sea level. So, as Old Testament Jews came to Jerusalem for a celebration, or a holiday, as they started the long climb up to Jerusalem, they would sing these psalms. These 15 Psalms were supposed to represent all the various stages of a believer's life. **Ps 121 is the second of these.** Let me just read it in its entirety:

out for Africa in 1840." **Charles Spurgeon:** "This Psalm is several steps in advance of its predecessor, for it tells of the peace of God's house and the guardian care of the Lord." "If it were not placed among the Pilgrim Psalms, we would consider it a military hymn, suited for the evening song of one who slept in the tented field. It is a soldier's song and a traveler's hymn."

- [1] I lift up my eyes to the hills.
Where does my help come from?
- [2] My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.
- [3] He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- [4] Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- [5] The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
- [6] The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.³
- [7] The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
- [8] The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

OK, let's start back at the beginning, because there's a little discussion among Bible scholars about vs 1: whether it should be translated as a statement or a question.⁴ You see, it could say, **[1] I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from?** [2] My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. (That's the way it reads in the translation I am using, the ESV). "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills." In this reading, the hills of Jerusalem represent the strength of God, and as the Jews look up toward the hills on their

³ Derek Kidner: "The two lines of verse 6 are not only poetic parallels, but use a favourite Heb. way of expressing totality: naming a pair of opposites to include everything between."

⁴ **James Montgomery Boice:** "The original KJV of verse 1 suggested a wrong thought to many people, namely, that the psalmist was looking to the mountains for his help. This is not the idea at all. ..." First, because the hills represented Jerusalem, God's holy city, "To look 'to the hills' really meant looking to God as one's true help. ...

ascent, they think about God. You see, in those days, every society wanted their capital city to be built on the top of a hill because it made it much harder for invading armies to overrun you. So, in this reading, the Psalmist is saying these hills represent the strength of God and remind me that my help comes from him. This reading has Scriptural warrant, too. **Psalm 125**, for example, just a few Psalms away, another Psalm of Ascent, says, **"As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore."** (125:2)

You say, *"Well then, what's the controversy?"*

Some Hebrew scholars say that the way this sentence is constructed in Hebrew, it is best read as a question. They didn't use question marks back then like we do now, and you determine whether it's a question based on the word order. And they say it should read: **[1] Will I lift up my eyes to the hills? Where does my help come from? [2] My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.** (By that reading, the Psalmist is saying, "My help doesn't come from these hills, it comes from God.")

You see, like I said, almost every society in the ancient world built their cities on hills. Rome was famously built on 7 huge hills. And the Psalmist is saying, *"Is our confidence no different than everybody*

Second, the stanza can be a rejection of the hills for God himself [because mountains and 'high places' are so often associated with pagan worship]. **Derek Kidner:** "The hills are enigmatic: does the opening line show an impulse to take refuge in them ... or are the hills themselves a menace, the haunt of robbers? Either way, [the psalmist] knows something better. The thought of this verse leaps beyond the hills to the universe; beyond the universe to its Maker."

else's? Are these hills our salvation? Is our hope merely that our hills are better than their hills?"

By this reading, he's saying, **NO! OUR PROTECTION DOESN'T COME FROM THESE HILLS**--it comes from something greater than these hills: namely **GOD HIMSELF**. And see, if these hills one day fail us—if some army, for example, figures out a way to scale these hills—God himself remains. This reading also has Scriptural warrant, BTW. For example, the author of **Psalm 46** says: [1] **God is our (real) refuge and strength...** [2] **Therefore we will not fear (watch this) though the earth gives way, though the mountains (the hills!) be moved into the heart of the sea.** God, not these hills, are our real refuge.

So, which is it? Is it **Option 1: These hills are strong, just like God's protection.** ("I will lift up my eyes to the hills...") Or is it **Option 2: These hills may be strong, but that's not where my trust is. My trust is in God alone.** ("Will I lift up my eyes to the hills...")

Let me turn you into a big translation committee. At all campuses, how many think it's option 1, that the ESV translators got it right? (Raise your hands.) **How many, option 2?** How many are scared to vote. *Those of you who raised your hands on option 1 are correct.* And so are those who raised your hands on option 2. Everyone's a winner at The Summit Church! Everyone gets a medal!

This ambiguity, I believe, is intentional. (This is poetry, after all, and ambiguity abounds in poetry). Here's what the Psalmist is saying: *Yes, the hills are a natural fortification that God has provided for our protection, and we can look at these hills as symbolic of God's protection, as God's provision for us. But we should never forget that*

our protection is not ultimately found in these hills, it's in God; and if these hills ever go away--or if some army every figures out a way to scale these hills, the God represent will always be there, and he's a better and more reliable refuge than even the strongest mountains.

And this ambiguity highlights a really important problem in the Christian life, one a lot of Christians struggle with: And that is, listen—allowing the provisions of God to become a substitute for God.

Now, granted--most of us have never thought this way about mountains, because we don't live with the daily fear of some army invading us on foot. The question for us is what provision there is that God has given you that you've allowed to become a substitute for him.

For example, like many of you, I have a savings account and a 401K. And if you don't have one, you're probably working toward one. And those are a great idea--the book of Proverbs commends that kind of saving. *But here's the question:* Are those things--savings accounts and 401Ks--are those mere expressions of God's provision to you, or have they become a *substitute* for him?

You see, they can be either, **just like the hills.** The hills could be an expression of God's protection for Israel; or, they could start looking to them as a substitute for God.

Here's another: I voraciously read books on parenting to learn the best techniques on raising my kids. And this is good. Scripture lays out a bunch of important principles for raising kids, and God gave me a mind to understand these principles, so I want to know everything

the Bible says about parenting so I can build my home on God's wisdom. But has attempting to master those techniques become a substitute for dependence on God's mercy in their lives? I know Christian parents--and have been one myself--who used these biblical techniques as some kind of full-proof way of guaranteeing sure your kids turned out right: just read *Raising Kids God's Way*; then James Dobson's book on discipline, and Jon Tyson's *Intentional Father*, pull this lever, and *guaranteed*... out come amazing kids! You don't even have to hope in the grace of God for your kids anymore if you learn these techniques.

To those of us in the throes of parenting, the Psalmist says, *"Will you lift up your eyes to the hills? Where does your hope in parenting come from? From the hills of godly wisdom you have amassed from these books? No, your help comes from the Lord. Hope in his mercy."*

Maybe you're at a stage of life where neither a 401K or raising kids feels that relevant to you--but I guarantee you, whatever stage of life you are in, there are provisions and protections God has given to you that threaten to become a substitute for him.

The question that the Psalm raises is this: **How does trusting God relate to all the 'natural' things we do to take care of ourselves? (Like savings accounts and insurance policies and best practices in marriage and good planning in business?).**

Let's break that down to 3 questions of faith the Psalm raises:

1. What do you actually *trust* in? (v 1-2)

- The hills or God? Are you trusting in the God who uses these things to provide for and protect you, or have you started to trust in those things instead of God?
- Ask yourself this: When you look into the future and feel some worry... What is the first thing your heart grabs hold of to tell yourself you are going to be ok? Is it...
 - ...the amount of money you have in your bank account? "I have enough that whatever circumstance happens, I'm going to be ok." Is that where your heart goes?
 - Is it the stability of your marriage and family? You get worried about the future and you say, "But I'll always have my family. I may not know what the future holds, but my family is strong, and as long as I have them, I'll be ok." This is the theme of every Hallmark movie--trade the idol of career for the idol of family.
 - Maybe what you find refuge in is your own ability to make things work. You've been knocked down before, but you always found a way to get back on your feet. You think this especially if you're young. So you think, "If the future knocks me down again, I'll do what I've always done and figure out how to make it work." I get knocked down, and I get up again...
 - Maybe it's in how pretty you are. Maybe it's in how smart you are. Maybe it's in how successful you always seem to be.

Again, the question is: What is your hope *actually* in? Is it in the hills, or the God who provided the hills? Because I promise you, at some point, these hills are going to fail you. Eventually some Babylon, some

Rome is going to amass an army big enough to scale that hill. And then what will you have?

The point is never to let the hill become a substitute for God because he is your real refuge.

I found myself in a little morbid thought spiral that really kind of drove this home to me. I found myself asking, "What would happen if I died and my kids had to grow up without a dad? I mean, Veronica has already told me she's not getting remarried if I did--you know, after you've been at the top... Just kidding. But without a father figure, without me there to guide them, would my kids be ok? Can I trust God that if this hill--me, as their dad, their protector, their guide--got removed, can I trust that God would take care of them? And I thought: Yes, I can trust that God would do that. If I got taken away, God would provide for them.

And that led to this question: ***OK then, while I am alive, am I trusting in him as their provider and protector who just works through me, or have I become in my own mind the substitute for God?*** Do I trust him in life the way I would in death?

For all the things I want to see in their lives--protection, guidance, spiritual transformation--where does their hope for those things really come from? Is it in God, who uses and works through me even though he's the ultimate source, or is my hope for those things in my parenting skills?

This may seem to you like an insignificant distinction, but it's not. Because, see, if ultimately their hope for these things sits on me,

that's a crushing burden to bear! And I'm always second guessing have I done enough? And what did I not do right? And I'm living with fear and regret aware of how insufficient this "hill" is to provide real protection and salvation.

But their hope ***ISN'T HERE***. It's in the God who sometimes uses me--but *HE* is their real protector and provider.

I've told this story before... but during a really challenging season of our parenting--I mean, let's be honest, all seasons of parenting feel challenging, right? Each one more challenging than the one before. But during one particularly challenging season--and it was during the teenage years, because those are the crazy ones (one older parent told me that the teenage years are like that scene in Apollo 13 when everything went wrong and they are trying to get the shuttle back to earth and it has to pass through the atmosphere at just the right angle, and if anything goes wrong, it will burn up. And Ed Harris warns everyone that during that reentry they are going to experience radio silence, and all they can do is hope they come out. And so for 4.5 tense minutes they just stare at where the shuttle could come and hope they make it. This parent said, "That's what the teenage years are like. 4.5 years of radio silence. They went in at the right angle... I hope they don't burn up."

Well, during that seasons, for my morning quiet time I read Psalm 136, which is the psalm where the Psalmist recounts the history of Israel--he lists out a bunch of the ups and the downs, the good and the bad, and between every major moment, he puts the phrase, "*The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.*" 26x in the Psalm he uses that phrase, and as you read it you get this overwhelming sense that

God himself was the one writing Israel's story. They failed, A LOT, and so did their leaders, but GOD' steadfast love endures forever and always kept writing their story.

And so I thought: I'm going to write out my own personal Psalm

136. And so I wrote out all the major events of my life, all the major turning points, the good and the bad, and between every major event, I wrote the words, 'The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.' And when I was done I went back and read it aloud to myself and as I did the Holy Spirit hit me with a realization like a ton of bricks. See, I had awesome parents; a mom and dad who did about as good of a job, I think, as humanly possible for parents. They were consistent, faithful, intentional, godly examples, they read all the books... But as I read back over all these significant moments in my life, I realized that for all the major, spiritually significant moments in my life--my parents had not engineered a single one of them. Not one. Yes, of course, God used them in my life. But looking through this personal history, it was clear that God had been the one writing my story. He was in control of it all, working through it all. It was his steadfast love that had been the through-line of my life, not my parents' skill.

And this is what the Holy Spirit hit me with: If God was the one who wrote MY story, wasn't it going to be the same for my kids, too? If it was his steadfast, pursuing love, and not my parents' perfection, that had made the difference in my life, wasn't that my kids' hope, too? Sure, I know God uses me--I'm like one of the hills around Jerusalem--but my hope as a parent is not in these hills, it's in a God full of steadfast love who is greater than these hills. God is the one writing their story, and his steadfast love endures forever. It's more steadfast

than me, it covers me when I fail. My hope for parenting is not in the hill; it's in the God behind the hill.

