

HELP FROM THE HILLS

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Psalm 121:1-2.

Those who are the most competent to judge hold that this Psalm dates from the period of the exile. The author was far away from Palestine and a prisoner in distant Babylon. Held captive under the hand of a tyrant and among heathen, he was far away from the hills and mountains of his native country. Babylon was a level country, a land of vast and monotonous expanse. And it was out of the dreariness of such a land that the Psalmist sent his thought, like a swift bird, to the hills which he had viewed formerly, and which were dyed with the memories of home. He was oppressed with the burdens and sorrows of exile. His drooping spirit was cheered as he thought of the hills of his homeland, which were so rich with the precious heritage of many years. Those hills brought faith and hope to him. As he strained his weary eyes toward the western horizon and shut his door at night, thinking of the majestic hills yonder in the distance, it was with a trust made easier and more confident that he committed himself to the keeping of Him of whose unwearied watch the hills somehow spoke.

Yet, we cannot do this Psalm justice if we think of it as having only homesickness in it. The deepest longing of the Psalmist was not for home, but for God. It was toward God that his whole being was set. He was God-sick far more than home-sick. Nothing less than God's help could really meet his needs. He did not turn to men, to nature, to work, or to pleasure, but to God.

I. The Challenge of the Hills.

Nature has many aspects and God is behind them all, but the grandeur, the vast solitudes and the deep recesses in the heart of the hills are, in a peculiar sense, the inner shrine where He waits for those who come, worn and confused, from the noise and strife of the world. The great hills rise peak beyond peak in sublime procession; the mountain streams run dark and cool through dim and hidden channels, singing that song without words which is sweet with all purity and fresh with the keenness of the untrodden heights. There is a mystery, a wonder, a glory and a magnetic attraction about the hills. There is a poetry, music and romance about mountain scenery.

Whether you have realized it or not, we have a highland Bible. It was in the hill country of Galilee and Judea that our Master lived, loved and labored. Jesus loved the hills. His chosen walks were among them. They were His sanctuary for prayer and His temple for worship. From the hills of Capernaum He preached. He overcame the temptation of Satan on the mountain. His matchless sermon was delivered on the mountain. The crest of a mountain was the scene of His Transfiguration; on the hill of Calvary He was crucified; and from Mount Olivet He ascended. When our Lord arose He said, "I go before you into Galilee!" Where did He go when His life was over and His victory was won? He went back to the hills again.

Hills have a fascination for those who are brought up among them. How the Swiss away from their own country pine for the mountains of their native land! It was among the hills of Scotland that there was developed a unique religious life and spirit. It was among the hills of New England, and along the coast, that our own nation was cradled in liberty and righteousness and justice.

Mountains are always a challenge to me. When I see them I think of strength, stability, might and majesty. What does one get from the mountains? He gets pure air, fresh

water, beautiful views and strength from climbing them. Among the mountains one finds higher heights, nobler visions and a purer atmosphere. As one climbs higher he sees better and farther.

The hills always summon us to look up. They are a source of aspiration. When a big hill looms before us we cannot look down, but our eyes are drawn upward by the sight. The hills invite us to cultivate the upward look. They challenge our strength and courage and perseverance. The uproads of the land of the spirit are traveled, not by wanderers or vagrants of lazy nature, but by sturdy seekers after God. The hills have little attraction for the idler, but are filled with charm for the pilgrim who aspired upward. They invite us to rise above the low level of existence, above the petty and trivial and commonplace, nearer to the home of God.

1. The hills call us to a higher life.

They challenge us to live on a higher plane. They beckon us to higher levels. They remind us that it is possible to live above the lower levels. Life may be lived on any level, on the plain or on the height, but the plane on which we live determines our characters and indicates our destinies.

The tragedy of our generation is in the fact that so many look to the gutters for ideals and standards rather than look to the hills. Many are looking for life in the gutters. They are seeking escape from life's boredoms and burdens in the lewd, the low, the base, and the vile. Just as the pollution of the water supply of a city endangers the health of all who live there, so the pollution of the sources of life and inspiration means death to a nation. It is the tragic misfortune of our generation that so many great sources have become polluted and that so many are turning to gutter filth for spiritual reinforcements.

In other ages literature was one of the great sanctifying and strengthening influences of life, but much of modern literature runs the dreary gamut of sex and excess. Under the delusion that nothing is interesting but nastiness and filth, most of our novelists weave their stories about the sordid and the perverted. One must seek long and diligently to find a noble and respectable hero, or a charming and chaste heroine.

In the modern mad rush for a thrill many laugh at everything sacred. Holy things have been prostituted and unholy profits have been made respectable. Alcohol has put on a dress suit, crashed the gate, and been admitted to so-called good society. Speed masquerades as progress, clamor goes for convictions, and big type is accepted as an evidence of great living. We have undertaken to learn from the raven and the cuspidor.

2. The hills remind us that there are contrasts in life.

Life is not all sunshine. Life is not all vision. Life is not all emotional uplift. Life is full of seeming contradictions. There are ups and downs in life. In other words, there are hills and valleys. There is sunshine today, and there is shadow tomorrow. There is disappointment, and there is hope; work and rest; storm and calm; sickness and health; joy and sorrow; life and death. But it takes the seeming contradictions of life to make a full-orbed Christian character.

3. The hills bring a wider horizon into life.

A Chinese proverb states, "If you do not ascend the mountain, you will not be able to view the plain." Spiritual enrichment means a wider outlook, broader sympathies, and an enlargement of the understanding.

II. The Call for Help.

1. Help is greatly needed.

The exiled Psalmist had many hostile to him between his abiding place and that home where he desired to be. It would have been extremely difficult for him to have gotten away from the dominion that held him captive unless it had been by the consent of the one holding him. So the more he thought of the mountains of Israel, the more he realized his need of help in reaching them. Even the hills could not send the needed help. He realized that his help must come from beyond the hills.

(1) Certainties create the need for help.

Temptations, vexations, trials, duties, difficulties and opportunities create this need.

(2) Uncertainties create the need for help.

Among these uncertainties are some great joy, some very sore perplexity, some very serious problem, some overwhelming sorrow, or the last experience of death.

One can never outgrow this need of help. Dependence is the characteristic of the creature. Help must be had in the conflict or it will end in defeat, in the toil or it will issue in failure, in the pilgrim-march or we will faint and fall by the way. We need help greatly, in varied forms, now, and constantly.

2. Human help is not sufficient.

We naturally look to our kindred and friends for sympathy and help. But they do not remain with us. Parents die; brothers and sisters are scattered far and wide; and friends become estranged. Neither can they render the assistance we need. Our wants and needs go so far and strike so deep that human sympathy does not avail. We need more than it can bring us, hence we must "lift up our eyes unto the hills from whence cometh our help." Our help comes from God.

3. Divine help is available.

What a blessing that we have powerful, efficient and constant help in God. For help it is in vain to trust creatures, but it is extremely wise to trust the Creator. God is the only true help for the soul. He alone can raise it from its fallen condition, break its fetters, heal its wounds, energize, its faculties, and set it on a safe and prosperous course. When a worldly man has trials he usually looks to earthly things for support. He looks to social sympathies and human friendships.

The genuine Christian turns at once to God because he realizes that from Him alone the necessary help can and must come. The hills to which we must lift our eyes are the purposes of God, the providences of God, the promises of God, and the proved faithfulness of God, for these are the hills from whence cometh our help. God is the source of our help. He helps us in proportion as we feel our need of His help and ask for it. His help is never in vain.

Lift up your eyes, away from the bitter struggle and petty annoyances of the day. Look across the centuries to the outskirts of an old town. There on the edge of the city, on the crest of a little rounded hill that looked like a skull, half-submerged in the plain, stands a cross. Upon it hangs a Man, in the agony of death, defying hate, malice and evil, as He prays, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That little hill is the highest pinnacle to which any soul ever lifted his eyes. In the midst of your lowest moments and your worst days, lift up your eyes unto the hill whereon Christ agonized and suffered for the sake of the world. "Look away to Jesus, Look away from all! Then we need not stumble, Then we shall not fall. From each snare that lureth, Foe or phantom grim. Safety this insureth, Look away to Him."