

Unmovable Trust

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 15th of October 2000. The preacher is Danny Saunders.

His sermon is entitled Unmovable Trust and is based on Psalm 125. Okay, well you might like to leave your Bibles open at page 498 as we work through Psalm 125 together.

As they marched through foreign lands, Allied troops in World War I would sing different melodies, one of which was, it's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go. These songs were sung so that the weary soldiers could fondly remember their great homeland, the country that they fought for, the place they longed to return to, the place that they could call home.

And so it is with this series of psalms. They're called Song of Ascent, the 15 Pilgrim Psalms from Psalm 120 through to Psalm 134. The people of Israel would come from everywhere to Jerusalem at different times in the year.

These 15 psalms reflect different stages in this journey to Jerusalem. They've been called soldiers' songs or travellers' hymns, pilgrim songs for those returning from exile or going up to Jerusalem for a feast.

[1 : 3 1] And they were probably sung in much the same manner as the World War I veterans, returning home after a campaign in one place or another. These psalms are also called songs of degrees or songs of ascent because each psalm reflects an ascent up a mountain or on a journey.

Each psalm in the series is a step along this path and they build on each other as they convey different truths about God and his relationship with his people. And so we come to Psalm 125.

Another step is taken in the ascent. Another station in the pilgrimage is reached. The pilgrims have witnessed past deliverances and victories and so in this psalm there is a rise in confidence and joy.

They sing that those who trust in the Lord will always be secure, no matter what oppression or wickedness might seem to prevail against them. And what about you?

If you were marching in World War I or in any war, singing as you go about Tipperary or the White Cliffs of Dover or that you come from a land down under, would you be full of optimism because you could trust in your God and hope for the future?

[2 : 4 9] Or would you be scared and alone because you did not know whether God was in control or whether he even cared? Are there situations that would cause you not to trust in God or to turn away from your faith?

Well, if there are such situations, this psalm is concerned about these things. This psalm spoke directly to the Israelites on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem and it speaks directly to you in whatever situation you may be concerned about.

Not only does it speak about our concerns in life, but it gives us reason to rest with reassurance that things will be okay. We are told this in verse 1. You see, those who trust in the Lord are first compared to Mount Zion.

This is because Mount Zion is a symbol of divine protection which cannot be moved but abides forever. Mount Zion stands unshakably firm.

It is God's mountain. The young adults Bible studies groups are studying the book of Daniel at the moment and they'll remember the stone cut from the mountain that destroys Nebuchadnezzar's statue and then becomes a great mountain that will stand forever.

[4 : 12] Well, this is a symbol of Mount Zion, a kingdom that will destroy all others, standing in its place and be an everlasting kingdom. Also, Mount Zion is a symbol of God's promises to Israel of land going back to Abraham.

It was to the writer of this psalm the visible guarantee of Israel's salvation and eternal hope. The pilgrims saw Mount Zion in the distance as they went along their journey. Its hills overlooked and encompassed Jerusalem.

It was symbolic of Israel's greatness and they had confidence that it would abide forever, forever as the guardian of Jerusalem and its people. This gave them confident joy in the present and future safety of God's people.

Mount Zion cannot be moved but abides forever. This psalm says to us that such unshakable stability is one of the marks of trusting God.

As it says, those who trust in God are like this. They are like Mount Zion. Therefore, here in verse 1, trusting God involves both a standing firm and a hope for the future or eternity, a trust that cannot be moved or shaken and that will last forever.

[5 : 34] These two things can't be separated. The next way this psalm encourages its readers is it compares God's people with Jerusalem.

In verse 2, As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people from this time on and forevermore. As the mountains and hills of Mount Zion surrounded the city, so now God's presence surrounds his people.

God is their guardian and their protector. This is why they could trust in the Lord. This is why in any situation which you have faced or will face, you can trust in God.

His will is to protect and preserve his people and this is why we can trust in him. We know that he wants to surround us and be with us both now and forever and so we can trust him.

Then we come to verse 3 that is perhaps the hardest part of this psalm to grasp when it says, For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, so the righteous might not stretch out their hands to do wrong.

[6 : 46] Well, we know that the land allotted or given to the righteous is Israel or Jerusalem and a scepter is a symbol of sovereignty, authority or power like the jeweled scepter or small staff that's held by the queen in the many photos that you've most probably seen of her.

Wickedness means evil or sin or rebellion against God and God's ways. So in this verse, it is a scepter of wickedness and so these two things are put together.

The scepter and the wickedness would mean the reign, power or authority of evil or sin. For the writer and the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem, this was a reminder.

It meant that as they came to the hills of Jerusalem, whether they were coming from exile as slaves in a foreign land or whether they came home only to find that wicked strangers were in control, we're not told which situation they're actually in.

But whatever their situation, they were reminded that this evil power would not be allowed to remain on their land. The Israelites assumed that this foreign power of wickedness could not remain because this land had been promised to Abraham.

[8 : 04] It was their inheritance. But even more than that, this verse is also saying that for the sake of his people, God will not allow such wickedness to remain in case God's own righteous people stretch out their hands to do evil.

To stretch out their hands to do evil would mean being tempted by the power of wickedness to do wrong. It means temptation. Stretching out their hands to do wrong would lead to participation in wickedness or rebellion against God.

Ultimately, it means to abandon faith, to turn away because of the pressure of the power of wickedness. It's been said that evil is always glad of having something to corrupt.

Well, a very simple illustration of this might be the cookie jar that's left open on the kitchen table. Little Johnny has been told that he must not eat cookies before dinner.

But the jar's been left open on the kitchen table. What is little Johnny going to do? He's a good boy and he trusts his mother and obeys her wishes. But the open cookie jar remaining on the table is tempting him to reach out his hand and take a cookie.

[9 : 19] The presence of the source of temptation makes it easy for little Johnny to stretch out his hand to do wrong. Well, maybe you're not tempted by an open cookie jar but you can think of ways that you are tempted to do wrong simply by the presence of something that is unrighteous.

It might be a person, a girlfriend or a boyfriend or a work environment that is that bad influence or it might be alcohol or drugs that always seem to tempt you.

For other people it might be the influence of magazines, movies or TV or is it the internet that can be such a readily available source of wickedness and evil.

Whatever it might be for you, the great promise of this psalm is that God not only surrounds his people and is with them but he will also guard his people against any assault on their faith and for this reason the scepter of wickedness will not be allowed to remain.

The psalmist's fear that fellow pilgrims might lose their trust in God is then picked up in verses 4 and 5 as the people are divided into those that remain loyal to their faith and trust in God and those that do not.

[10 : 41] Firstly, the writer prays for those who continue to trust and says in verse 4, Do good, O Lord, to those who are good and to those who are upright in their hearts. The psalmist seeks God's goodness and protection to those who are good and upright in heart, those who have faith, who stand firm and trust in him.

So this group would not abandon their faith or turn away from God. The flip side, of course, is found in verse 5, But to those who turn aside to their own crooked ways, the Lord will lead away with evildoers.

The writer of the psalm takes the result of turning away for granted. They will be led away. This is because he knows that those who have turned aside to their own crooked ways or to themselves and their own selfishness have abandoned their fellowship with God.

They have forfeited their right to the goodness and blessings that belong to God's people. So the psalm is saying that those who abandon fellowship with God who fall away are doomed to perish like other evildoers.

They're in the same boat. If you abandon God, God will ultimately abandon you. There's no middle ground. God cannot surround you or be with you because if you've turned aside to go your own way, you're saying to God, go away.

[12 : 08] I don't need you. I can do it myself in my own way. Or maybe this person might say, I believe in God but on my own terms, not on God's.

I won't accept the Bible. I won't accept Jesus as my personal saviour. I believe in God the way I want to. And off they go along their own path. And so we see from this psalm that there are two ways to live.

You either trust God or you don't. Well, we're seeing what this psalm meant in its immediate context but how is this psalm fulfilled in Jesus Christ and what are the implications for us today?

Well, if such unshakable stability of faith is one of the marks of trusting God, then our faith should also be like this. And this psalm gives us reason to have this trust.

