

## Thought for the Week 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020

### Psalm 124

- <sup>1</sup> If the LORD had not been on our side –  
let Israel say –
- <sup>2</sup> if the LORD had not been on our side  
when people attacked us,
- <sup>3</sup> they would have swallowed us alive  
when their anger flared against us;
- <sup>4</sup> the flood would have engulfed us,  
the torrent would have swept over us,
- <sup>5</sup> the raging waters  
would have swept us away.
- <sup>6</sup> Praise be to the LORD,  
who has not let us be torn by their teeth.
- <sup>7</sup> We have escaped like a bird  
from the fowler's snare;  
the snare has been broken,  
and we have escaped.
- <sup>8</sup> Our help is in the name of the LORD,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.

“What if..?” I wonder how often you have said that. “What if I had...?” or “What if I hadn’t?”  
“What if things had turned out differently...?” Usually that sort of question is impossible to answer, but when the psalmist David asks, “What if...?” he *is* sure of the answer to his question: *“What if the Lord had not been on our side?”*

But first, he muses in verse 1 & 2 on the possibility that, if God had not been on their side, then they would have been DOOMED, DOOMED (as Private Frazer used to say in his wonderful Scottish accent in the Dad’s Army series). They would have been devoured, defeated, and disappointed as they were attacked by enemies. Back in those days in Israel they were always threatened by sudden attack from one enemy or another. So are we, for our great enemy the devil doesn’t give us a warning when he attacks and these days it seems that God’s people are under attack from many sides. It seems to me that the media are more and more out to attack and undermine the Christian Church any way they can find.

Flooding can be a great problem. We often think of Israel as having a hot and dry climate, but during the rainy season when the mountain snow melts the dry riverbeds become filled very quickly and flooding was common. Climate change seems to be making flooding more common here in the UK. And isn’t there a danger that our message of the Gospel is in danger of being drowned out in a torrent of other messages that contradict it?

The wild beasts mentioned in verse 6 were a constant threat in ancient Israel (the Hebrew language has 12 different words for lions) and the picture was often used in scripture for persecution. As yet, any persecution we have suffered for our Christian faith has been very mild, but that is certainly not the case in much of the world today. We can easily forget that more people died for their Christian faith during the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in all the previous 19 centuries put together!

The snaring of birds for food was common in the ancient world and escape for a helpless bird which walked into the trap in order to eat the tasty morsel of food was virtually impossible. And doesn't Satan have some very tempting bait to offer us, and Oh how easily we fall for it?

But of course, this psalm is not all about doom and gloom – indeed it's the very opposite. There is an answer to the question, *"What if the Lord had not been on our side?"* And the answer is that the LORD IS ON OUR SIDE.

There is a God in whom we can trust. Oh yes, various trials and afflictions may befall us (as they did to the people of Israel), and the Lord may even allow us to fall into a trap, but we cannot be kept there when he wants us to be free. The trap we have all fallen into ever since the Garden of Eden, is sin, and the result is death – eternal separation from God our Father. But the Good News is that the trap has been sprung, and not only that it has been broken so that it can never ensnare us again!

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has broken the power of sin and death, so that it no longer has hold over us and we can walk free.

The people of Israel didn't deserve God's love and forgiveness and neither do we., but God in his sheer love, mercy and grace has provided a great salvation for us in Christ. Listen to what Paul says in chapter 8 of his letter to the Romans:

*<sup>31</sup> What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

All we have to do to know this is accept God's gracious invitation to come to Christ in repentance, faith and trust and then we will find, like the psalmist, that: *"Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."*