

**Series**            **Cries from the Heart**  
**Sermon**          ***The Cry for Peace and Security***  
**Speaker**        **Pastor Josh Black**  
**Scripture**      **Psalm 125**  
**Date**            **August 26, 2007**

**“Would you go check?”**

Men, have you ever been laying in bed at night, quite comfortable and content to stay in that same spot, immovable, until morning? Have you ever had this peaceful bliss interrupted by the anxious voice of your wife saying to you, “*Honey, are you sure you locked the door?*” Or, “*Is the garage shut?*” “*Did you put out the trash?*” “*Did I blow out the candle?*” When I respond to these questions with, “I don’t know,” I would like to think that would be a sufficient answer considering my horizontal posture. But “*I don’t know*” is generally followed up by, “*Well, would you go double check?*” On those evenings when my courage is in rare quantity I sometimes say, “*Why don’t you go check yourself,*” but that response is met with something along the lines of, “*...because I’m scared.*” This is so bothersome! And what about this one: “*I think I heard someone! ...would you go check?*” I’ve never understood this request. Who wants to go check? First of all there’s nobody there, but what if there was? Why push a perfectly harmless burglar to the point of unnecessary violence? Why not just let him burgle? Surely there’s nothing in my home that’s more valuable than my life. After all, as Pastor Mike reminded us last week, we can’t take it with us when we go. So if there is someone downstairs (which there isn’t) why do I have to put my life in jeopardy? Why can’t I just roll over and go to sleep?

**Proposition**

The reason is this: my wife’s desire for peace and security is stronger than my desire to stay in my very comfortable bed. As we look together at Psalm 125 this morning I think that we will see that our desire for Peace and Security is very strong indeed. I think you’ll also agree that we often times seek out the peace and security that we desire in places that are ironically dangerous and in that process we miss the only true way of experiencing peace and security and that is from trusting in Jesus, with our whole life.

Turn with me now in your Bibles to Psalm 125.

Psalm 125

*Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion  
which can not be moved, but abides forever  
As the mountains surround Jerusalem so the Lord surrounds his people  
from this time forth and forevermore  
For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted for the righteous  
lest the righteous stretch out their hand to do wrong  
Do good, O Lord, to those who are good  
and to those who are upright in their hearts!  
But those who turn aside to their crooked ways  
the Lord will lead away with the evil doers  
Peace be upon Israel*

## **Immovable?**

There is a phrase in that first verse that just jumps off the page at me. *“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mt. Zion which CAN NOT BE MOVED...”* Can not be moved? Does this describe you? On the contrary I feel quite moveable. I’m frantic at times and prone to losing my temper, I’m impulsive and struggle to control my tongue. And I know of many Christians who worry to the point of sleeplessness. There are believers in the marketplace who fold under pressure to perform and in the process compromise their beliefs with unethical business practices. There are a number of high school and college students, who profess belief in Christ, but whose moral lives look no different from their non-Christian peers; they are quite movable when it comes to the influence the world has on them. And what about parenting? Maggie and I have recently borrowed a book titled *“She’s Gonna Blow! Real help for mom’s dealing with anger.”* What parent hasn’t felt like they’re gonna blow at times? Many of you have received the phone call that nobody wants to receive; that a loved one is sick or has died? Do you feel like a mountain that can not be moved during these times? If we were so immovable and secure would there be as many that have moved to the suburbs, into gated communities, installed high powered security systems, invested hours upon hours studying their portfolios and retirement accounts to make sure that they are going to “be okay”?

The notion of being immovable fascinates me, because when we place our real life experiences along side of our yearning for a “mountain-like” life there seems to be a “disconnect”. I believe that, in all of us, God has created a desire for himself. As Pascal said, *“we were all created with a God-shaped vacuum.”* Or as Augustine said, *“our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee.”* So when our desire for God is not being met in actual experience we cry out. We experience friction between reality and the way things should be and so we seek out reconciliation.

