

## Sacred practice of reviewing God's help

Psalm 124

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Date: October 23rd 2016

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### Psalm 124

<sup>1</sup> If the LORD had not been on our side—let Israel say—

<sup>2</sup> if the LORD had not been on our side when enemies attacked us,

<sup>3</sup> when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive;

<sup>4</sup> the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us,

<sup>5</sup> the raging waters would have swept us away.

<sup>6</sup> Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

<sup>7</sup> We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped.

<sup>8</sup> Our help is in the name of the LORD,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.

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### Sacred practice of reviewing God's help -

Psalm 124

*Reviewing the hazards that could have destroyed us,  
if not for the LORD on our side*

**"WHAT IF...?"**

When I read this psalm on Tuesday morning, I remember thinking as I read it, *I'm not sure if I can relate very well to this Psalm* because *I'm not* under attack by any *enemies* who might *swallow me up alive*, nor am I being *threatened* by a *natural calamity* that could *sweep me away* like a raging torrent, and I'm *not* feeling *trapped by circumstances* beyond my control.

I wondered whether I'd have *anything personal* I could share with you about how this psalm *relates to my life!*

Turns out that's quite a *dangerous thing to start wondering* about when you're preparing to preach on a psalm *like this one!*

Because, by the time *Thursday morning* had come around when I was starting to write this message, Psalm 124 had become a *whole lot more relevant* to me by then- *as you'll see!*

Psalm 124 is one of the *15 Psalms of Ascent* that were sung by Hebrew pilgrims as they journeyed from their homes from all over Israel, to the temple in Jerusalem for one of the three religious festivals: *Passover, Pentecost* and *Tabernacles* (actually its *feast of Tabernacles* time write now for the Jewish people).

As they travelled to Jerusalem they used to *sing these songs of ascent, each one of which describes a sacred practice for helping people grow as followers of Yahweh, on their spiritual journey toward God.*

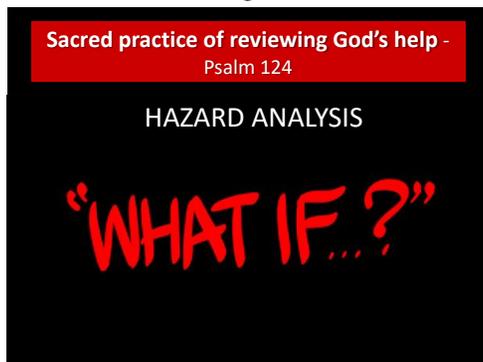
Although the New Covenant *doesn't* require us to go to Jerusalem to *celebrate* the *Hebrew religious feasts*, like they did back then, nevertheless *each of these 15 Psalms describes a sacred practice that is just as applicable for helping us grow as followers of Jesus on our sacred journey toward God!*

Psalm 124 teaches us: **1a**  
the *sacred practice of reviewing the hazards that could have destroyed us, if not for the Lord on our side!*

*I think Psalm 124 is a kind of spiritual health & safety review, here's why.*

### **Hazard Analysis: "What if?"**

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When I applied to the *Western Bay District Council* for approval for *the Ocktoberfest Fun Run* to go around the perimeter of *Jubilee Park*, I was sent a *hazard analysis form* - that I had to fill in and return by evaluating "what if?" every conceivable (and inconceivable) hazard occurred in the Fun Run.

Like:

- *What if* a runner ran in front of a car and the driver didn't see them?
- *What if* there was *really bad weather* and the roads were *flooded*?
- *What if* there were *other users in the park* that the runners might run into?
- *What if* someone *collapsed from exhaustion* or had a *heart attack*?
- *What if* someone went the *wrong way*?
- *What if* there was an *electrical fault* in any electrical equipment?

*What if?* questions are *part and parcel* of a *hazard assessment* for a *health & safety review*.

Which is why I think *Psalm 124* is a kind of *spiritual health & safety review*, because it begins by asking "*What if?*"

"*What if* the LORD had *not been on our side*- Israel?"  
Then continues:

"*What if* the LORD had not been on our side when enemies attacked us, when their anger flared against us... and the people reply: "*they would have swallowed us alive!*" (like a *scary dragon swallowing its prey!*)

But that's not the only hazard that could have destroyed them.

"*What if* we're *engulfed by a flood and swept away?*"

"*What if* we're *attacked by the sharp teeth of those wanting to tear us apart with their nasty words?*"

"*What if* we're *snared by hunters wanting to trap us like prey?*"

These are *dangerous hazards* identified by the "*what ifs?*" of Psalm 124.

As the Hebrew pilgrims traveled the *long dusty road to Jerusalem* at a time when Israel was *surrounded by political enemies* who wanted to *eliminate them* like a dragon swallowing its prey,

They had *little protection from natural calamities* - like being swept away by a flood.

And they were socially vulnerable *social advancement* to the powerful members of society who got what they wanted with *abusive words*, or by *ensnaring people* into doing what they *didn't want to do*.

So you could say *nothing much has changed* in regards to these *political, natural and social hazards of life!*

Which means Psalm 124 invites us to ask the same "*what if?*" questions to identify the hazards *we face* in life.

*What's different* about the "*what if?*" questions of Psalm 124 from the "*what if?*" questions the Western Bay District Council required me to ask for the *Fun Run health & safety review?*

What's different is that a typical *health & safety review* just asks the question "*What if something goes wrong?*"

Whereas Psalm 124 asks the people, "*What if these hazards had happened **without** the LORD being on our side?*"

And that's what *sets the Psalm apart* from your *usual health & safety review*.

The Psalm asks the Israelite pilgrims to *remember the times* when *they'd experienced natural, political or social hazards* that they'd gotten through **because** *the LORD was on their side!*

And the Psalm *invites us to **do the same!***

You see there's *something sacred, something spiritual, something significant-* that *readies us for the journey ahead* when we review the *difficult circumstances* we've been through, that we *wouldn't have gotten through*, if not for the LORD **on our side!**

A few Sundays ago Raewyn and I had *Kingsley and Maree Morris* from *Picton Baptist church* around for afternoon tea. They're in the process of raising support to be *missionaries in Mali*, and we invited anyone interested to join us for afternoon tea with them.

Among those who came was *Hermon*, a Christian from *Eretria* who had moved to *Eretria* as a young man, for work. But when war broke out between *Eretria* and *Ethiopia*, all the men of eligible age, including *Hermon*, were conscripted into the *Eretrian army* to fight against *Ethiopia*. But because he didn't want to fight against his own countrymen, *Hermon* escaped and fled to *Ethiopia*.

But in *Ethiopia*, anyone now returning from *Eretria* who could have been in the *Eretrian army*, were under suspicion of being a spy.

When the war finally ended, *Hermon couldn't go back to Eretria* because he was as a deserter from the *Eretrian army*.

But *neither could he stay in Ethiopia* because he was still under suspicion of being a spy.

He was a *political refugee* with no where he could go.

Imagine being in that situation if you *didn't have the Lord on your side!*

But *Hermon did!* And he was eventually *granted political asylum in New Zealand*, where he's been living for the past 8 years.

He's here *pruning Kiwifruit in Te Puke*,

and has a *wonderful testimony* of how he became a *born again follower of Jesus*, which I'm sure he'd be happy to tell you about if you meet him at church.

Although *our* political situation is *nothing like as hazardous as that*, Psalm 124 also invites us to reflect on "*what if the Lord **hadn't** been on our side through the natural (and unnatural) hazards we've gone through* such as:

*floods, fire, hail storm, psa, sickness, accident, contamination, loss of a loved one... and whatever else you might've been through!*

And "*what if the Lord hadn't been on our side through the social hazards we've experienced* such as:

*sibling rivalry, redundancy, bankruptcy, broken trust, marital strife, abuse, peer pressure, exclusion, intimidation... and whatever else you might've been through!*

Psalm 124 teaches us the *sacred practice of reviewing the hazards that could have destroyed us, **if not for the Lord on our side!***

### Help assessment "Praise be!"

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After all the *hazards* have been identified in a *Health & safety review*, the *next* thing that's done is an *assessment* of how to *isolate, eliminate or minimise* the hazards to *keep people safe*.

Psalm 124 does something *similar but **different*** to that,

as it proceeds with the sacred practice of a ***spiritual health & safety review***.

What's *different* about Psalm 124 (from a modern day health & safety review), is that it **doesn't** say *anything* about what can be done to *isolate, minimise, or eliminate* any of the hazards identified in the Psalm! You'd think it would, *but it **doesn't!***

Instead it *praises God* for getting the Hebrew pilgrims *safely through and out of the natural, political and social hazards* they'd experienced thus far!

Let's look at it again.

