

Theme: The LORD, who made heaven and earth, will be our source of help in 2024.

Text: Psalm 121:1-2 (NKJV)

I will lift up my eyes to the hills -- From whence comes my help? ² My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.

In the name of our Lord and God with whom our future in 2024 rests secure, dear fellow redeemed;

Our country is big on conducting polls in order to take the pulse of the nation on a wide variety of issues. Were we to look at the polling numbers on how our fellow citizens feel about the prospects for 2024 on such topics as the economy, physical health and safety, and weather conditions, I think we would find a gloomy report. Judging by the way things went in 2023, many are not very optimistic about the coming year.

It is quite natural for us to be concerned about those conditions in life that personally affect us and others. But some become so filled with anxiety that they are paralyzed by fears and worries. Whereas as children of God we know by faith that we have a mighty God who is our source of help in every need and that therefore there is no cause for fears or worries about what lies ahead of us in the future. The Lord who made the world and everything in it with His almighty power, great goodness, and infinite wisdom uses those same attributes to oversee and govern the world we are living in for our good. It is for this reason that we lift up our eyes to the LORD to help us in the new year. Standing at the threshold of the old year coming to a close and the start of the new year, we look to the Word of God in order to be reminded of the kind of help He provides us with.

Looking at the polls, one area that is high on the list of concerns is the economy. In recent times, we have been experiencing high inflation and a high cost of living. And so, the investor is wondering what the stock market will do in the coming year and the pensioner about the kind of earnings he or she will have, and the consumer about what the cost of living will be.

Whether conditions improve or worsen the Lord Jesus helps us to keep things in perspective by instructing us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." With this petition we are reminded to look to the Lord each day for what we need for body and life, be thankful for and content with what He blesses us, and trust that the Lord will be faithful in providing us with what we need the next day and the next all through out the year.

We have many examples in Holy Scripture of God's faithfulness in providing His people with daily bread. Consider how in Israel's 40 year wilderness journey God sent manna from heaven daily to sustain their lives or Jesus' miraculous feeding of thousands with a small amount of bread and fish or how the Lord kept the prophet Elijah alive during the 3 ½ year drought by sending food in the mouth of a raven and later miraculously keeping the widow's flour bin and cruse of oil from running out.

Whether we have little or much in the new year the Lord will be faithful in providing for our needs!

With a high crime rate in the streets and numerous earthquakes occurring in the bay area, our fellow citizens are concerned about their personal safety. Even though we may feel safe in our immediate area, there are other kinds of dangers we may encounter like being involved in an automobile accident or suffering injury due to a fall.

Whatever the danger may be we have this word of our Lord in which He assures us of His protective care: “No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Ps. 91:10-12).

Concerning these powerful spirit beings, consider how the LORD protected the prophet Elisha and his servant from Syrian soldiers who came after them to do them harm. When the soldiers approached the two servants of God, the LORD sent His heavenly army to protect them. Not seeing this host of angels that surrounded them, the fearful servant said to Elisha, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” So he answered, ‘Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ And Elisha prayed, and said, ‘LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, ‘Strike this people, I pray, with blindness.’ And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha” (2 Kings 6:15-18).

Each and every day the LORD sends His guardian angels to watch over us in order to keep us safe from harm and danger. They possess great power and might to carry out the Lord’s instructions on our behalf. And in those cases where the LORD allows some accident or injury to touch our lives, our Lord is there to help us. Through His gracious, almighty hand He sustains us, encourages us, strengthens us, and heals us.

Witnessing the different weather conditions in our country this past year which included such things as drought conditions and heavy rains and snowstorms, as well as tornadoes, what can we expect in the new year? While there are weather forecasts and prognostications which are unable to tell us everything, the weather for the new year rests with God.

Listen to the testimony of the psalmist concerning God’s governing of the weather conditions: “Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty, Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain. He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters, Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind, Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire. You who laid the foundations of the earth, So that it should not be moved forever, You covered it with the deep as with a garment; The waters stood above the mountains. At Your rebuke they fled; At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away. They went up over the mountains; They went down into the valleys, To the place which You founded for them. You have set a boundary that they may not pass over, That they may not return to cover the earth. He sends the springs into the valleys, They flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst. By them the birds of the heavens have their home; They sing among the branches. He waters the hills from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That he may bring forth food from the earth” (Ps. 104:1-14).

Since the LORD is in control of the weather, we lift up our eyes unto Him and ask Him to graciously and mercifully bless us with the kind of weather that will be beneficial. When in His wisdom the LORD sends weather conditions that are not favorable or are destructive, we have faith that the LORD has His reason for the kind of weather He sends and that He will use it to serve for the good of mankind. The LORD can use the harsh elements of weather to reprove those who are disobedient, to correct those who are erring in life, to train and to strengthen those who are in need of being built up in the LORD. Whatever the weather may be that God in His wisdom and goodness sends, we know He always has our spiritual and eternal welfare at heart and in mind.

As we are getting along in years, one area of life that concerns us more and more is the state of our health. How will our health fare in the new year? Will it get worse or will it improve to some degree?

With this matter of concern on our minds, consider God's dealings with the Israelite King Hezekiah. In 2 Kings we read, "In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.'" Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, saying, 'Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.' And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David"" (20:1-6).

Our health and our life rest in the hands of the LORD. So then, whenever any health problem arises, we lift up our eyes to Him first and foremost in order to seek His help. Since God has not promised us that He will in every case cure us or restore us to good health, we trust that He will do what is best for us. Also, since the length of our days in this world rests in His hands, we commit our life into His all-knowing, all-wise ways, trusting that He knows best when to call us home to heaven.

The last matter of concern to us that is really the most important of all considerations in the new year is our spiritual health and welfare. We know that in this evil world there are many wicked forces at work that would separate us from God and lead us to our eternal doom. And so, it is quite natural for us to be concerned about remaining in faith to the very end.

In order to reassure us in this ultimate concern listen to these words of our good Shepherd Jesus Christ, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.... My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:14,15,27-29).

As in the past so also in the new year there will be countless times that we will stray from the paths of God. Our concern about our straying ways is that we do not become completely separated from the LORD in impenitence and unbelief.

Our good Shepherd Jesus Christ comforts us by telling us of how He laid down His life for us so that each and everyone of our sins are taken away and forgiven by God. Jesus also reassures us about our remaining in His flock until He translates us into heaven that as we continue to listen to His voice that sounds forth from the Bible and follow Him in faith and love, both He and our heavenly Father will not let anyone or anything separate us from our Lord and God. Because of His saving grace and His abiding care we will have everlasting life in heaven through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ and will not perish eternally.

Looking to the future of 2024 there are many unknowns. But what we do know with absolute certainty is that the LORD our God will be with us each and every day of the new year. And He will be faithful in employing His forgiving love, His almighty power, His infinite wisdom, and His great goodness to ever bless us no matter what we encounter in 2024.

Therefore, in the new year that lies ahead of us we will lift up our eyes to the LORD, who made heaven and earth, trusting that He will bless us on our way. Amen.