

Unshakeable!

Psalm 125

By pastor Ken Keyte

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1



Psalm 125

A song of ascents.

¹ Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.

² As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people both now and forevermore.

³ The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil.

⁴ Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart.

⁵ But those who turn to crooked ways the LORD will banish with the evildoers.

Peace be upon Israel.

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever!

These are *reassuring words* for anyone who has experienced the devastating power of an *earthquake*, like the one that struck *Kaikoura* three weeks ago.

Or for anyone who's suffered any other kind of *physical, emotional, relational or spiritual* "earthquake" that's shaken your life some how.

Psalm 125 teaches us the sacred practice of *unshakeability*. **1a** by reassuring us that:
 we are *unshakeable by evil*,
 and we're *unshakeable from falling away*,
 because we have a *supernatural defender* surrounding us—none other than the *Lord God Almighty!*

The Psalms *metaphor* for the *unshakeability* is the *mountains protectively surrounding Jerusalem*, the way *God* protectively surrounds his people.

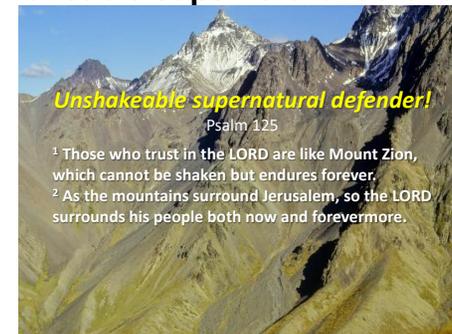
This metaphor would have been *obvious* to the *Hebrew pilgrims* as they made their way through the mountains surrounding Jerusalem for the three annual religious festivals of *Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles*.

You see Jerusalem owed much of its *physical security* from enemy attack, to the mountains that *encircled her*.

(The mountains in this photo aren't actually the mountains surrounding Jerusalem, they're the Kaikoura's in case you were wondering!)

So as the pilgrims sang this Psalm of Ascent, while on their way up to Jerusalem, the mountains surrounding the city were a visual image of their *eternal unshakeability* because the LORD *surrounds those who trust in him* like the mountains *encircling Jerusalem*.

Unshakeable supernatural defender (2)



Back in biblical times cities needed *elaborate defense systems* to make them safe from *enemy attack*.

Even though Jerusalem was *surrounded by mountains*, the book of Nehemiah describes the huge effort that went into *rebuilding the city walls* after the Israelites returned from exile in Babylon.

People build *all kinds of defensive systems* to protect themselves from *all sorts of harm*.

Psychologist Sigmund Freud observed that a *major drive* for people is the *reduction of tension* and that the *major cause* of tension is *anxiety*. He *theorised* that when anxiety occurs, a range of *defense mechanisms* are *triggered* that *unconsciously operate* to *distort or falsify reality* and thereby *relieve anxiety* for the person.

Freud proposed a number of *psychological defense mechanisms*.

Maybe you can recognise some of these that you've subconsciously used to *quell your fears*:

1. *Denial*- believing that what is true is actually false
2. *Displacement*- taking out our reaction on a less threatening target
3. *Intellectualization*- avoiding unacceptable emotions by focusing on the intellectual aspects of the threat
4. *Projection*- attributing uncomfortable feelings to others
5. *Rationalization*- creating false but believable justifications for what's going on
6. *Reaction Formation*- taking the opposite belief because the true belief causes anxiety
7. *Regression*- going back to a previous stage of development
8. *Repression*- pushing uncomfortable thoughts out of conscious awareness
9. *Suppression*- consciously forcing unwanted thoughts out of our awareness
10. *Sublimation*- redirecting 'wrong' urges into socially acceptable actions.

People of faith have the same needs for *protection and security* as anyone else. We're *no better* than others in that regard.

But what *is different* however, is that we *don't* have to build our own *psychological defense mechanisms* because we have an *unshakeable supernatural defender* in God himself who *surrounds us* protecting us from *harm!*

I wonder *what defense mechanisms* might have been *triggered in Mary* when she received the *shocking news* from the angel that although she was *unmarried* she would become *pregnant to the Holy Spirit*, and *give birth* to the *Son of God!*

I wonder what *defense mechanisms* were *triggered in Joseph* when the angel told him *not to be afraid of taking Mary as his wife*, because the *child conceived in her* was *from the Holy Spirit*, and was to be *named Jesus* because he will *save the people from their sins!*

I wonder *what defense mechanisms* were triggered in *Joseph and Mary* when the *Emperor Augustus decreed a census* was to be taken requiring them to make the *long arduous journey* from their home in *Nazareth*, to Joseph's ancestral home of *Bethlehem* - and that they would have to *make this arduous journey* right when *Mary was due!*

Joseph and Mary would've taken the *same well worn road* that thousand of Israelites took every year for the *religious festivals*, except their *destination wasn't Jerusalem*, instead they would've continued on *past the mountains* surrounding the Holy City, and on to *Bethlehem about 10km* further south.