We were created to experience peace and security through relationship with God, and so we cry out, *“God, put an end to all of this insecurity and restore peace to my life!”* This is the reason why Psalm 125 was written. Life in Israel was not as it was supposed to be, and so the Psalmist cries out to God, for peace. As the Israelites sang this song they would have been reminded, in the midst of all of their troubles, who they were in relationship to God. This Psalm served as a reminder of God’s past faithfulness and gave them hope of his future promises. This Psalm was written to encourage *us* to keep fighting the good fight even when the world’s ways are more attractive. It was written to remind *us* of the futility of taking matters into our own hands and to cast a hopeful vision of the lasting reward we will receive if we put our trust in Jesus.

As the Israelites traveled to Jerusalem, for their 3 annual feasts, they would have sung this song. When they traveled they would have seen the mountains surrounding the city as well. Those majestic mountains and this song, about mountain-like faith would have triggered in them many thoughts about God and encouraged them to continue in the God-ward life they were trying to lead.

## **Metaphor of a Mountain**

Jerusalem was surrounded by mountains and this provided defense against invasion. Jerusalem was also insulated from the pagan world outside of her walls because of the mountains. However, the mountains surrounding Jerusalem, in spite of their great protection, were not impenetrable. The Israelites were still in need of a strong military and had to keep a close eye on danger. The mountains shielded the Israelites from the world outside, but they were not enough to make Israel immune to the influence of the pagan culture. The mountains, though providing a great protection physically did nothing to guard the souls and hearts of the people of God.

For when God's ways weren't fast enough or "shiny" enough Israel turned to idolatry or self-sufficiency. God is a range of mountains around us, but he doesn't force us to become his people, and he doesn't force us remain his people. When we choose to go our own way or the way of the world we forfeit the protection of the mountains that surround us and expose ourselves to danger. In the same way that Pronghorns expose themselves to danger when they abandon their strengths and are lured towards the shiny arrows of the hunter.

So, the mountains surround Jerusalem, yes, but as history has proven those mountains alone do not hold the city; it is only when the Lord has a hold on your life that you are secure. The mountains are a picture of God's faithfulness, but they are a picture that can not be understood while we remain faithless. You can't move a mountain, but you can get around it. Are you trying to find ways around our immovable and faithful God?

### **NT Picture of what trust looks like**

We have a great story in the New Testament, from the life of Peter, which illustrates what it looks like to trust God. It is the story of Peter walking on the water.

You may be familiar with the story, but for those of you who aren't the setting of the story may be helpful. Jesus had just finished feeding the 5,000 and after Jesus dismissed the crowds he instructed his disciples to get into a boat and to cross the Sea of Galilee, while he stayed back to spend a little time in prayer. The story picks up in the middle of that same night.

Matthew 14:25-33

*...in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."*

*And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." [Jesus] said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and TOOK HOLD OF HIM, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

Peter trusted Jesus when he got out of the boat, but he ceased to trust him when he took his eyes off of Jesus and was worrying about the wind. If we are to understand what it means to trust God the message in this story is critical. Many of you have trusted Jesus for your salvation, but when we take our eyes off of the Lord and start worrying about our safety we will ironically forfeit our safety and start sinking. Friends, worry is the polar-opposite of trust! There are many things that demand our attention in life, but if we are to trust God we must maintain focus, on Jesus. So long as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, regardless of what's going on around us, we will be immovable, mountain-like, sea-walking-on, Christians!

So if we are to trust God, *let us fix [our] eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12:2*

We could conclude this sermon here because really the answer to how we trust God and experience peace and security is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, but we know that even though the message is simple, the

application is difficult and so I want to look now at what gets in the way of us trusting God and what hinders us from experiencing the peace and security we long for.

### **Nehemiah and the Scepter of Wickedness**

Commentators believe that Psalm 125 was written during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. During this time the preserved remnant of Israel had returned from their Babylonian captivity and God's people were now in their own land, but the land was dominated by a foreign power. The Psalmist refers to this power as *the scepter of wickedness*.

Verse 3 says,

*The scepter of wickedness will not REST on the land allotted for the righteous  
LEST the righteous stretch out their hand to do wrong.*

A scepter is an instrument of war – I gather that it was a long rod of some kind with a ball on the end of it that would have been used to club someone in the head – and so the word scepter came to symbolize domination. Even though the Jews were rejoicing because of their deliverance from captivity and a spiritual revival that was happening in their community, they were also discouraged at the opposition they were experiencing from those in the land. The scepter of wickedness was making it difficult to be faithful to God and to the task he had given them of rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem.

Do you feel like the scepter of the wicked is ruling America? Is it ruling our schools and our marketplace? You don't have to leave the television on very long to know that the scepter of wickedness has full dominion over the media drenched world that we live in. How are we as Christians to respond to this reality?

In Nehemiah 4 we are told the story of the Israelites ordeal in trying to build the wall around Jerusalem while suffering persecution at the hands of the Samaritans, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites. The instructions Nehemiah gives to the Israelites who are working in these conditions are interesting. He didn't have them cease working because of the distraction, but he didn't have them ignore the fact that danger was imminent either. Instead he had them work with their tools in one hand and their sword in another; one hand for their task for the Lord, one hand for protection from the world. That's really where we're at today as believers. We need to stay focused 100% on following Jesus and not quit, but we have to do that right here, right now, in this real world of sin. We are to be in the world, but not of the world.

But how should living in the world look? We are, after all, called to be set apart, as the people of God; we are called to be holy and to stand up for what is right. This is not easy to do though when the world's ways shout out so much louder than God's ways or when they come so much easier than God's ways. That is why the Psalmist encourages us with these words: *the scepter of wickedness won't rest on the land allotted for the righteous lest the righteous stretch out their hand to do wrong*. The presence of wickedness was discouraging, but the Psalmist wanted to remind the faithful that this wickedness wouldn't last. He understood that the world's ways are loud now, but that they will be silenced eventually.

Is the Psalmist referring to the political situation in Israel? I have a hard time interpreting this passage politically because as I look at history it seems as though Israel has constantly been at war politically; generally as a result of their faithlessness. I believe that when the Psalmist spoke of the scepter of wickedness not being permanent that he was prophetically looking to eternity and the New Jerusalem where joy shall never end. For as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:19, *"If only for this life we have hope in*

*Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*” Don’t we have so much more to be encouraged by than the possibility of political relief? Again, as Hebrews 12:2 says, “...for the joy set before him [he] endured the cross” and so for the joy set before us, which is eternity with Jesus, we endure life among the wicked.

Israel ultimately didn’t take this promise to heart though. Instead of enduring under pressure they more times than not folded under pressure. One of Israel’s perennial challenges was adopting pagan values while calling themselves the people of God. That ultimately led to Israel’s destruction. We face this same challenge today. I think it’s fair to say that a large section of the church has adopted America’s values, in place of God’s, all the while calling themselves Christians. They have failed to trust God with their whole lives. These are people who call themselves Christians and could recall a time in their life where they put their trust in God, but their lives today prove that their trust and focus is no longer on God, but rather on the world and the fortresses they have made for themselves. Maybe these people have given up because they didn’t see immediate results from following Jesus and now they are embracing the American value of instant gratification. Or maybe their God-given desire for peace and security, which paradoxically comes through sacrifice and endurance, got confused with the American expectation of comfort and convenience; maybe they sold out. The psalmist has something to say about the people of God selling out to the values of the world. Look with me at verse 5.

*But those who turn aside to their crooked ways  
the Lord will lead away WITH the evil doers*

Remember that God will not force people to come to him, and he will not force them to stay. But when we quit putting our trust in the Lord, as the Israelites did, we voluntarily evacuate the fortress of God and will ultimately suffer the same end as the unbelievers, which is separation from God and the security he provides. It’s a sad story when God’s creation seeks peace and security in places other than a relationship with Christ because all other ways actually lead in the opposite direction; they lead to destruction – *no one comes to the Father except through Jesus.*

### **Digression**

This warning to not turn aside to crooked ways is clear in this Psalm, but I think there is another danger that is not as clear, but may ring more true with some of us who have spent most of our lives in the fortress of the church. Instead of succumbing to the pressures of the world some are tempted to abandon the world all together. When we, as Christians, feel like the evil people of this world, are threatening our peace and security, some respond by hiding themselves from the world.

In an effort to “protect ourselves” from sin, have we built our walls so tall that we have discouraged the sinner, that may need to seek refuge in our fortress, from seeking Jesus? Are we putting our trust in God as our fortress when we build walls of isolation or are we taking matters into our own hands? After all, wasn’t Jesus himself a friend of sinners? He calls us to follow him, he calls us to be holy, but he also calls us to have a heart for the lost. What about the good news of the gospel that is available to the world? Did not Jesus say that only the sick need a doctor? Have we forgotten that we too once were sick; that we too “were lost, but now are found?”

