

*Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. 2He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. 3In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' 4For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, 5yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" 6And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? 8I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"*

"I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth." (Psalm 121)

I wonder when he first heard those words. Was it as a child of a year or two, listening to his father's prayers? Did he hear these words on Mary's lips as the family made their annual journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover?

Did Jesus memorize this Psalm 121 as part of his studies in synagogue school? If so, etched in his heart were the promises: "The Lord will not let your foot slip; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."

As he grew and attended synagogue each week, Passover each year, more and more he depended on the promises: "The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night."

After his baptism when he was led out into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted by Satan, every sort of doubt must have tried to seep into his heart but he sealed his heart with the assurance: "The Lord will keep you from all evil, he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore."

Already by Jesus' day, Psalm 121 was a well-used song, an ancient song. Five hundred years old, eight hundred years old, a thousand years old? And every one who prayed that song, except the prophet Elijah, ended in the grave. Dead.

Maybe the sun did not strike God's people by day as the psalm promised, nor the moon by night, but to be honest the psalm should have said, "But death will get you in the end."

Would it be any different for Jesus?

Had not his mother told him of the angel's visit? "Son of God", the angel had said.

Had not shepherds told her of other heavenly visitors, announcing that he was the Savior, the Messiah?

Had not the sky been torn open when God's Holy Spirit descended upon him at the time of his baptism? Had not the almighty God spoken to him saying, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

If anyone could expect the promises of the 121st Psalm to be forever his, then Jesus could.

*I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come?*

*My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.*

*He will not let your foot be moved, he who keeps you will not slumber.*

*The Lord is your keeper, the Lord is your shade on your right hand, the sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.*

We know that this psalm is entitled, A song of ascents. These were the songs for the pilgrims to sing as they journeyed up to the holy city, Jerusalem.

Maybe Peter and James and John sang to him as Mary once had, "The Lord will keep you from all evil, he will keep your life." On the way to Jerusalem, to celebrate the Passover one more and one last time.

Who knows, maybe Jesus had heard them sing this psalm just before he told the parable of the unjust judge and the widow who bothered him continually, and how though he was not a good man, he did good for the widow, simply to get rid of her. "And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you he will quickly grant justice to them."

Jesus cried out to God that night, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible, remove this cup from me, yet not what I want but what you want."

He prayed knowing the promise: "The Lord is your keeper, he will keep you from all evil, he will keep your life."

Three times he prayed that the cup of suffering and death would not be his to drink. And the soldiers came with Judas.

The one who taught that God will quickly grant justice took his place alongside of the Muslims in Bosnia, victims of cruelty. The one who taught that God would answer his people's prayers took his place alongside of the dying children of Somalia, victims of a foolish war. The

one who taught God will not delay in helping his children who cry to him, took his place beside the children in every place, suffering and dying from a disease that chose them but that they would never choose.

We want a simple faith, and a simple world, and simple answers. We want a God who will be our bullet proof vest, and our health insurance policy, and our cornucopia pouring out abundance.

But instead God has sent Jesus to die on the cross.

We want prayers that will work, a God that will do as we demand, and will be an umbrella in every storm.

But instead God has sent Jesus.

We want happy endings and miracle cures and always being a winner.

And the Son of God gets his clothes stripped from him, nails driven into his hands, and vinegar to sip. And the ridicule and laughter of all around.

We call it the Christian faith. We believe that when every awful thing had happened to Jesus that God raised him from the dead. When every prayer and pleading had been met by silence this side of the grave, still God acted beyond the grave. And nothing else finally mattered.

We call it the Christian faith. We believe that the one all earthly evidence declared to be a fool, is God's Son. We believe that when all evidence of our eyes and ears and senses says that God is absent that the reality is that God is not slumbering. We believe that the Father of Jesus is our Father who will finally and forever keep his own from all evil.

If Jesus is who we believe he is, we who believe in him are wisest of all. And if he is not, then we are fools with him.

For God's Son has promised you eternal life. And if that promise is true, nothing else will matter. For God will have kept your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore. Amen.