Because I'm going to tell you young parents now, when you look back at your parenting, all you're going to be able to see are things you wished you'd done differently. Things you could have done better. "But oh," the Psalmist would say to us, "Don't worry if you messed up one of those hills. *Their hope was never in those hills anyway.* Their help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth and all the hills."

Here's a second, but related **question that the Psalmist asks:**

2. What do you see as permanent in your life? (vs 3)

In **Vs 3** the **Psalmist switches the metaphor** and says, "*God will not let my foot be moved... my foot is on a foundation that can never be shaken and it's not these hills or this terra firma beneath my feet. It's God.* What do you see as permanent in your life? What do you see as unable to be taken away?"

Let me go back to my marriage for a minute. My wife is God's provision to meet so many of my needs. She's my comfort, my companion, my support, my biggest cheerleader, and my best friend. In Veronica I have experienced the goodness and provision of God. But no earthly relationship is immovable, and all earthly relationships can be shaken--by death or whatever.

In July 1997, Veronica and I had gone out on our second date--she didn't know they were dates, she thought it was just two friends

hanging out, but I knew they were pre-engagement meetings. I just didn't want to tell her that so I wouldn't freak her out. Well, the morning after our 2nd date I was in class and a friend of mine who knew I'd gone out with her again asked me how it went. I gave him a thumbs up. And he said, "You really like her?" And I pulled out a sheet of notebook paper and wrote down some 60 or so adjectives that depicted all the ways I thought she was incredible and why I was **going to marry her**. I showed it to him... and he acted interested but I'm sure inwardly he was rolling his eyes, regretting ever asking me the question. Well, I shoved that paper back into my notebook and forgot about it until 2.5 years later when Veronica and I got engaged. And then I remembered it, and I went back and dug it out--it was all crumpled up, but I bought this really expensive frame and put it around that crumpled paper and gave it to Veronica on our wedding day, and I said to her, "This list represents all the beautiful things you are to me that I noticed from the very beginning." Pretty romantic, right? But on the bottom I put a phrase that is one of the most important insights in my life: "You represent something that can never be taken away from me."

That's from C.S. Lewis. Lewis said that the greatest earthly gifts were like a ray of sunshine that warms our face on a fall day. Lewis said, "You feel the warmth of that ray and are thankful for it, but what you should really be thankful for is the sun from which that ray emanates. Follow that ray back up to its source. That's what you're thankful for. Because here's the thing (Lewis said)--at some point, you may be hidden from the ray itself; something may block the ray from hitting your face: a storm cloud, or life makes you stand in some shadow. Even then, when you don't have the ray, the sun behind that ray

remains and you'll never be separated from that sun. Be thankful for the ray, but put your hope in the sun." Does that make sense?

Don't get so fixated on the gift that you forget the giver the gift pointed you to. ***We used to have a dog, a little Jack Russell terrier... Don't get fixated on the pointer; fixate on the Giver the gift points you to.***

As much as I love my wife and could not imagine a day without her--and don't want to imagine a day without her--I knew then and I know now that she could be taken away from me. Not even the best marriages are permanent--yes, of course, we made a vow to be together for life and we plan to honor it--but none of us are guaranteed we'll even wake up tomorrow. And one day, chances are, one of us is going to die and leave the other one alone. I hope it doesn't happen that way; I've told her I hope we die together in a skydiving accident when we're 90 or doing street evangelism in Sudan, but chances are that one of us is going to die before the other and leave them alone, maybe for years. But in that time when the ray is hidden from our face, the sun of God's goodness remains. **The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.**

My wife, my savings accounts, my parenting techniques, any plans for my future, any resources I have to meet tomorrow's challenges--these are all rays of the sun, but I don't hope in them. The Lord is my keeper. He's the shade at my right hand.

