



Kirkcaldy and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald

8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF

Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: groenstes@yahoo.com

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



Date: 9th January 2011

Sermon: Rev Dr André J Groenewald

Reading: Psalm 121

Background to the reading

The psalmist of Psalm 121 was really a very realistic man. As his eyes look into the distant hills, he is aware of all the dangers that face him on his journey home. Jerusalem and more specifically the temple on Mount Zion was **the** place of worship for all the Israelites. It was customary for all Jews to attend at least one of the most important festivals in Jerusalem. Usually they would be blessed by the priest on the start of their journey home.

The Psalmist knew the poor dust roads could cause him to stumble and fall especially in the dark. He also knew that God does not sleep like the other gods of the other nations. He was sure that His God is the Maker of heaven and earth and is totally different from any other god. His God is his travel companion 24/7 and will protect him all the way home. Six times the verb “Shomer” “to watch, guard” (*watches over, keep*) sounds out. The perils are unknown but the security is certain. The Lord who redeemed his son *Israel according to* Ex. 4:22 will not now lose him on his way home!

The Lord will be his shade at his right hand. In Biblical times this meant protection and salvation and in this case divine protection. Why? Well in those days your right hand would hold the sword which would drive the enemy away. The right hand was the hand of strength, skill, and authority; the one of love and tenderness; the one which bestows the greatest blessings; the place of greatest favour or honour or influence. Being the more important hand or side, it is the one by which a man is led; on which a man is endangered or accused and where his protector must stand to help him. The “right hand of God” is a favorite OT expression for His almighty power in creation and in war and deliverance, as well as for His sovereign mercy.

The psalmist knew what the sun could do to him and he was aware of the fact that some people even worshipped the sun. The worship of the sun was one of the oldest forms of false religion, and was common among the Egyptians and Chaldeans and other pagan nations. The Jews were warned against this form of idolatry. The sun was recognized in the Bible as a beneficent source of light and heat upon which all life depended, but its power to smite was also known and feared. But sun worship was also found in Israel

He was also aware of what the moon could do to him and again he was also aware that some people worshipped the moon. In those days many people believed that the moon was supposed to cause lunacy (from the Latin word for moon “luna”), and epilepsy, literally, “moon struck.” The great brilliance of the moon in Eastern countries led to its being an early object of idolatrous worship, a form of idolatry against which the Jews were warned. But the Israelites, however, fell into this idolatry, and offered incense, and also cakes of honey, to the moon. The name of the city Jericho (Hebrew “Yerikho”) is derived from a word for moon and probably indicates the existence of lunar worship at those sites at some early—presumably Canaanite period.

The Psalmist concludes his hymn of praise by saying that God will “watch over” him always and ever.

Amen

Sermon

*The text for the sermon is verse ⁵ The LORD watches over you—
the LORD is your shade at your right hand*

Last Sunday I preached about the challenges of the journey with God but today I want to emphasize the joys of travelling with Him as portrayed in Psalm 121.

And as someone rightly pointed out to me after last week’s sermon: we do not MAKE bad choices all the time! I agree. Although we are utterly corrupt sinners and not fit to come in the presence of God, He wants to be our travel companion. But we need to take His hand and hold on to it. Because if we do, we are rest assured, like the Psalmist says, of His help and guidance all the way.

It is actually fun to go on a trip. And everyone would agree with me that although it is hard work to pack the car once you speed of – it is exciting! I guess the same is true of our journey with the Lord. It is exciting to know we are on a journey with the Lord because He is so Almighty and knows everything. It is so comforting to know: whatever happens on this journey it will end in heaven to be with God for ever and ever! It is so reassuring to trust Him because He is so trustworthy. Everything He promised came true in Jesus Christ. He even gave us His Holy Spirit.

And yes, we too know all the dangers and challenges that face us every moment of every day but with the Lord at our side we are able not only to cope but also to be shining lights to other. We will be able to smile at the wonders around us – the wonders of His love, the miracles of life which He gives, and the hope that we see in the eyes of the dying. We will be able to cry with hope because our Redeemer lives. We will be able to stay vigilant and awake when He comes again.

But we must also do our bit on this journey with the Lord. Too much baggage can impair our vision and impatience can lead to serious accidents. I mean sometimes we carry with us baggage that belongs to the past. Sometimes we do not even open

the suitcases with the old baggage to breathe. No sometimes we kindle them and feed ourselves with negative thoughts of revenge. We even use them as weapons against other people. But this old baggage of old fights, unresolved conflicts and tension can destroy our lives and others too. It can make us negative and impatient travellers. Travellers that are not willing to wait on the Lord to act. With accidents I refer to the “carnage of lives” around us - people abusing drugs and alcohol, mothers abandoning their own children, parents killing their young, child abuse and molestation, violence and corruption, conflict in families, divorce, adultery ...Do I need to say more.

We must remember that we are travelling with the Lord. Other people must actually see that He is driving, that He is in control. Other people must see in our faces that we are happy because we trust our driver. Other people must be able to see that even after the times that we climbed out of the car, making our own accidents, that we are willing and hopeful to climb in again because God is the only ONE who can help.

He is the only ONE that can turn corners with only ONE wheel on the road – meaning with or without our co-operation because He is the Maker of Heaven and Earth. He does not need us but wants to steer us in His direction in order for us to experience His full glory, mercy and peace once we enter through the gates of heaven.

Who is currently your travelling companion?

I hope you can stand up today and say: It is the Lord!

Praise and Glory to His Holy Name.

Amen.