

### **Psalm 124:8**

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
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God on Your Side

The Word of the Lord from Psalm 124:8: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

"If it had not been the LORD who was on our side...." That's how David begins Psalm 124. Then he makes it the confession of the entire nation. He says, "let Israel now say:

"if it had not been the LORD who was on our side when people rose up against us,  
then they would have swallowed us up alive,  
when their anger was kindled against us;  
then the flood would have swept us away,  
the torrent would have gone over us;  
then over us would have gone the raging waters.  
Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth!  
We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have  
escaped!" (Psalm 124:1-7)

The life of David is a life of beating the odds, it seems. He's born in a small town, the youngest son in a family of shepherds. David's a nobody in a family of nobodies. The nation is ruled by Saul; and when he dies, the crown will pass to his son Jonathan—so everyone supposes, but the Lord has different plans. He sends His prophet Samuel, and Samuel anoints David, the last-born son of Jesse, to be the future king. When the nation of Israel cowers on the battlefield before Goliath and the Philistines, it's the young David—too young to fit into armor—who slings the stone, brings down the giant and routs the enemy. He grows to be popular among the people and hated by the jealous King Saul, who tries repeatedly to kill him—and what match is the young shepherd boy against the crazed king? Yet David survives the king of Israel and repeatedly defeats Israel's enemies at the same time. Eventually, he becomes the king of Israel and preserves the nation against others. He builds the kingdom in power and wealth. Later in his life, there's trouble because of his own sin: more than one son seeks to overthrow him and plunges the nation into civil war. Yet David survives as king until he dies of old age.

What's true for the king is true for the rest of Israel: they remain a people and a kingdom because the Lord has preserved them from their enemies.

It isn't luck. It isn't chance or fortune. It isn't David's smarts or fine moral example. It's the Lord on his side who preserves and delivers him. It is so because the Lord has made a promise to David: David will be an ancestor of the Messiah. David's life begins as a humble shepherd boy in the little town of Bethlehem, then rises to become king by the will of God. A thousand years later, another boy will be born in Bethlehem in even humbler circumstances—He'll be wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger. Seemingly against all odds, He will escape the murderous plots of a king before He's even old enough to toddle. He will live a holy life, die and then rise again three days later. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, enthroned forever; and He is the Shepherd who guides His sheep even through death and into eternal life. He's not just another man living by the Lord's promise: He's the Lord of heaven and earth—the Lord of heaven and earth made man to keep His promise of salvation. God is on His side, because He is God Himself.

The death and resurrection of Jesus still lies centuries in the future when David writes this psalm. But the promise is made; and because the Lord promises, it's already as good as done. David and his fellow believers have the certainty of salvation because the Messiah is coming to die for their sins. They don't live by wits or luck, but by the mercy of God who uses all things for their good. That's why the psalm concludes, "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth."

Who better to help? If the LORD of heaven and earth is your Helper, who's going to defeat Him? No one. That's why, unless those Israelites of the Old Testament are silly enough to turn to idols, reject Him and refuse His help, they will never be defeated.

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God is on your side. You know that to be true because He promises it is so. That's why you've gotten this far, and that's why you proceed with confidence into the year ahead.

You haven't made it this far because luck or good fortune, but because of the Lord's mercy—far better and far more trustworthy. You haven't made it this far because of your strength, brains, talents, wits and abilities. Those are all gifts of God, but no guarantee of success and long life: as one of David's sons would lament, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11). The Lord has different plans for each one of us here, and some will appear more fortune-filled than others. But whatever your lot, you are an instrument in His hand; and so you purpose to live a life according to His Word, as best you can with what He entrusts to you.

More to the point, you haven't made it this far because of any righteousness on your part: you know full well by now of your sin that would condemn you before God. But it doesn't: it doesn't because Christ died in your place on the cross. The Good Shepherd has died so that you might be His sheep—not one to be sacrificed, but to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

So you say, often, "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth." It's on page 5 and page 15 of the hymnal—of all things, it's part of the confession of sins. That's worth pondering a moment: if you're going to go before a king and ask him for help and deliverance, it's best that you don't poke him in the eye—with human rulers, it doesn't pay to say, "Help me, even though I've repeatedly disobeyed you." Yet you declare that you come before the Lord of heaven and earth for help—and then, *next thing*, you tell Him all about your poor, miserable sinfulness and iniquitousness. You don't hide your sins—you make them all known to the King! Why would you ever do a thing like that? Because He bids you to. He calls upon you to confess your sins so that He might forgive you for them.

See, the Lord has already made you His own: Christ died for the sins of the world, and He's given you that victory in your baptism. You're like the Israelites of the Old Testament: if God is for you, who can be against you? If the Lord has made you His own, who is going to wrestle you away from the LORD? No one, because no one can. The LORD who has redeemed you is no two-bit junior deity who gets beaten up by other gods who are bigger than He is. He's the one true God, the LORD who made heaven and earth. No one is greater than He. Nothing can separate you from Him. The only way you can possibly lose is to cling to sin, refuse His grace and deny His Word; for He will not force you to be saved.

That's why, when we speak of God's sovereign power and protection of you, we always speak of it in connection to His cross, His sacrifice, His grace for you. The devil is no match for Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, who made heaven and earth. Satan cannot separate you from God. The only thing he can do is convince you to leave. He'll try to seduce you with some attractive sin so that you don't want to be forgiven, or reduce you to such a mess of guilt and shame that you think that no forgiveness is possible. He's very good at this, far better than we are at resisting him; but all of his whispers are built on a lie. The lie is that your sin is too great for God to forgive.

But if the Lord of heaven and earth says you're forgiven, who is the devil to say otherwise? That's why the evil one hates to hear you say, "I am baptized." It's why he hates to hear you declare that your help comes from God, and then go ahead and confess your sins rather than hide them. Confessed sins have no power, because the Lord takes them away. And if your sins are gone, then you're confident of the Lord's help and mercy for you.

That's what Paul is getting at in our epistle for this night, from Romans 8. It's easy to get caught up in the list of all the things that can't separate us from the love of God, so that we miss the reason why they can't separate us—Christ Jesus the Lord. Look at the questions he asks:

"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" Answer: He will. He will give you all good things necessary because He's paid the price of His own Son's blood to make it so.

"Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" No one. "It is God who justifies," as St. Paul says. If the Lord is the Judge who declares that you're innocent of sin for Jesus' sake, who's going to overrule Him? No one: therefore, you are not separated from Him.

St. Paul asks again, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." The Lord Jesus sits at His Father's right hand to say, "I've paid the price for their sin!", as if the Father would ever forget. No, as long as that price is paid, nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus the Lord. That's why, as you rejoice in God's power and sovereignty, you rejoice most of all that this means that no one can say you're not forgiven if He says that you are. Because if you are forgiven, then truly nothing can separate you from Him.

All of this is such comforting news as we arrive at the end of one year and the beginning of the next. The Lord has brought you this far for Jesus' sake, all according to plan: He's even made use of your worst days and failures ultimately for your good. You have no idea what the next twelve months will bring, or even if we'll be here together next New Year's Eve. But you are confident that God is on your side. You will not be swallowed up by enemies of sin, death and devil. Your help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth, and that help starts with His grace: your innocence and righteousness are in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The Lord is for you. The Lord is with you, as near as His Word and His Supper to sustain you. Nothing can separate you from Him, because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen