

## **Psalm 120**

## **Are we there yet?**

Intro : **Pray** for the people on left and right. Ask for God's Spirit to speak to them. Remember Saul set out on just another ordinary day-family stuff-lost livestock and God met him. 1 Sam chpts 9-10 Chpt 10v9 'God changed Saul's heart.'

### **Read Psalm 120 out loud**

Strange choice? I've entitled this psalm, Are we there yet? Truth is hoping to give you a taster and by looking at Psalm 120 you'll want the whole BOXSET. Fifteen in all.

120 is the start of the Songs of Ascent-look at the headings all the way to 134

Four written by David, one by Solomon and the other 10 anon.

An ancient song book within a songbook.

There are other groupings. 113-118 the 'hallel' psalms are sung together at Passover. Hallel means praise. Or 146-150 the Hallelujah psalms-like the folk song 'all God's creatures got a place in the choir.'

Wait a minute. There's something strangely familiar about these. Take a look. Short...only 12 mins to read. (It took someone 2 hours to get rid of a microwave on Monday!)

These are songs for the road as we are going on a journey from where we are (120) climbing all the way up to Jerusalem until we reach (134). The geography of Israel dictates the climb. You can only go up to the city of Jerusalem 2500' above sea level. (Dead sea -1400') Matt 20v17/18

The 15 steps....at the southern edge of Jerusalem's temple Mount. 200' wide steps. Fifteen steps inside some say priests sung these 15 psalms here.

Why are we going up to Jerusalem? It's all about the temple!

God said in Deut 16. Take out your diaries. Here are some dates I want you to mark. To remember the things I have done for you.

Every Sabbath (sundown Friday-sundown Saturday), and then the 3 food festivals.

**Passover**...in the spring **Wheat..(Pentecost)** early summer

**Tabernacles** ...(Booths) in the autumn John 7:1

That's what these are all about. From Deut 16:14 it was to be a happy time of celebrating and everyone was included. Foreigners, orphans and widows. And the exciting part-

Jesus learned these songs by heart as a boy and sang these on his many trips up to Jerusalem. (Luke 2:41-42)

Think of the Pharisees; Will he come to the feast? John 11:56

Standing in the Judean desert and about to go up to Jerusalem we read these psalms. I have been intrigued by them ever since.

Read Psalm 120 again. NLT version

**Ok so you're writing a song but let's work on that intro !**

**v.1** Starts with distress and ends in v.6 with war. Hmm not the happiest of songs but an honest and necessary one and it gets things started.

This is a theme we have been working on in our last few weeks.

**? Why are we more prone to cry out in our distress and not in our success?**

We can go it alone when things are going well and it is easy to forget that we humans are mortal but now we have been forcibly reminded just how vulnerable we are.

C.S. Lewis, "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

So the psalmist calls on the Lord in his distress.

**'and he answers me'** The mystery of prayer is all over these short songs. Similar vein 130 'Out of the depths I cry. Hear my prayer-let your ears be attentive. I wait..my soul waits. Ps. 88v14 'Why do you hide your face from me?'

Abraham Heschel, 'The Bible is not a book to be read, but a story to be lived out!'

Where are we in this story? Some words used for people like us are: Followers of the way (Acts 9:2) Disciple (learner someone who follows the master) and pilgrim (someone on a journey to a desired place) Tourist is not one of our words. (David Pawson)

We are pilgrims on a journey and these psalms are a great background for understanding our life as a faith-journey.

This journey starts with the realisation that **something is wrong!** Save me from lying lips.

To use the musical theme. The rhythm is all wrong, the chords aren't right and they're playing all the wrong notes.

C.of I. response is **I'm playing all the right notes- but not necessarily in the right order!**

**What's the problem?** Lying lips & deceitful tongues. Playground chant 'sticks n stones.

The writer is disillusioned and is living with the tension of being in the world but having that feeling of not belonging to it.

