

Mary's Trek: Making God Your Shelter
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Psalm 121
S-1803

● Background Slide #:

What does it do to your heart to realize that Mary didn't make it home for Christmas? (Repeat)

Sad: If anybody needed to be home for Christmas, it was Mary.

● Slide #: Luke 2:1-3: In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. 2 This was the first enrollment, when Quirin'i-us was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city.

● Slide #: Luke 2:4-5 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

● Slide #: Luke 2:6-7: And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. 7 And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

"No room for them in the inn!"

How many of us feel like that—or have felt like that.

We just need to go home...find a shelter...a refuge from some of the troubles that beset us.

So Mary and Joseph are on their way to Bethlehem to pay those taxes, and so all of that to say this – this isn't a joyous trip, it is like a trip to the IRS, or like going to the DMV to renew your license, that's not a joyous experience, so going to the dentist for a root canal or going to the doctor because your bowels are impacted.

Most pregnant women are told not to travel in their last trimester of pregnancy. Not Mary. She made the arduous trip in her ninth month on the back of a bouncing donkey. Sitting on the back of a donkey for Mary felt like she was dribbling a basketball in her abdomen. They both probably wondered if she'd go into labor on the road.

There were no Triple T truck stops to potty and buy a Snickers. Can you imagine how many pit stops poor Mary had to make?

Happy meals and Dairy Queen Blizzards could not be found along the way. The couple probably survived on stale bread, moldy cheese and a few dried figs.

And besides all of that her sandal straps were cutting blisters into her swollen ankles.

Thank God we all don't have to walk to Washington D.C. every year! What a pain!

You have to put yourself in their sandals and realize that they are going into an awkward situation. Like many of us, when we go home, family is going to be there. And they are going back to the place of their ancestry, which means there will be a little bit of a family reunion.

Certainly there is extended family that is going to be there and Mary is pregnant, but they are not married, they are engaged, and this is going to raise some eyebrows and raise some questions. I wonder if a lot of this ride was them strategizing about how they were going to reflect the questions.

Many of you know exactly what I'm talking about because you are strategizing right now. Right? Because everybody has some crazy relative with some weird fascination with your dating life, or you know, there is some situation that you don't want to talk about, like you're going to get one hundred questions about the job you lost in the last month, or family issues are going to come up and you naturally strategize how you're going to deflect the questions or change the subject or make sure I'm not alone with this particular relative.

Wise men come: Living in a house about two years before Herod came after them: Angel: "Get out of town and go to Egypt.

Herod died. Angel "Go back to Israel; Herod is dead."

Got there and Archelaus reigned in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and

Went north and settled in Nazareth.

And for the next 25 years, Mary and Jesus finally found shelter—a refuge—from the dangers of life.

Many of us need a shelter—a refuge—a home to shield us from the struggles of life. I want to talk about those shelters.

Sometimes events occur and we feel like a dry barren wind off a lonely

desert. And something inside us begins to melt.

At other times difficulties feel like a chilling mist. Seeping through our pores, it numbs the spirit and fogs the path before us.

Shelters are hard to find these days...you know, people who care enough to listen; who are good at keeping secrets.

Let me be painfully specific. Where do you turn when the bottom drops out of your life?

A woman discovers her husband is a practicing homosexual. Where in the church can she find help where she's secure with her secret?

Your spouse talks about separation or divorce. To whom in the church do you tell it?

Your daughter is pregnant, and she's run away - for the third time. She's no longer listening to you. Who do you tell that to?

You're in deep financial trouble.

Or your wife is having an affair.

Or a your husband is an alcoholic. Or something as horrible as getting back the biopsy from the surgeon, and it reveals cancer, and the prognosis isn't good.

Or you had an emotional breakdown. To whom do you tell it?

What do you need when circumstances of your life and threaten to engulf you with pain and confusion?

You need a shelter, a listener. Someone who understands.

Thomas Carlyle: "Friends are sheltering trees.

Travelers along the journey with us. They can understand and help.

Human help is wonderful, but, it is always human

But, to whom do you turn when there is no one to tell your troubles to?

Where do you find shelter?

Like to call our attention to a man who found his refuge and shelter in the Living Lord.

His name? David.

Cornered, bruised by adversity, and struggling with low self-esteem, he wrote Psalm 31.

●Slide #: Psalm 31:1-2: In you, O LORD, do I seek refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! 2 Incline your ear to me, rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!

David cries out for a “refuge.”

The Hebrew term speaks of safety, security, secrecy. He tells Jehovah God that He was looking to Him for refuge.

Let me give you an example of what finding God as refuge might just look like.

Journal: September, 25, 1982

Problems with relocation; exhausted, afraid of what the people will think: If God can take 2 fish and 5 loaves then He can handle any financial needs we have.

I want to explore this idea of God being our refuge, our shelter in times of need.

Psalm 121: A song of ascents.

Psalms of Ascents: 120-134: journey up to the high places of the Temple.

Psalm 120 unfolds with the pilgrim still far from home. He looks to the hills in the distance and wonders and probably fears what might be on the other side. He anticipates the long, arduous journey ahead and wishes he could be home in the blink of an eye.

Songs written for Pilgrims returning to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity.

15 steps leading up to temple.

All begin with a distress call—not a bad place to begin a journey.

Sometimes the best motivation we'll ever have for going someplace else is distress in someplace old.

Life can change in the blink of an eye. All well, go to office, job deleted,

doctor visit more serious than imagined.

Thought you and your spouse were fine, learned through a third party that you are not.

Journal: February 14, 1996

It seems that I always turn to you when I hurt...lot to be thankful for; hurting about Bronwyn

A Song of Ascents.

●Slide #: I lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence does my help come? 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.

●Slide #: 5 The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. 6 The sun shall not smite 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 for evermore.

●Slide #: Psalm 121:1-2: I lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence does my help come? 2 My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

“Maker of Heaven and Earth” reminds us that all is God’s turf. We are on His territory.

Creator: Some powerful God to help him on his journey.

Quantum Enigma: instant special communication

Slit illustration: time runs backwards

●Slide #: Psalm 121:3 He will not let your foot slip—

An ancient traveler made his journey primarily by foot. Terrain could be treacherous. A twisted ankle or a broken foot could leave him stranded far from water. It could have been his ticket to the grave.

Brie and platform, spiked heels
Dislocated knee, broke wrist, sprained ankle
Now owns 20 pair of Target flats.

Some in danger of slipping:
Heart or Back surgery
Role change at work
Spouse left
Children
Depressed

Sister Dede died of breast cancer: buried her last week in Dallas.

Journal: 10-20-98
\$1,400 relocation check

Still standing. God is our refuge. Never could have survived without Him as a refuge.

•Slide #: Psalm 121:3b-4: he who keeps you will not slumber. 4 Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Ancient pagan peoples commonly held the notion that god's slept, or hibernated, or even died during the winter months. The protector of Israel does not slumber or sleep.

Journeys long enough that they necessitated sleeping somewhere along the way.

Perhaps the wind whistled eerily around them.

Perhaps a wild dog howled in the distance.

Scariest still, perhaps a bandit lurking nearby waited for them finally to sleep before creeping into camp to rob and decimate them.

When they were too exhausted to go on, they reassured themselves that Yahweh wouldn't blink an eye. Why? Because some one had best stay awake.

Never Slumbers:

Airport: Dry mouth: “I was snoring, wasn’t I? If I do it again, some one poke me in the ribs.”

Never Sleeps: Fore arm shiver dream.

He never wakes up suddenly with a start when the earth rumbles beneath our feet and be confused about what is going on.

•Slide #: Psalm 121:5: “The LORD is your keeper...”

“The LORD is your keeper” is the overarching message of this Psalm.

58 syllables before and 58 syllables after it.

Center stage is not enough for David.

Repeated the word numerous times.

English uses several different words used to make reading easier and less repetitious—as keep, watch over, guard, to keep

But David uses the same word every time.

Read 121:7-8 from RSV

Psalmist was not concerned with the variety of words such as keep, watch over, guard, to keep the singer engaged, he repeated the point over and over again until they got it.

God tends to us. Watches over us. He never entrusted the job to anyone else. At no time does God abdicate our guardianship to an angel, regardless of how mighty.

•Slide #: Psalm 121:5-6: The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. 6 The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.

Anyone who lives in a miserably hot climate knows the threat posed by heat stroke to those traveling in the semi-desert in the blazing sun. Need shade

“It is getting hot around here.” He is our shade: our shelter from the

scorching sun of life.

Reference to being moon struck is much less common and much more intriguing.

In the ancient world, common belief that seizures were the result of long or intense exposure to the haunting effects of the moon.

Matthew 17:15: "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water."

Moonstruck is the literal rendering of the Greek word.

17:15: "He is a lunatic..." is proper translation.

Praise God, he protects us even when our superstitions mislead us.

Won't die until finish book

Ricky laughs out loud! "What are you thinking? Do you really think that is true? Do you really think God works like that?"

"You are thinking like a lunatic!"

- Slide #: Psalm 121:7-8: 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 for evermore.

But, what if our feet have slipped?

What if we have been hurt on our journey?

Dangerous world.

No temptation—way of escape

- Slide #: 1 Corinthians 10:13: No trouble has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not allow you to have troubles beyond what you can bear. But when you are tried, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

What does it look like when God is our refuge?

Must be willing

- Slide #: Jesus in Matthew 23:37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather

your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Find a place and have deep intimate times in His presence.

JOURNAL: January 31, 1983

Not seeking god enough and it is costing me

Journal: September 22, 1982

Overcome with depression: You will be victorious

Journal: December 19, 1998

Relocation: Red Sea experience can handle mine