Trust is taking something that's dear to you and that you value and then if you can put that thing in someone else's hands and feel confident that they will look after it and care for it in the same way that you would and do, well, that's trust.

[13 : 24] You demonstrate trust in a bank by putting money in it. You show faith in a doctor by trusting in times of illness. You prove your trust in a boat or a car by getting aboard, by getting in.

And in the same way, you'll know if you trust God because you'll be comfortable giving your most valued and precious possession to Him. You'll be comfortable knowing that your very own life is in God's hands and you trust Him with it.

You demonstrate your trust in Christ by trusting Him with your life and by receiving Him unconditionally as your Saviour. Well, this trust that we must have in God is like the story of a family that woke up to find their house on fire.

The parents woke up the children and led them out but their five-year-old slipped away and ran back upstairs. It wasn't until they were outside that they saw Him in the second-floor window surrounded by smoke.

His father yelled out to him, Jump! Jump! I'll catch you! The child protested, But Daddy, I can't see you! The father cried back, But I can see you and that's all that matters.

[14 : 43] Jump! Here in verse 1, trusting God involves both a standing firm and a hope for the future or for eternity.

A trust that cannot be moved or shaken and that will last forever. A trust that knows God is watching. A trust that rests comfortably in God's outstretched arms.

And a trust that relies on God to catch you when you fall. This psalm gives us reason to have this sort of trust in God because as you recall from verse 1, Mount Zion is a symbol of God's promises to Israel going back to Abraham.

It was to the writer the visible guarantee of Israel's salvation and eternal hope. Well, these promises and this salvation are found in Jesus. Mount Zion is a metaphor for the kingdom of God.

Isaiah prophesied that God would lay a foundation stone in Zion, a cornerstone, a sure foundation and the New Testament tells us that Jesus is this foundation, the foundation for the kingdom of God.

[15 : 54] God's kingdom or Mount Zion is found in Jesus. The cross is our symbol of God's promises.

Jesus and the cross are our Mount Zion. But there's also a final fulfillment to this psalm. Hebrews chapter 12 verse 22 says, You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable angels in festal gathering and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven and to God the judge of all and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.

Well, there are two implications to this. For the psalmist, we saw in verse 1 that trust in God and hope for eternity go hand in hand. So now we see that this has not changed but it's been fulfilled in Jesus.

We have even more to give us confidence and joy as now our trust in Jesus for salvation is to go hand in hand with our hope for heaven. Our trust in Jesus will endure forever as we go to live with him forever.

And this is because as Christians our citizenship is in heaven. We are receiving Mount Zion a kingdom that cannot be shaken cannot be moved but will abide forever.

[17 : 31] Well, the far-reaching implications of this psalm continue in verse 2 with the promise that as the mountains once surrounded the city so now God's presence surrounds his people.

Jesus, through the Holy Spirit is of course living in us and with us and he was named Emmanuel which means God is with us. Also, Revelation chapter 21 speaks of heaven as a place where the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them as their God. They will be his peoples and God himself will be with them. Well, this is not reason enough to rejoice with the psalmist along our own pilgrimage.

The implications of verse 3 is simply awesome. We saw in verse 3 that the scepter was defined as a symbol of power and that wickedness could be seen as evil or sin. The power of sin then is everything bad and evil in this world that remains here.

It is the devil's lies and empty temptation. This temptation leads us to sin or doing what we want without caring about God.

[18 : 43] And we know from the Bible that the ultimate result of sin or the payment for sin is death. Well, the devil also knows that sin will cause us to be separated from God and so he wants to use his power to tempt us to stretch out our hands to do wrong.

He wants to cause us pain and crying and darkness and suffering. But the good news in this psalm is that the power of sin will not rest on the land of the righteous.

The power of sin over those who trust in the Lord will not remain over them. It will not remain because Jesus has fully and finally defeated sin when he died on the cross and rose again.

You see, when Jesus died on the cross he took on the punishment for your sins and when Jesus rose from the dead he was showing that death had no power over him.

He had therefore defeated sin and he had defeated death. Jesus did this so that we could be freed from the power of sin and from our own hands or actions that do wrong.

[19 : 53] All those things that tempt you and prompt you to do wrong are harmless if your trust and faith are firmly rooted in the truth that Jesus has defeated sin.

Jesus is victorious over sin and death. The New Testament promises us that we will not be tested or tempted beyond what we can bear.

Well, this is because temptation is powerless when you remember and live in the victory of Jesus. Jesus won this victory for us so that we could be made righteous before God and so enter into the land of the righteous, the land that was promised to Abraham, promised to Israel and now finally promised to all those who put their trust in the Lord and do not turn away.

The heavenly fulfillment of verse 3 is that in God's kingdom not only will God be with us and surround us but his presence will mean that in heaven we will not live in a place where sin remains at all.

The power of sin will be no more. And that is why in Revelation 21 verses 4 to 5 it states that death will be no more.

[21 : 06] The result of sin will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more. These things will have passed away. Both the gospel and heavenly fulfillment of this psalm continue in verses 4 and 5.

The prayer is that the Lord would do good to those who are good and upright in heart. We need to assume here that the good are only those that are made right through their relationship with Jesus.

Jesus has defeated the power of sin over them. They are forgiven and their hands that do wrong are washed clean. There is no other way we can be good because we have all fallen short.

We have all been tempted and stretched out our hands to do wrong. We have all taken a cookie from the cookie jar. This prayer then speaks of all the love and joy and peace of mind and soul and all the other goodness that comes from knowing God.

Not just an end to the power of sin over you but a new beginning where God's love through his Holy Spirit can penetrate every part of your life and his presence can help you in every situation.

[22 : 22] As we know all things work for good for those that love and trust God. And again we also see a reason for our unshakable trust and hope in the heavenly fulfilment of this psalm.

If we persevere if we do not turn away we who trust in God will inherit the kingdom of God. These are the good things that we are promised God's goodness to us now and forevermore.

Well we've already seen that the flip side of this is found in verse 5. Remember there are only two ways to live.

You either trust God or you don't. This psalm is a warning to us. Don't mess around with sin. Don't take it lightly.

If you abandon God and turn to your own ways God will ultimately abandon you. And so we see this in verse 5 and we also see this fulfilled in the New Testament when we are told that Jesus himself will sit on his throne in judgement over all people.

[23 : 32] Jesus will separate those who trust in him for salvation and those that don't. Those that trust in him will receive their inheritance the kingdom of God Mount Zion that has been prepared for them since the creation of the world and those that don't trust Jesus for salvation will have no one to take the responsibility for their sins except themselves and so they'll be led away to eternal punishment.

They'll be led away with evildoers. The conclusion then for the psalmist is that the peace and the existence of the people of Israel are ultimately guaranteed only if their trust is firmly established in God and in the future promises of God's presence and an end to the reign of wickedness.

The psalmist and the pilgrims with him can then rest in the strength of this assurance and with a calm mind state simply peace be upon Israel. And so what is the conclusion for you?

With the same confidence can you also state that peace will come upon you? Are you at peace now? To answer this question all you need to ask is do you trust Jesus or don't you?

Have you jumped into God's outstretched arms with full confidence that he will never let you fall that he holds you forever? This psalm tells us that there are only two ways to live.

[25 : 07] One way will lead to goodness peace and the heavenly Mount Zion and one way will lead away with evildoers. Let's pray. Dear Father God we pray that those who do trust in you and what Jesus has done for them will continue to do so.

We pray that you would make their trust unshakable like Mount Zion and that they will continue to live with their trust and faith in Jesus so that they will be guarded from temptations and that they will know your presence with them always.

Dear Lord we also pray for those who may be in danger of turning away from you or who may not have accepted your free gift at all. We pray that these people come to know the great promises of this psalm for themselves.

Lord Jesus please give these people faith. Give them a yearning and a desire to know you more or to receive you as their saviour. Please remove whatever temptations or addictions that they have come in the way of their relationship with you.

Please open their eyes and show them your love and how they can live in your victory and in the hope of your goodness to them both now and always. We pray in Jesus' name.

[26 : 40] Amen.