The *sight of these mountains* may well have prompted them to *sing Psalm 125* to reassure them by the site of these mountains and the words of verse 2 that, "*as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD WAS surrounding Mary and Joseph both now and forevermore!*"

They would've needed this kind *unshakeable reassurance* to have *followed through* on the angel's *terrifying instructions* the way they did.

They would've needed to know that they were *surrounded by an unshakeable supernatural defender*, none other than the *Lord God Almighty*, like the mountains *surrounding Jerusalem*, as they followed through with *their part* in God's *salvation plan!*

Although the *time* and the *place* and the *instructions* are different for you and I, the same *sacred practice of unshakeability* still applies for us today!

Because Psalm 125 reassures *us* that *everyone* who trusts in the Lord, is surrounded by a *supernatural defender*- none the *LORD God Almighty!*

Which means the *only defense mechanism* you or I need, is to *trust in the LORD!*

Unshakeable by evil

3



All the same *we do become anxious*, and *slip into apprehension* and *fearfulness*, we do become *uncertain and insecure*.

The book of *Genesis* describes the world we live in as "*fallen*" and under the *curse of God* because *humankind* has *rejected our maker*. The *letter of Romans* explains the *consequence of this* as the *whole of creation groaning like it's in labour pains* as it awaits *liberation from its bondage to decay*.

Which is why the world can *often be a very scary place* to live in! Like it's recently been for the *people of Kaikoura*.

Not because of any particular *people's sin*, as *Bishop Brian Tamaki* has controversially preached, but because of *all humankind's collective rejection of God!*

But *even closer to home!*

On Thursday morning, during our Health & Safety meeting, one of our committee members, *Duane Knight*, received a *text from school to pick up his son* because there'd been a *bomb scare* at school.

Thankfully it was a *false alarm!* But *even innocent children* fall prey to the *threat of evil* in our fallen world!

Once again Psalm 125 provides *unshakeable reassurance* for those who trust in the LORD when it says that,

³ The Scepter [or power] of the wicked *will not remain over the land* allotted to the righteous, for then *the righteous* might use *their hands to do evil*.

Whoever wrote this psalm would've been *very familiar* with Israel's *up and down history*. We can *read about it* in the books of *Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Chronicles, and Kings*.

This *up and down pattern* is *particularly evident* in the book of *Judges*. Read it right through and you'll notice a *recurring pattern* that goes like this:

The *Israelites again* did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and so the LORD *strengthened* King [x] *against Israel*. So the Israelites *served* King [x] of nation [y] for [z] years. But when the Israelites *cried out to the LORD*, the LORD *raised up for them a deliverer* Judge [A] of tribe [B] who *delivered Israel* from King [x].

The Bible shows how this *up and down historical pattern* of Israel like in the book of *Judges* *Judges* was repeated *over and over again!*

The book of *Judges* *explains why this was so*. It says that God deliberately allowed *neighbouring nations to exist* for the *purpose of testing Israel*,

to see whether Israel would *obey* God's commandments *or not*.

So the *Israelites* lived beside the *Canaanites*, the *Hittites*, the *Amorites*, the *Perizzites*, the *Amorites*, the *Perizzites*, the *Hivites*, and the *Jebusites* so that whenever Israel got *too far off track* from obeying God's laws, *one of these nations* would be *raised up by God* to *rule over Israel* for the purpose of *turning them back to God*.

This *up and down pattern* of Israel's history continued right through till the *time of Jesus' birth*.

Israel found herself *once again* under *foreign rule*, this time under the powerful *Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus*, who *decreed a census* be taken requiring *Joseph and Mary* to travel to *Bethlehem*.

At this *dangerous point* in Israel's history, I think Psalm 125 verse 3, would have been especially *reassuring for them*.

³ The scepter of the wicked *will not remain over the land* allotted to the righteous, -

This verse also *hints at God's master salvation plan*.

Although God had *raised up* other nations to *rule over God's people* to test their faithfulness to the LORD, yet God *would not allow* any *wicked ruler* to remain over them for *longer than necessary*, because he was *sending a saviour* to *deliver them from evil* once and for all!

You see God's *master salvation plan* was *not* for his people to go through history in the same *repetitive and up and down pattern* like they had been ever since they *first set out for the promised land*! This time God was *sending his very own Son* to *deliver all God's people from evil* for evermore!

Although the *time* and the *place* and the *people* and the *rulers* are different, *God's master salvation plan* is *still in action today*!

God *did not* send Jesus into the world as *just another deliverer* to rescue his people *all over again*!

He sent his *very own Son* into the world to *deliver all of God's people* so we can stop *perpetuating this up and down pattern* once and for all!

Which is why verse 3 provides such *unshakeable reassurance* for *us today*!

Although *we live* in a *tiny nation* at the *mercy of powerful rulers* from across the seas.