The Psalm says that *enemies have attacked us, their anger has flared against us, that a flood came, sharp teeth were out to tear us apart and we've been trapped in the fowlers snare **But.....***

<sup>6</sup> *Praise be* to the LORD, who **has not let us** be torn by their teeth.

<sup>7</sup> *We **have escaped*** like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare **has been broken**, and **we have escaped**.  
[How? Because:]<sup>8</sup>

Our help is in the **name of the LORD**, the Maker of heaven and earth! **4a**

In this psalm:

*political hazards* are likened to a *dragon swallowing its prey*, *natural hazards* are described as like being *swept away by a flood* *social hazards* are portrayed as like being *bitten by a wild animal's teeth* or *caught in a hunters snare*.

But in this *second part* of the *spiritual health & safety review* the Psalm *praises the LORD* for *helping us get through and get out of every hazard we've ever faced!*

The LORD is *our dragon slayer* who *snatches us out* of the enemies mouth!

The LORD is *our lifeguard* who *saves us* from being *swept away by natural calamities!*

The LORD is our *defense attorney* who silences *our prosecutors condemning words!*

The LORD is our *rescuer* who *frees us* from the *hunters snare!*

I don't know what *hazards* you've been *experiencing lately* maybe *you're like me* (at the start of the week) thinking the *hazards of Psalm 124* don't really relate- because things are going *just fine*.

If *that's you* then remember *we never know what's just around the corner!*

Like I said on Tuesday morning everything was going just fine, but *by Thursday morning* I had a *much better appreciation* of Psalm 124!

Here's how that eventuated:

On Tuesday morning, when I was still thinking things were going *swimmingly well*, I opened an email from someone I knew entitled "FYI"  
And the email message read:

"I emailed this to you earlier today but just in case you have not received it . Please see attached documents."

I thought it could be something important that I should read, so *in spite of a warning message* from my computer security software: *'Not to click on the link if I didn't trust the site it was about to take me to'* - since I knew who'd sent it- *I clicked on the link!*

Those of you who are in my *email contact list* will know what happened next!

Turned out the email I'd opened was a *malicious* one and *not* from the person it said it was from.

So when I clicked on the link it *infected my computer with a virus* that *accessed my email contacts directory* and sent everyone in it, the *same malicious email* that I had received- as if it was *from me!*

Psalm 124, suddenly became a *whole lot more relevant to me* in the midst of this *computer virus hazard* I'd fallen victim too!

*I'd been attacked by a cyber enemy,*  
*who'd swallowed my email contact list whole,*  
*I was being flooded by emails and phone calls from people*  
*who'd received a malicious email from me.*  
*I felt like the trust people had placed in my emails I sent*  
*them - had now been swept away!*  
*I could feel the sharp teeth of those who thought I'd*  
*deliberately or negligently sent it,*  
*I'd been snared in a trap and I couldn't get out of it!*

So I did the only thing I could think of doing at 10:30 at night- *I asked God for help!*

And then sent out emails to everyone in my contact list- warning them *not to open an email from me entitled "FYI"!*

Next morning I gingerly opened up my emails again, wondering what further *cyber hazards* were lurking there!  
Amongst the hundreds of replies to the warning I'd sent out the night before, was a reply from Peter Edwards (owner of *Vision Lab* - a computer services company in town).

He'd tracked down the virus and diagnosed what I needed to do to clean up my computer to ensure *I didn't re-infect anyone else!*

So I checked with Michael Cumming to make sure I was doing the right thing then carefully following Peter Edwards instructions about what I should do.

When I eventually resumed preparing this morning's message on Psalm 124, the psalm was now a *whole lot more relevant to me!*

Finally I felt like I could *praise the Lord*, that I *hadn't* been *swallowed by a cyber dragon* or *torn by angry teeth*.  
I'd been released from the *cyber hunters snare!*

God had *used a computer expert* to help me,  
But I *can still say- My help is in the name of the LORD,*  
*the Maker of heaven and earth and the internet!*

Although the *cyber hazard* I fell victim to this week,  
*is nothing* in comparison to some of the *natural, political and social hazards* people are victim to around the world-  
it's helped me realise *why the sacred practice of Psalm 124 is important for me to be practicing too!*

Psalm 124 teaches me and you the *sacred practice of reviewing the hazards* that *could have destroyed us*,  
if it *wasn't for the help of the Lord!*

<sup>1</sup> If the LORD had not been on our side—*let Te Puke Baptist Church say—*

<sup>8</sup> Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth!