



# Firwood Church

These are the notes of a sermon preached at Firwood Church by Ronnie Evans on the morning of the 1 March 2009; these notes are, therefore, intended to be read in conjunction with the sermon. To download sermons and other free resources, visit [www.firwoodchurch.com](http://www.firwoodchurch.com) or subscribe through iTunes.

## SONGS OF ASCENT - PART 5, THE LORD MY RESCUER

### **Psalm 124**

#### ***A Song of Ascents. Of David***

**<sup>1</sup>If it had not been the LORD who was on our side—  
let Israel now say—**

**<sup>2</sup>if it had not been the LORD who was on our side  
when people rose up against us,**

**<sup>3</sup>then they would have swallowed us up alive,  
when their anger was kindled against us;**

**<sup>4</sup>then the flood would have swept us away,  
the torrent would have gone over us;**

**<sup>5</sup>then over us would have gone  
the raging waters.**

**<sup>6</sup>Blessed be the LORD,  
who has not given us  
as prey to their teeth!**

**<sup>7</sup>We have escaped like a bird  
from the snare of the fowlers;  
the snare is broken,  
and we have escaped!**

**<sup>8</sup>Our help is in the name of the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Songs of Ascent are a collection of Psalms (running from Psalm 120 through to Psalm 135) which pilgrims sang as they travelled towards Jerusalem and up to the temple. In Psalm 124, the Psalmist describes to us the travails which assailed the Israelites and to that place where the Living God is celebrated as Rescuer of his people.

David describes the ferocity of the opposition rising up against the people of God and recognises, had the Lord not been on their side, they would surely have been overcome. The Psalmist is assured, therefore, that '...the Lord is on our side...'. David's confidence is rooted in the truth that the Living God is with His people.

The question, therefore, is this: how are Christians today able to overcome the problems and difficulties inherent in 21 century living and the snares and difficulties which can entrap them and turn them away from the Living God? Throughout Psalm 124 we see that the Lord is not only with His people, but the Lord is *for* his people, whatever the difficulties and dangers.

## 2. THE BATTLE

### Psalm 124

**<sup>2</sup>if it had not been the LORD who was on our side  
when people [men] rose up against us,  
<sup>3</sup>then they would have swallowed us up alive,  
when their anger was kindled against us;  
<sup>4</sup>then the flood would have swept us away,  
the torrent would have gone over us;**

Here, the Hebrew word, *adam* (translated 'men') is used to refer to those outside Israel, the believing community. David is acutely aware that those not of the people of God are, by nature, opposed to the people of God. In Psalm 124 the enemy is firmly located outside and against Israel.

There is an important truth here to be unpacked. Often people make the claim that '*we are all God's children*'. Presumably they reason thus, we are all created by God and, consequently, we must all be regarded as his children. In reading the gospels, however, we find that Jesus challenges this understanding,

### John 8

**<sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. <sup>43</sup>Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. <sup>44</sup>You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. <sup>45</sup>But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. <sup>46</sup>Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? <sup>47</sup> Whoever is of God hears the words of**

## **God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."**

Jesus is quite clear: we are either of God's family or the family of the devil. This sounds brutal and harsh in the light of our rarefied 21 Century sensibilities, but it is the consistent view of Scripture. We are either for God, or we are against Him. We are in a continual battle and our enemy, Satan, is very, very real. Scripture is quite clear as to where we should stand, and does not allow for taking both sides.

In choosing to follow Christ, Christians set themselves firmly on one side and will be attacked as a result. The Church as the body of Christ will similarly be attacked. This will always be true until the return of Christ.

### **3. THE DEFENCE**

The church, collectively and individually can only withstand an attack of the ferocity with which Satan will attack with God on our side protecting us. David understood this fully and recognised the potential consequences of departing from the protection of God,

#### **Psalm 124**

**<sup>4</sup> then the flood would have swept us away,  
the torrent would have gone over us;  
<sup>5</sup> then over us would have gone  
the raging waters.**

Our society in the UK is generally considered to be a safe society. Our perceived civility, political system, stable government, police force and other factors may all contribute to this viewpoint. In other countries we see tragedies, terrorist attacks, Christians being taken and tortured, dragged into the streets and burned, put to death. In the UK and many other countries, it is easy to feel immune from such opposition.

Psalm 124 presents us with an altogether different perspective. David posits that the reason we are safe is because God's hand is upon us. If God were to remove his hand from our country or any country that deems itself 'safe', then the

#### **Psalm 124:4-5**

**<sup>4</sup> ...the torrent would have gone over us;  
<sup>5</sup> then over us would have gone  
the raging waters.**

Our warfare, our battle, is not against mankind or people outside of the church, but rather is a spiritual battle and, as such, the *means* of our defence must be spiritual. Consequently, the Apostle Paul exhorts those at Ephesus,

#### **Ephesians 6:20**

**Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.**

#### 4. THE DEPTH OF GOD'S INVOLVEMENT

In Psalm 124, David emphasises what would happen if God were not with the people of God. Scripture recognises the absolute dependency of the universe, this planet and mankind upon the Lord. In Job we see, that were God to remove his Holy Spirit we would be turned to dust,

##### **Job 34**

**<sup>14</sup>If it were his intention  
and he withdrew his spirit and breath,**

**<sup>15</sup> all mankind would perish together  
and man would return to the dust.**

Only when in glory will we understand and see the protective hand of God moving, acting and intervening in creation. On that day, even those saints who have experienced terrible persecution will understand how much God protected them through those dreadful times. In this the worship of the saints will be sweeter and more glorious.