And when darkness seems to hide his face, I rest on his unchanging grace; in every high and stormy gale; my anchor holds within the vale.

I know that some of you have “lost” a hill this year; a hill you thought would always be there, but that hill has been removed, and “cast into the sea,” so to speak. “And I know it’s hard,” the Psalmist says, “but you don’t have to despair. Lift up your eyes BEYOND those hills. *Your help comes from the Lord*, the maker of those hills. He is your keeper, he will keep your going out and coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”

Which leads to a 3rd question of faith this Psalm presents:

3. How do you respond when it feels like God is asleep? (Vss 3–4)

[3] ... he who keeps you will not slumber. [4] Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

In those days, in addition to the hills that provided protection, there were watchmen who stood guard on those hills who would look out over the valleys to spot any invading armies. As Jewish pilgrims ascended the hills into Jerusalem, they could see those watchtowers. Well, one of the greatest threats to a city’s safety back then was if one of those watchmen fell asleep. A watchman falls asleep and an entire army could sneak up the hill and ransack the city. It’s why they made sleeping on sentry duty punishable by death. Even then, however, it still happened.

⁵ Vs. 36 says, “And other boats were with him.” (Totally off topic: That last phrase is a little Easter egg embedded in the text that critical scholars say reveal that this is eyewitness testimony, not made up legends. You see, one of the charges skeptics make about the New Testament is that these are basically made up legends that people later assumed were factual. But these stories are purported to be eyewitness testimonies, and part of the evidence for why that’s true are little phrases like this one:

But God, the Psalmist says, never slumbers or sleeps. **Do you know why he feels compelled to say that?** And not just once, btw, 3x [3] ... he who keeps you will not slumber. [4] Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Why does he feel compelled to say that, and then to say it 3x?

Because he knows there are times in our lives where it seems like God is asleep. I know that for some of you, that’s where you are now. You’re like: “Hey God, are you awake up there? How did this danger get in here? Were you not watching? Where were you “when she said that” or “he did this” or “the doctor missed that?” Were you asleep, God?

No, the Psalmist says, he wasn’t asleep. He never sleeps, *and he’s just as in charge when it seems like he’s asleep as he is when you know he’s awake.*

There’s a **story from the life of Jesus** that illustrates this beautifully. Hold your place in Psalm 121, but flip over to Mark 4 if you can. Or just stay in Psalm 121 and I’ll put it on the screen.

Mark 4:35 (After a full day of teaching,) **Jesus said to them, “Let us cross the sea to the other side.” [36] And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat...⁵ [37] And a great windstorm arose, and**

“And there were other boats with him.” What’s that got to do with anything? Nothing, it’s just a guy recalling what he saw from memory. So there we were, sailing across the sea with Jesus. Oh, and you know what? My cousin Jed was there, too, with his ridiculous boat—the one he built to look like a whale. Anyway... Nothing to do with the story, just a guy remembering stuff from memory. Legends are never written like that, where you include extraneous details. These stories are not written like legends; they are written like eyewitness accounts.)

the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. And the disciples were terrified, [38] But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Y’all, this **must have been some kind** of storm, because these were *experienced* fishermen, and they’d been in lots of storms. Storms on the Sea of Galilee were quite uncommon. The **Sea of Galilee is 700 feet below sea level**, and the mountain range that encircles it rises up to 9,200 feet ABOVE sea level, which means you have this bowl where this **mixture of cold air** from the mountains and warm air from the sea comes together and creates these sudden, violent storms. Even today, **if** you go to the **little restaurants** along the western side of the sea, they’re always up on stilts with these **little signs that tell you if a storm comes to get your car out** because in the course of an hour the parking lot can flood by up to 10 feet (Hopefully if we ever get to Israel, you can see them). These fishermen were used to those kinds of storms, but this one was so bad it made even these experienced fishermen terrified.