**? What are some of the ways we feel this?**

Feels as in Psalm 116:11 'all men are liars.'

**? In what ways are we being lied to?**

Advertisers, Entertainers, Politicians, Scientists. Those peddling religion Mark7:8 'got rid of God's commands to bring in their own'.

Eugene Peterson, 'Rescue me from the person who tells me of life and omits Christ, who is wise in the ways of the world and ignores the movement of the Spirit.'

God only mentioned directly x2 and then v3/4 **He** but it is the key to the whole psalm.

Once we bring God in, he fills the whole horizon....and we see the truth. This God made me and loves me and the truth about what is wrong with the world is that I and my neighbour have sinned in refusing to let God be for us, over us and in us.

**v.4** He lets God do the punishing. Lots of crying out to God in the psalms re enemies, but in every case the psalmists refuse to take revenge themselves, but leave it to God.

Paul teaches this principle in Romans 12v19 'Do not take revenge my friends but leave room for God's wrath. Remember also this type of prayer even in heaven. Rev.6v10 'How long until you judge and avenge our blood.'

God's arrows are judgements aimed at provoking repentance.

**v.5** Authentic stamp all over this. Meshech and Kedar are far off place names. Meshech a far off tribe in Southern Russia and Kedar a wandering Bedouin tribe of warlike people on the Syrian Arabian border. (Kedar- second son of Ishmael Gen25:13..remember v.18 'and they lived in hostility towards all their brothers' Arrows used as the tribe famous for skill with the bow. As for the coals of the broom tree, our guide showed us how it was done.

Has there ever been a people so spread out from their own country in the history of the world? Psalm 126 v1 Even they can't believe it..and this was just their first return from exile.

After destruction of the temple in AD 70 (1st Jewish revolt A.D.66-73) they were scattered and then 2<sup>nd</sup> Jewish revolt (A.D.132-135) when they thought they had the Messiah Bar Kocba (pronounced Coke-ba son of the star..Num24:17) they were again scattered to the ends of the earth. No Jew was allowed to come near the city of Jerusalem.

We got a sight of this in Auschwitz. All the arrows from everywhere leading sadly to there.

Even in the death camps, the Jews finished any remembrance of these feasts with 'next year in Jerusalem.' 1967

So here we have just that. Some of God's people living In Meshech and Kedar. Together they represent areas far and near where Israelites lived as outsiders.

Psalm 120 is the decision to take one way over against the other. To take God's way and start out on the upward climb, the narrow way and follow the one who said, 'I am the way'

We know what this is called...Repentance (to turn around to turn away from) Always and everywhere it is the first word. John the Baptist Matt 3v2 Jesus Matt 4:17

Peter's sermon Acts 2:38 Revelation 3:19 The message to church no. 7 Laodicea...Repent

**v.6/7** 'Too long...like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15v13), he is fed up with the far country.

It's time to refocus. To obey God and set out where the father is waiting.

NLT: 'I am tired of living among people who hate peace. Time to 'come apart' in this case get the spiritual batteries recharged.

Peace is such a precious jewel that I would give anything for it but truth. **Matthew Henry**

That is what has happened here.

The Psalms of Ascent, sung from memory several times a year, served as reminders of faith, forgiveness, family, children and right attitudes toward God and people.

What was true then remains true for us. We need reminders of what we already know, for without these we would forget essential truths. (Phil.3v1 2Peter 1:13, 3:1)

**Are we there yet?** No, because faith is a journey lasting a lifetime and there is no quick fix, no cheat sheet we're talking discipleship in an instant society, but stepping out in faith is the first step on the journey. The other songs show us how to keep on pressing on.

E. Peterson says these little Psalms are not monuments but footprints. A monument only says, 'At least I got this far,' while a footprint says, 'This is where I was when I moved again.'

**The Sawmill Challenge.** Have a go at learning some of these psalms. 131 and 133 only 3 verses. Good prizes.