

Never Without Help
Psalm 124 and James 5:13-20
26 September 2021

I wonder, friends – have you got a **favorite psalm**? Chances are, you **do**... although **maybe** you appreciate so **many** of the psalms that you really **can't** call **one** of them your **favorite**. There's no question that, over the centuries, the psalms have been treasured - **treasured** because they articulate with skill, subtlety and power the most profound, deeply felt emotions we humans have: Joy... wonder... shame... utter abandonment... abject desperation... anger... longing... unquenchable hope... and, in the psalm we've focused on **today**, **thankfulness**... thankfulness over having been **saved** by God.

By the way – **Have** you been saved? (Have you ever been asked that question?) *Have you been saved by **God**?*

People – even Presbyterians! – do **sometimes** experience themselves **being** saved by God... being saved from one thing or another... saved in any number of ways: Saved from sickness... saved from their enemies... saved from **themselves**, sometimes – from bad decisions they've made or foolish steps they've taken... **being** saved from depression, despondency... from guilt and its isolating loneliness... saved from a frightening sense of being **alienated** from God and **unable** to do a **thing** about it... saved from “**many** dangers, toils and snares”... saved **by** God, thanks be **to** God! And if, in some way, **you've** experienced God saving **you**, then the joy and **thanksgiving** that erupt in Psalm 124 is **surely** something you can relate to!

It is a profound **Christian** confession (not a **universal** confession, but certainly a **Christian** confession) that God **does save** people...that God is not **impassive**, removed, or unmoved by our various plights... but is **concerned** and **active** in providing relief and release... that God is not **against** us... or neutral about us... as some suspect or believe... but, rather, that God is profoundly **for** us... is, in fact, so **profoundly** for us that, finally, **nothing** can **actually** be against us... not **effectively** against us. God **works** in wondrous ways... in inscrutable ways at times... to **save** us in all kinds of ways, and to save us from all kinds of harm. I **suppose** that **sometimes**, in order to be **for** us, God has to work against us... has to work against **our** working against God. But then, even **that's** all part of God's working **for** us. It's a **way** that God acts to save. Thanks be to God! God is for us.

God saves people. God saves **us**! How **amazingly** good that is! What astonishing good **news** that is! You'd **think** that, in **light** of that news, we'd almost **float** through life! But we don't. Not **many** of us, anyway. Just as we're only occasionally aware of how incredibly **beautiful** the sky is... or what a **blessing** it is just to **breathe**... a **lot** of us find that our consciousness of God's saving mercies frequently fades when we become absorbed by the pains and pleasures, the demands and responsibilities, of everyday life. God's great grace, **sometimes**, is lost on us. Sadly, maybe a **lot** of the time.

But, it seems **not** to have been lost on **James**. In the portion of his letter that we read this morning, James was **insistent**: *Whatever it is that's going on in your life, bring **it** to God. Bring God to **it**. Bring God's presence and power to bear upon it.* Are you suffering? **Pray** to God. Are you cheerful? Sing **praise** to God. Are you sick? Get others to **call** on God to help you. Are you **sin-sick**... entangled... maybe with others... in a sense of shame over something you've done or failed to do? Take it **together** to our merciful God. Let the Lord of mercy have **his** way with you... with you **all**. And be **reconciled**. Do you have a **concern** for someone who's in peril? Are you bearing a **burden** for another soul? Bring your concern directly to God. Bring **God's** concern into the picture. Let your awakened **awareness** of God's active concern **vitalize** your compassion, inspire your hope, and invigorate your response. Do **not** fail to bring God **in** on things, to bring God's love to bear on **every thing** and on every **one** that you can!

That is James' earnest wish for us. That's his well-considered counsel. It is, you **might** say, his last will and testament.

Friends, I am convinced that our Lord **desires** and **intends** to **use** YOU to bring God's **saving** grace to **bear** upon people in your community. **No** one in that community is without God's help. But, you should **realize** that, for **some** in your community, God intends for God's help to be channeled **through you**... through your outreach and your active intervention; through your self-sacrifice and what you risk for Christ's sake; through your determined praying for enemies **and** friends; through your standing up for those who've been bowled over; through your welcoming in of those who've been marginalized; through the **love** you show in any number of practical ways; through the forgiveness you extend to those who have offended; and through the **faith** that you reflect, even when faith seems a **foolish** thing to have.

I dare say it won't always be easy channeling God's help to others in your community. **Nor** will it always be a very **comfortable** thing for you. But it's **likely** to be quite **comforting** to some of the persons receiving it. And surely it will deepen **your faith** to be used by God in this way. And, you'll also have **help** with this work – real help. Holy help. God's help.

We are never **without** help. Never! God give us grace to see it and to accept it... and to use it gratefully.

May it be so for you and for me.

James 5:13-20

Are any among you suffering? **They** should pray. Are any cheerful? **They** should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? **They** should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.