And there’s Jesus, almost humorously, in the middle of this crazy storm, asleep. So they WAKE HIM UP and ask him: vs. [38] “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” [39] And he awoke and **rebuked** the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!”

- I love that word “rebuke.” He **rebukes the weather** like it’s nothing more than a rowdy child. “Quiet. Be still.” BTW, “**be still**” in Greek is what they call a “**verb of continuing action**,” which means what he literally said was, “**Be quiet ... and stay quiet.**” He **put the storm in time-out!** He was like, “You *SIT DOWN*, and *STAY*

DOWN, and I’ll tell you when you can come out and play again.” And the storm **slunk off** over into the corner.

And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. **Not only did the storm die down** immediately, the waves died down. Even if you could make all the wind go away, it takes at least **a couple of hours** for all the waves to die down. Jesus made it **all get calm AT ONCE**.

And then, **my favorite part of the story**. He turned to the disciples and (vs 40) “He said to them, ‘Why are you so afraid?’” “Uhh... *Why were we so afraid, Jesus? Well, for one, we thought we were going TO DIE... the boat was literally taking on water.*” And Jesus replies, (DEEP SIGH): “Have you still no faith?”

Now, we always shake our heads at the disciples, “*How could they be so dumb?*” Here’s my question: *When would you have woken Jesus up?* Some of y’all would have woken him up at the sign of the first storm cloud on the horizon! Or, be honest, some of you would have never gotten in the boat if you’d ever heard a story of someone who went through a storm. These guys stood strong in their faith until the boat was **literally filling up with water**. They kept thinking, any minute he’d get up and help them, until one of them was like, “I seriously think he’s gonna sleep through this whole thing while we drown.” I’m just being honest here: it seems like a reasonable time to wake him up.

And yet, when Jesus wakes up, it says he **rebuked** them for their lack of faith. **Why? Well, vs 35:** he’d already indicated that he planned to go to the other side. They should rest assured that once Jesus said something was gonna happen, it would happen.

And here's another interesting detail about this story: Jesus brought a cushion into the boat because he planned to sleep. Did you see that? (Put **vs 38** back up there.) Listen, when you bring a cushion, you intend to sleep. **If I see you bring a neck pillow into service I know you have already decided you are not going to make it through the sermon.** Jesus brought a cushion on this trip because he was planning to sleep. **But why was Jesus planning to sleep if he knew a storm was coming?** I mean surely, if he controlled the weather, he could predict the weather. He planned to sleep through a storm. Why?

You know the answer. This was a test of faith, and he wanted his disciples, and us, to see that: **He's just as in charge when it seems like he's sleeping as he is when we know he's awake.**

And so, for those of you who feel like God is asleep in your life--you feel like some part of your life is filling up with water. Listen, when Jesus promises good to you, that doesn't mean there won't be seasons in which your boat takes on some water. The paycheck doesn't come in. An unexpected bill surfaces. The kid wanders. The marriage gets worse. Your parents get crazier. But that doesn't mean he's forgotten you. **He's just as in charge when it seems like he's sleeping as he is when we know he's awake.**

He wants to see if you'll trust him. To be willing to get in that wheelbarrow and stay in it even when the waterfall beneath you feels like it's gonna tear the world in half because you TRUST that he will not your foot be moved.

BTW, **Mark 4:41** tells you the point of this whole ordeal. After Jesus had calmed the waves, it says **⁴¹ And they were filled with great fear** When they were in the storm—convinced they were going to die—they only felt plain old, regular, “think we're going to die” fear. But after Jesus had rescued them, they felt **GREAT** fear. Get this: **the rescue scared them more than the storm did...** and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey

him?” This fear was not a “we're going to die” kind of fear; it's the **fear of wonder that** you feel when you know you're standing before the awesomest of power. It's the fear that leads to worship.

VAMP

And it makes you say, **“Who is this that even the wind and waves obey him?”** And then you sit in wonder and say, **“That God is keeping me? The one who oversees the wind and the waves controls ALL THINGS in my life and keeps me in any storm! So,**

[1] *Will I lift up my eyes to the hills?*

Where does my help come from?