##### **Revelation 15:3-4**

**"Great and amazing are your deeds,  
O Lord God the Almighty!  
Just and true are your ways,  
O King of the nations!  
<sup>4</sup>Who will not fear, O Lord,  
and glorify your name?  
For you alone are holy.  
All nations will come  
and worship you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed."**

Those who are set against God are also set against the people of God. David understood this to be true of Israel. We must understand that this same dynamic is also true of the church. In God's eyes there is no neutrality; no fence to sit upon.

God is our rescuer actively working in the lives of all those who are His. Each of us who know and love the Lord can look back to the time before they knew Jesus, and see instance after instance when God has saved and rescued them from even greater danger and peril. As believers, we are acutely aware of those times when, 'if it were not for the Lord', we would have been 'swept away'.

## 4. SNARES

### Psalm 124

**<sup>6</sup>Blessed be the LORD,  
who has not given us  
as prey to their teeth!  
<sup>7</sup>We have escaped like a bird  
from the snare of the fowlers;  
the snare is broken,  
and we have escaped!**

For believers, there are many 'snares' in this world,

- i. bad company,
- ii. uncontrolled ambition,
- iii. confidence in our own strength,

all of which lead to iv. outright disobedience

#### i. Bad company

### 1 Corinthians 15:33

**Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."**

### 2 Corinthians 6:15

**What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?**

The Bible warns that many are led away from the Lord by bad company. Scripture clearly warns us that we should take great care as to who we spend time and allow ourselves to be influenced by. We are called to live in the world alongside non-believers. However, if we spend a disproportionate length of time with non-Christians – or even with those in the church who are critical and condemnatory - then this will have an effect on us and will result in us becoming ensnared by ungodly attitudes and behaviour.

A life of drink, drugs, immoral behaviour is often a consequence of bad company. Often we have a very small view of our God and think he cannot possibly help us – God can and will rescue us from any situation if we have a true desire to follow him. This does not mean that we will not suffer consequences of our sinful behaviour, but that God will give us the strength to glorify him as we turn to him in repentance.

## ii. Uncontrolled Ambition

### **Ecclesiastes 4:4**

**And I saw that all labour and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbour. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.**

### **John 5:44**

**How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?**

Uncontrolled/ungodly ambition can often be a snare. Meditate on these verses. They will completely turn your life around.

We must continually examine our lives and our heart-motives: Why do we do what we do in the church? What are our motives in ministry? What heart-desires motivate us in our leisure time? Do we work for our own sake, our own satisfaction? Is our desire to look good before men? Is our work in the church done so that we might look better, more committed, more spiritual, and more holy before our fellow Christians?

Or... is our true hearts-aim simply to please God? Is every action, every thought governed by the desire to bring glory and praise to God?

## iii. Confidence in our own strength

### **Genesis 13:12**

**Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.**

### **2 Peter 2:6-7**

**6if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men**

One of the most difficult attitudes for us to attain is that of being 'God pleasers' and not 'Man pleasers'. If we seek to please God and be in the place he wants us to be then we will experience complete and absolute joy.

Many find it difficult to stand for God, in our workplaces or in our families, because of our fear of not being accepted, of retaliation.

Sometimes the difficulty of a situation faced can bring about the blaming of God. We think God has put us in this situation/place and we cannot get out or change anything.

When we rely on God and when we let Him be our strength, then we can persevere even in the most difficult or dangerous of situations. The situation will not necessarily go away, but God will give us the grace to be able to persevere. He will become our strength.

#### **iv) Disobedience**

God has and will continue to make it very clear to us what we are to do and what we are not to do. Often we choose to decide what is good for us, or we decide to go ahead with something which we know contravenes God's desires for us. We err in that we think we know what is best for our lives. We seek to please ourselves and not God and are critical of those that seek obedience. Often, because we consider God's way to be harder, we believe that we have a better solution. God calls us to be obedient to His Word. God will never contradict his word and is always faithful and always true.

God is serious about obedience and the results of disobedience. The first part of Psalm 124 states, 'If the Lord had not been on our side'. How can we be sure that the Lord is indeed on our side? Because we are walking in obedience and not disobedience.

If we are Christians and follow Christ then everything that happens throughout our life – even the most difficult things - will work for good. God is for those who have given their lives to Christ – no exceptions.

#### **Romans 8:31-39**

**<sup>31</sup>What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written:**

**"For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."**

**<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

## 5. RESCUE

### **Psalm 124:8**

**Our help is in the name of the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth**

David's words draw a contrast between the Lord God and the many false gods in the surrounding cultures: gods of the sea, of the moon, or the harvest, etc. David knows the one true God, the one who created the heavens and the earth, who holds all things together. When we have a revelation of how great and powerful our God is, our problems actually become smaller and smaller in comparison. The way in which we see problems and difficulties in our lives is directly related to how clearly we see the living God.

The Lord is constantly under attack in this nation. The purpose of this attack is to make God look smaller and less significant, a small god who is not the creator of the world, not really in control, one who winds up the clock and lets it run itself, who is not around when we need him.

When we view God as he really is: Creator of all – of heaven and of earth and everything on the earth, a God who came down to earth and died for our sins, for me and for you, then we will see and believe that He has power to break through our inadequacies and our sins and restore us to fellowship with Him.

We will then see God as David saw Him; as Rescuer and as Lord.