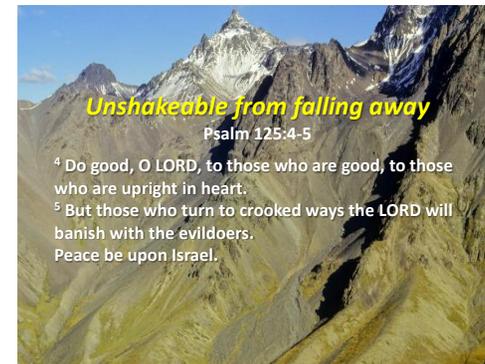
Although *we live* under a *government* that *often* makes *ungodly laws*.

Although *we live* beside *people* who *don't know Jesus* and who *ignore his ways*.

Yet *we know* the power of evil *will not remain over our land*, because *we serve the Saviour* who has *come to deliver us from all evil*, Jesus Christ the Lord!

Unshakeable from falling way

4



Psalm 125 finishes with a *prayer*.

⁴ Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart.

⁵ But those who turn to crooked ways the LORD will banish with the evildoers.

Peace be upon Israel.

It's a *prayer for our relationship with God* to be so *unshakeable* that it would be *impossible for us to ever fall away*!

The Bible records a few examples of people who *once had followed Jesus* but *then turned away*.

Judas would be the most *infamous*!

But there's also *Hymenaeus and Alexander* who "*made shipwreck of their faith*" it says in 1 Timothy 1:19-20.

When the way of Jesus *gets difficult*, it can become *very tempting* to take *what looks like an easier alternative path*.

Distracted and diverted they *slip off* and *fall away*!

I have a sister who I worry may have turned off on another path and fallen away.

Eugene Petersen in his book '*A long obedience in the same direction*' writes:

'If it is possible to fall away, how do I know that *I won't*- or even worse that *I haven't*? How do I know that *I have not already lost faith*, especially during times when I am depressed or have one calamity after another piled on me?

Such insecurities need to be confronted directly. We have our *ups and downs*, zealously believing one day and gloomily doubting the next, but he is faithful. We break our promises, but he doesn't break his. Discipleship is not a contract in which *if we break our part of the agreement* He is free to *break His*; it is a covenant in which *He* establishes the conditions and *guarantees the results*!

Certainly *you may quit if you wish*. You may say "*no*" to God, you may *choose the crooked way*. But that *is not the kind of thing you fall into by chance or slip into by ignorance*. Falling away requires a *deliberate, sustained and determined act of rejection*.'

So we are *secure* not because we are *sure of ourselves* but because we *trust that God is sure of us*!

As *Mary and Joseph* arrived at *Bethlehem* to discover there was *no room for them at the Inn*, it must have been very tempting at that point for them to *doubt what the Angel had told them* and begin looking for *another way*.

"The Lord's angel tells us we're going to be parents of God's son, yet God can't even organise accommodation for us in Bethlehem!"

But perhaps at this point they prayed Psalm 125's *closing prayer*.

"Do good to us, O Lord, for we are among those who are good and upright."

Then after Jesus was born their faith was *tested again* when the angel warned Joseph they *must flee to Egypt* because *King Herod* was searching for the child to *destroy any rival* to his throne.

Joseph and Mary may have found reassurance in the last line of Psalm 125,

' those who turn to crooked ways the LORD will banish with the evildoers.'

And *even more reassurance* in the closing *blessing* of the Psalm.

"Peace (shalom) be upon Israel" because they knew that the *Prince of peace* had just been *born*!

Last Sunday I invited everyone to take one of these little road signs that point the way ahead for us as a church with our five emphases for 2017.

On it, it says:

'My commitment for 2017 (2 Tim 1:6-7)

Helping people become followers of Jesus by:

- prayerfulness- our power source
- spiritual gift development/ relational mentoring
- courageousness in sharing the good news
- Unconditional, inclusive love for others
- Self discipline- what's ours to do, what's not?'

And I gave you a 48 hr challenge to spend some time before the Lord, prayerfully asking God to show you what he wants you to commit to for each of these five pointers for the year ahead.

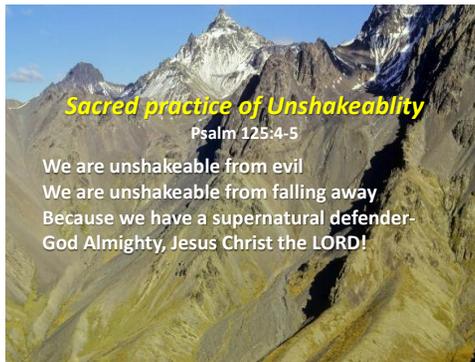
The first of those pointers for 2017, is how we carry out the sacred practice of *unshakeability*- through *prayerfulness* our power source.

My commitment to prayerfulness in 2017, is that I'm committing to *starting up a men's mid week prayer breakfast* next year, for guys who would value meeting together for an hour to:

- have breakfast and coffee together,
- to read and chat about the *Word for Today together*,
- and then to pray together before heading off to work or whatever we've got on in the day.

I think this would be a great way to carry out the sacred practice of *unshakeability in 2017!*

5



Psalm 125 teaches us the *sacred practice of unshakeability* by reassuring us that:

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and we are unshakeable from falling away,
because we have a *supernatural defender* surrounding us-
none other than *God Almighty, Jesus Christ our Lord!*