[2] My help comes from the LORD,

who made heaven and earth.

[3] He will not let your foot be moved;

he who keeps you will not slumber.

[4] Behold, he who keeps Israel

will neither slumber nor sleep.

[5] The LORD is your keeper;

the LORD is your shade on your right hand.

[6] The sun shall not strike you by day,

nor the moon by night.

[7] The LORD will keep you from all evil;

he will keep your life.

[8] The LORD will keep

your going out and your coming in

from this time forth and forevermore.

Friend, it may seem like he's sleeping in your life, **BUT HE'S NOT.**

You say, “Well wait a minute, J.D. How do I know he’s not secretly mad at me? Maybe I haven’t been a good enough Christian and maybe this storm is his punishment?”

Great question. The answer to that is in the Psalm: Psalm 121: **Vs 6**). “The sun will not strike you by day.” We know that the sun of God’s judgment struck Jesus for us. Jesus stood before the bright holiness of God stained with our sin and was struck down for it. The darkness killed Jesus when God the Father turned his back on him. **Vs 7**, the LORD will keep you from evil and keep your life. The Father did not keep Jesus from evil but let him die under evil’s curse so that he could save us. The Lord did not “*keep Jesus’ life;*” rather, it pleased the Lord to bruise him, because by his death God would save us. And we know that if did those things for us, he won’t abandon us now. If he did not spare his only son for us he will now **(vs 8)** “**keep our going out and our coming in from this time forth and forevermore.**”

Let’s return to Charles Blondin: Blondin crossed Niagara Falls over 300 times, and rarely was he able to get a volunteer to get in that wheelbarrow. *RARELY*... but not never. Once, he put his manager, Harry Colcord, on his back and carried him across the Falls. Blondin told Harry as he climbed on **(PIC)**: “Listen, Harry.... for the next few moments, you are no longer Harry Colcord, you are Charles Blondin. As I cross over, you are a part of me—mind, body, and soul. Don’t worry about the waterfall below, I’ve got that. Focus on me. When I sway, you sway. Just rest in me and do what I do.”

Friend, you are now in Christ. That’s the good news of **Psalm 121:** You can rest in him. The sun won’t strike you because it struck him. Evil won’t touch you because it pierced him. So just rest in him! Obey

him. So where do you feel like life is out of control? Where do you hear the roar of the waterfall? Don’t look down at the waterfall! Look UP to Christ who is now carrying you. You are one with him. Where does your help come from? Not from the hills. Your help comes from THE LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth, who never slumbers or sleeps.

HEADS BOWED--Honest reflection time

Where are you trusting in something in the place of God? A spouse? A family. A job. A financial cushion?

- **Let me get you to do a little thought exercise.** Again, heads bowed, everybody put your hands out in front of you, in your lap. And open them... now, in your mind’s eye, put in your open hands whatever matters to you most in life; what you trust in most; what you couldn’t imagine life without. Just think, *This is the one thing I need in the future to be okay.* A spouse, a career, your family, a savings account... close your hands around that thing symbolic of how tightly you’d want to hold onto it. Can you say, *“God, you have provided these things for me and I’m thankful for them, but I don’t trust in them, I trust in you, the God behind them. And if one day, they go away, I’ll still have you. I’m ready to trust you completely. To obey you entirely.*
- Others of you, maybe you’ve never surrendered your life to Jesus! Are you ready to climb into the wheelbarrow and trust him completely? I can tell you from experience, *“Tis so sweet, to trust in Jesus, just to take him at his word! Just to rest upon his promise, just to know, thus says the Lord! Jesus, Jesus, how I love him, how I’ve proved him over and over. Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus--oh, for grace, to trust him more!”*

- Do that now. Say, 'Jesus, I surrender and I am coming to you. I believe you died on a cross to save me from my sin and I accept that gift right now as my salvation from sin. Come into my life right now, I give my life to you. Amen.'