

Exposition on Psalm 121

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in our lives and the protection of God, who is our defence upon the hand of our right hand.

Scripture: Psalm 120:1, Psalm 120:3 - 121:1, Matthew 6:3, John 1:16

Topics: "Divine Guidance", "Spiritual Protection"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the importance of seeking help from God, emphasizing that our help comes from Him and His fullness. He urges believers to pray for guidance and protection, highlighting the dangers of pride and the need to trust in God who never sleeps or slumbers. Augustine encourages choosing God as our keeper, as He alone can preserve us from all evil and temptations, safeguarding our souls for eternity.

Transcript

1. ...Let them lift up their eyes to the hills whence comes their help Psalm 120:1. What means, The hills have been lightened? The Sun of righteousness has already risen, the Gospel has been already preached by the Apostles, the Scriptures have been preached, all the mysteries have been laid open, the veil has been rent, the secret place of the temple has been revealed: let them now at length lift their eyes up to the hills, whence their help comes...Of His fullness have all we received, John 1:16 he says. Your help therefore is from Him, of whose fullness the hills received, not from the hills; towards which, nevertheless, save thou lift your eyes through the Scriptures, you will not approach, so as to be lighted by Him.

2. Sing therefore what follows; if you wish to hear how you may most securely set your feet on the steps, so that you may not be fatigued in that ascent, nor stumble and fall: pray in these words: Suffer not my foot to be moved! Psalm 120:3. Whereby are feet moved; whereby was the foot of him who was in Paradise moved? But first consider whereby the feet of him who was among the Angels were moved: who when his feet were moved fell, and from an Angel became a devil: for when his feet were moved he fell. Seek whereby he fell: he fell through pride. Nothing then moves the feet, save pride: nothing moves the feet to a fall, save pride. Charity moves them to walk and to improve and to ascend; pride moves them to fall...Rightly therefore the Psalmist, hearing how he may ascend and may not fall, prays unto God that he may profit from the vale of misery, and may not fail in the swelling of pride, in these words, Suffer not my feet to be moved! And He replies unto him, Let him that keeps you not sleep. Attend, my beloved. It is as if one thought were expressed in two sentences; the man while ascending and singing the song of degrees,

says, Suffer not my foot to be moved: and it is as if God answered, You say unto Me, Let not my feet be moved: say also, Let Him that keeps you not sleep, and your foot shall not be moved.

3. Choose for yourself Him, who will neither sleep nor slumber, and your foot shall not be moved. God is never asleep: if you do wish to have a keeper who never sleeps, choose God for your keeper. Suffer not my feet to be moved, you say, well, very well: but He also says unto you, Let not him that keeps you slumber. Thou perhaps wast about to turn yourself unto men as your keepers, and to say, whom shall I find who will not sleep? What man will not slumber? Whom do I find? Whither shall I go? Whither shall I return? The Psalmist tells you: He that keeps Israel, shall neither slumber nor sleep Psalm 120:4. Do you wish to have a keeper who neither slumbers nor sleeps? Behold, He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep: for Christ keeps Israel. Be thou then Israel. What means Israel? It is interpreted, Seeing God. And how is God seen? First by faith: afterwards by sight. If you can not as yet see Him by sight, see Him by faith...Who is there, who will neither slumber nor sleep? When you seek among men, you are deceived; you will never find one. Trust not then in any man: every man slumbers, and will sleep. When does he slumber? When he bears the flesh of weakness. When will he sleep? When he is dead. Trust not then in man. A mortal may slumber, he sleeps in death. Seek not a keeper among men.

4. And who, you ask, shall help me, save He who slumbers not, nor sleeps? Hear what follows: The Lord Himself is your keeper Psalm 120:5. It is not therefore man, that slumbers and sleeps, but the Lord, that keeps you. How does He keep you? The Lord is your defence upon the hand of your right hand....It seems to me to have a hidden sense: otherwise he would have simply said, without qualification, The Lord will keep you, without adding, on your right hand. For how? Does God keep our right hand, and not our left? Did He not create the whole of us? Did not He who made our right hand, make our left hand also? Finally, if it pleased Him to speak of the right hand alone, why said He, on the hand of your right hand, and not at once upon your right hand? Why should He say this, unless He were keeping somewhat here hidden for us to arrive at by knocking? For He would either say, The Lord shall keep you, and add no more; or if He would add the right hand, The Lord shall keep you upon your right hand; or at least, as He added hand, He would say, The Lord shall keep you upon your hand, even your right hand, not upon the hand of your right hand....

