

**GOD, OUR HELP: Ps. 121; Gen 12; Rom. 4; John 3**

**“Remember that you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”**

Pardon the downer, but have you ever felt helpless?  
In sore need of help from others  
either unavailable or unwilling to assist you?  
Along the **road of life’s long journey**,  
have you ever felt **overwhelmed** and **out of gas**?  
**Beaten down by the hot sun during the day,**  
**struck to the bones with nighttime’s bitter chill,**  
**deserted by your travelling companions.**

Out of **water**, out of **food**, out of **strength**.  
Out of **patience**. Out of **time**.  
Have you ever felt helpless? I have.  
And even though everyone’s got their singular story,  
their particular plight –  
I hope you’ll agree with me  
that **we all share a common problem:**  
**the world is filled with helpless humans.**

Try as we might, we cannot fix ourselves. All may not suffer equally, but  
We can’t escape **Death, Taxes**, or even the most mundane symptoms of human existence –  
things like **pride, anger, and greed**.

Some of us may not feel helpless at the moment. We act and feel like we’ve got it all together.  
That’s dangerous.  
Others feel quite helpless, but are hiding behind a mask, because this is Church and we dare not  
show our scars. That’s a shame.

Friends, we need help. The sooner we admit this to ourselves and each other, the better off we’ll  
be. So let’s go find some help, shall we?  
Or rather, let’s consider how our Help has found us.

**Psalm 121: Pg. \_\_\_\_\_**  
**Our Help Comes from the LORD, Maker of Heaven and Earth**

The narrator of the 121st Psalm is most likely a Jew on his or her journey up to the Temple at  
Jerusalem to worship and sacrifice. However, I think every human being has asked the Psalm’s  
opening question:

**“I lift up my eyes to the hills” -- (or, I look up from the chaos of my current situation) --  
from where will my help come?”**

And the answer, whether we like it or know it or not, is that **“My help,” our help, “comes from  
the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”**

That’s right, **our only hope is found at the beginning of the story**, in the same God who,  
according to Genesis 1-2, made the heavens and the earth.

This passage, along with many others throughout the Bible, makes it clear that **the Creator is  
our Redeemer**.

But the really astonishing thing is that **the Maker of the entire universe seems to care about  
the lonely psalmist on his journey to Jerusalem!** The One who holds creation in his hands  
somehow cares about a tiny speck on the canvas of eternity!

Good news, traveler! When you’re about to trip on a rock on life’s hard path,

**He will not let your foot be moved.**

When you’re desperate for sleep, yet wary of thieves in the night, go ahead and close your eyes  
in peace, for **he who keeps you will not slumber**.

That’s right, **the faithful God who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep**. He’s got your  
back all night! **The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand**. He’s got  
your back all day! After all, he made sun and moon, nighttime and daytime. You’ve nothing to  
fear.

**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.**

Friends, there’s our help.

The Creator himself, the Redeemer himself. The One who keeps his people who keep his ways.  
But there’s so much more to the story!

**Genesis 12:1-4: Pg. \_\_\_\_\_**

**Our Help Comes from the LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**

See, the LORD is our help not only because he made the heavens and earth, but because he’s  
been on a relentless mission to set everything right again ever since things went so horribly  
wrong when our first ancestors rebelled against our Maker. When they opened a Pandora’s box  
of Sin and Death that’s haunted sons of Adam and daughters of Eve on their futile journeys back  
toward Eden ever since Genesis 3.

But as Genesis 12:1-4 tells us, the next major step in the story of God’s redemption starts with a  
man named Abram in a land called Ur.

The LORD, our help, tests the faith of Abram with a command to leave something specific and  
cherished – his country, kindred, and father’s household – and go to something vague – a land  
that the LORD would show him.

The things that Abram is then promised in return for obedience to this command (to get up and go) set the trajectory for the rest of the Bible, for the rest of the story about the cure for human helplessness. Abram is promised

- (1) the land which he will be shown,
- (2) many descendants who will be a great nation,
- (3) divine blessing and protection,
- (4) a great reputation, and
- (5) that he & his descendants will become a source of blessing to the world.

After all, the entire world needed fixing, and this was God's continuation of the story from Adam and Eve to Abraham and his children – in order to make everything right again.

In the words of Walter Bruggemann, this “risky imperative” “invites Abraham to live in hope, to wait for a fulfillment, to trust the promise maker to be a promise keeper.” After all, he could do nothing on his own power or ingenuity to achieve the blessings. This was God's promise, and things were obviously in the Lord's hands. But Abram could also never be the same person after this divine intrusion – he would either be transformed into a faithful hoper in or a faithless scorners of the commands and promises of God.

Thankfully, the passage tells us: **Abram went, as the Lord had told him.** God's mission of redemption carried on. **But if this is what links Abe with Adam, what on earth links us with him?** That question has two answers: **first, faith.** And secondly, **the most important son of Abraham** – **Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

#### **Romans 4:**

#### **Our Help Graciously Comes through Faith in Our Faithful God**

First, faith. Despite Abraham's initial faithful response to the “risky imperative” of God, descendants of Abraham eventually started taking their special status for granted – looking down their noses at the pagan nations around them, and assuming that things like **the bloodline of Abraham,** possession of **the Torah or Law of God,** and **obedience to it in distinctive matters** like **what they did and didn't eat** and what they **didn't keep on their male babies for longer than eight days...** they assumed that **these things were the primary source of their identity as God's special people.**

But, in addition to missing the huge point that **Abraham's descendants were supposed to bless the entire world** – that according to Exodus 19 they were supposed to be **a nation of people who spread God's presence and renown throughout creation** – they also missed the huge point that **the glue of their relationship with the LORD wasn't kosher food, circumcision, or even keeping the Sabbath.** Instead, it was the reason for those things in the first place! –

**Their faithful God's GRACE and their faithful FAITH to him.**

After all, Paul reminds his opponents on this issue, Genesis 15:6 tells us that '**Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.**' This is important for two reasons.

- (1) if Abraham had earned this righteousness through works, it wouldn't have been **reckoned to him as a gift**, but **given to him as his due wages**.
- (2) because Abraham faithfully trusted in God and was reckoned righteousness BEFORE he ate kosher, kept Sabbath, and circumcised himself and his offspring –**the righteousness was not earned through these works of the law, but from faith in the faithful God.**

For this reason, Paul adds, **it depends on faith, in order that the promise first given to Abraham may rest on God's grace and be guaranteed to all Abraham's descendants, not only to the adherents of the law and the nation of Israel, but also to those who share the faith of Abraham — including Gentile followers of the Lord Jesus Christ like you and me.**

The first link between us and the faithful God of Abraham, who gives life to the dead and help to the helpless, is **FAITH** –  
**an enduring, faithful trust in the LORD, our help.**

But, because the story has continued, this faith must now be put not only in God, but in the God-Man, **Jesus Christ, God himself who, for us and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was made human.**

**John 3:1-17: Our Help Comes from Above**

Jesus Christ takes the infirmities of helpless humans upon himself, and offers us new life in return.

Our Gospel text for today illustrates this beautiful message of salvation through **an encounter between a son of Abraham, Nicodemus the Pharisee, and The Son of Abraham, the Son of God, the Son of Man – Jesus Christ.**

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, and although he truthfully identifies Jesus as "a teacher who has come from God," he falls short by not recognizing Jesus as anything more.

Jesus replies to the man, who is obviously seeking instruction, that '**no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.**' This is a tricky statement designed to gauge where this Pharisee, this teacher of the people of Israel, is at in his understanding of God's mission to make everything right. Furthermore, the phrase "born from above" can also mean "born again" in Greek... And while both phrases are undoubtedly true in certain senses, it's obvious from Nicodemus' reply that he's misunderstood Jesus' point.

Born again? But “how can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born” again?

Jesus raises the stakes and continues to explain that **“no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** Many things could be said here about the connections to creation and to baptism. Also, there’s a huge sermon in here somewhere about the potentials and perils of using Christian jargon!

However, the point is that, like both water and spirit or wind (same Greek word) which come from above and give life, the source of help and hope for humanity has also come from above, and is now standing in front of Nicodemus! But tragically, he does not understand that the difference between these births is qualitative, not merely chronological. **It’s not just that we need to be born a second time! We helpless humans must be re-born in an entirely different way! Though we are but dust, God’s Spirit can give life.**

**“How can these things be?”** Nicodemus replies, before fading from the narrative. Jesus then incisively notes his ignorance, despite being a teacher of the nation of Israel. **If the teacher fails to understand, how much more so the nation!**

Jesus then continues to draw the contrast between earthly things and heavenly things. Remember, the key is that **we humans, stuck on earth in Sin and Death, are unable to help ourselves.**

But the good news is that our help comes to us from above!

Jesus says in verse 13 that **“No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.”**

God himself has come down to help us!

Christ then predicts his own sacrificial death on the cross in verse 14, the purpose of which, in verse 15, is that “whoever believes in [the Son of God, the Son of Man] may have eternal life.”

**“For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”** For, **“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”**

Famous words. Hope for the helpless.

But I’ve purposefully skipped over Jesus’ poignant question in verse 12: **“If I have told you people about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?”**

The point? **If Nicodemus and the nation of Israel overlooked, misunderstood, and failed to have faith in their Savior, though he stood right in front of them on earth as the most important earthly thing – then they had no hope of the heavenly salvation he came to offer.**

Jesus.

He is the link between us helpless humans and the help the LORD provides.

He is our help from the LORD, because he is the Lord,

Maker of heaven and earth.

He is the fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham,

because he is the Son of Abraham

through whom blessing is offered to the entire world.

He is the one in whom we are to put our faith,

for he is the faithful God who faced Sin and Death in our place,

and who graciously offers eternal life and righteousness

to his faithful people who trust him.

He is the ultimate display of God's love.

And He is the main way in which God is making everything right again.

**Friends, we need not remain helpless,** for our help comes from above.

His name is Jesus, and he calls us to eternal life, to true life in perfect relationship to God, each other, and creation – if we will trust in him, if we will demonstrate faithful faith in our faithful God.

**And yet the challenge remains,** for if we misunderstand and overlook Jesus like Nicodemus apparently did, we stand condemned in our helplessness. We cannot save ourselves, and there is no one else but Jesus, the Son of God, by whom we can be saved.

Furthermore, if like the nation of Israel **we attempt to hoard God's blessing for ourselves, in purposeful and pious ignorance toward the helpless masses around us...** then we may claim to have faith in God, but our works or the lack thereof clearly demonstrate that we have misunderstood his global redemptive mission.

See, God wants to help us. He dearly loves us, each one. But he also wants to help us understand that it's not all about us! Specifically, **it's not all about ME. I am bent inward by sin... and the Gospel takes me first upward, through Christ, to God...and then outward, through Christ, to others!**

**The Creator of heaven and earth wants to redeem all he has made – the rich, poor, black, white, Latino, Asian, simple, educated, sophisticated, ignorant.**

So, if today you have already been born from above, if you're a follower of Jesus along life's long journey, would you take heart? Would you take time to be encouraged, no matter the difficulties of your present circumstances, by **remembering the great salvation you've been freely given?**

And then, as the community of the HELPED,  
would you join me in heeding our Helper's call

**to loose the bonds of wickedness,  
to undo the straps of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
to share our bread with the hungry  
and bring the homeless poor into our houses;  
when we see the naked, to cover him,  
and not to hide ourselves from our own flesh?**

And finally, if for whatever reason you have yet to **place your faith, your trust, your life in the hands of the One who came down from heaven for our salvation – would you do so today?**

Just as when he hung on the cross to face Sin and Death in our place, **his arms are wide open.** And though he asks for your entire life, for faithfulness to him in every aspect of your being, he offers you eternal life – life to the fullest. **And in the grand scheme of things, his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.**

Amen.