5. I ask you, how ye interpret what is said in the Gospel, Let not your left hand know what your right hand does? Matthew 6:3 For if you understand this, you will discover what is your right hand, and what is your left: at the same time you will also understand that God made both hands, the left and the right; yet the left ought not to know what the right does. By our left hand is meant all that we have in a temporal way; by our right hand is meant, whatever our Lord promises us that is immutable and eternal. But if He who will give everlasting life, Himself also consoles our present life by these temporal blessings, He has Himself made our right hand and our left...

6. Let us now come to this verse of the Psalm: The Lord is your defence upon the hand of your right hand Psalm 120:5. By hand he means power. How do we prove this? Because the power of God also is styled the hand of God...Whereof John says, He gave unto them power to become the sons of God. John 1:12 Whence have you received this power? To them, he says, that believe in His Name. If then you believe, this very power is given you, to be among the sons of God. But to be among the sons of God, is to belong to the right hand. Your faith therefore is the hand of your right hand: that is, the power that is given you, to be among the sons of God, is the hand of your right hand...

7. May the Lord shield you upon the hand of your right hand Psalm 120:6. I have said, and I believe you have recognised it. For had ye not recognised it, and that from the Scriptures, you would not signify your understanding of it by your voices. Since then you have understood, brethren, consider what follows; wherefore the Lord shields you upon the hand of your right hand, that is, in your faith, wherein we have received power to become the sons of God, and to be on His right hand: wherefore should God shield us?

On account of offenses. Whence come offenses? Offences are to be feared from two quarters, for there are two precepts upon which the whole Law hangs and the Prophets, the love of God and of our neighbour. Matthew 22:37-40 The Church is loved for the sake of our neighbour, but God for the sake of God. Of God, is understood the sun figuratively: of the Church, is understood the moon figuratively. Whoever can err, so as to think otherwise of God than he ought, believing not the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost to be of one Substance, has been deceived by the cunning of heretics, chiefly of the Arians.

If he has believed anything less in the Son or in the Holy Spirit than in the Father, he has suffered an offense in God; he is scorched by the sun. Whoever again believes that the Church exists in one province only, and not that she is diffused over the whole world, and whoso believes them that say, Lo here, and Lo there, is Christ, Matthew 24:23 as you but now heard when the Gospel was being read; since He who gave so great a price, purchased the whole world: he is offended, so to speak, in his neighbour, and is burnt by the moon.

Whoever therefore errs in the very Substance of Truth, is burnt by the sun, and is burnt through the day; because he errs in Wisdom itself...God therefore has made one sun, which rises upon the good and the evil, that sun which the good and the evil see; but that Sun is another one, not created, not born, through whom all things were made; where is the intelligence of the Immutable Truth: of this the ungodly say, the Sun rose not upon us. Whosoever errs not in Wisdom itself, is not burnt by the sun.

Whosoever errs not in the Church, and in the Lord's Flesh, and in those things which were done for us in time, is not burnt by the moon. But every man although he believes in Christ, errs either in this or that respect, unless what is here prayed for, The Lord is your defence upon the hand of your right hand, is realized in him. He goes on to say, So that the sun shall not burn you by day, nor the moon by night Psalm 120:6. Your defence, therefore, is upon the hand of your right hand for this reason, that the sun may not burn you by day, nor the moon by night.

Understand hence, brethren, that it is spoken figuratively. For, in truth, if we think of the visible sun, it burns by day: does the moon burn by night? But what is burning? Offence. Hear the Apostle's words: Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? 2 Corinthians 11:29

8. For the Lord shall preserve you from all evil Psalm 120:7. From offenses in the sun, from offenses in the moon, from all evil shall He preserve you, who is your defence upon the hand of your right hand, who will not sleep nor slumber. And for what reason? Because we are amid temptations: The Lord shall preserve you from all evil. The Lord preserve your soul: even your very soul. The Lord preserve your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for evermore Psalm 120:8. Not your body; for the Martyrs were consumed in the body: but the Lord preserve your soul; for the Martyrs yielded not up their souls. The persecutors raged against Crispina, whose birthday we are today celebrating; they were raging against a rich and delicate woman: but she was strong, for the Lord was her defence upon the hand of her right hand. He was her Keeper. Is there any one in Africa, my brethren, who knows her not? For she was most

illustrious, noble in birth, abounding in wealth: but all these things were in her left hand, beneath her head. An enemy advanced to strike her head, and the left hand was presented to him, which was under her head. Her head was above, the right hand embraced her from above.. ..

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