There have been Christians at all stages throughout history who have gone to extreme measures to guard themselves against the evil of this world, and I believe that in most cases these efforts have been with good intentions. However, our isolation strategies won’t keep *us* from sin, but they could keep sinners from Jesus. We must be fully committed to following Jesus, without compromise, but we are to do that right here, and right now, in the real world. Rarely are we given opportunities to flesh out our faith in isolation from the world. Nehemiah was not able to rebuild the wall without opposition. And in a similar

way we will have to live out our faith where the scepter of wickedness is present. We are called to be faithful among the faithless; to walk in wisdom toward those who are without.

### **Friday Night Ramp Ministry**

In the youth ministry here at First Free we have been blessed with an opportunity that none of us would have ever dreamed of. We now have over 30 students who are a part of our ramp ministry here at the church on Friday nights. These students come to ride our skateboard and bike ramps that are behind the youth building, to share a meal with us, and to hear the gospel. Most of these students are not Christians. A lot of these students who attend on Friday nights come from different backgrounds than the kids who grew up in this church. They dress different, they act different, they talk different, and they're here for different reasons. Frankly they intimidate some, irritate others, they make many nervous, and a lot of people if they were honest would like them to "quit ruining the youth group." I understand these sentiments because these students are a threat to the peace and stability of a youth group, which has never had such a large influx of "unchurched" students as part of the regular dynamic of the group. And while these assessments of our "unchurched" friends are true in some regard they are also short sided.

What a lot of people do not realize is that most of these kids come from broken homes; families fractured by divorce, imprisonment, and death. They have experienced abuse, neglect, feelings of hopelessness, and hostile environments that are unpredictable at best; environments where raised voices are the norm and where crying yourself to sleep at night goes unnoticed. And so they cry out! They shout out the cry for *Peace and Security!* It may look different than your cry, but they cry out all the same. Some may prefer to call it acting out, as these students vie for attention. They're either loud or they won't participate at all, they're wild and don't have respect for the rules sometimes – they disrupt lessons – they disrupt our peace and stability.

But why are they here? Is it because of the ramps and the free food? Maybe, but could it be that they are here for something entirely different than that? Could it be that this is a refuge for them; one of the few safe places they have to go every week? Could it be that while they're disrupting the peace of our church we're providing them a slice of peace they've never experienced?

I've asked some of these students if they could ever dream of or imagine a day when peace would be restored to their families. Their response is either sarcastic laughter or downcast faces. But these students have dreams and aspirations just like the kids in this church. They desire relationships, love, and affection. They want affirmation and encouragement just like you and I. So do they come to ride our ramps or do they come because they see these things in us? Do they come to eat our food or do they come because they see these things in Jesus, through the stories we tell them week after week?

Do they threaten our peace? Well, that's one question we could ask. Or we could ask a different one; are we showing them, through our lives and words, how they could experience everlasting peace? Are we painting a picture of AN eternal, mountain-like fortress, or do they sense dissention in us? They are at war in their families, yes, but even more importantly they are at war with God because of sin. They may never know peace in their homes, but they can know peace with their Creator.

And so can we.

### **Prayer**

In the middle of Psalm 125, the writer does something different than he does in the rest of the Psalm. It kind of comes out of nowhere, but I think it captures the meat of the chapter. Right in the middle of it all the Psalmist stops to pray:

*Be good, O Lord, to those who are good  
and to those who are upright in their hearts.*

Prayer, in its very essence, acknowledges that we are not in control; God is. The posture of prayer is requisite of those who wish to put their full trust in the Lord. Remember, this psalm was written for the *faithful*, who were trying to follow God in an evil world. There was opposition from the outside and the inside; even the people of God were abandoning faith. But there were a few who were still trying to actually *live out* what they believed. Those who pray know the answers aren't in themselves and they know the answers are not in the world; they acknowledge that the answers are only in God himself. And so it is there, in God's presence, that they seek refuge and strength. The faithful are not unrealistic about things such as world peace or even lasting peace in their own community, but they are *confident* they will experience peace and security through an abiding relationship with their Creator, and so they pray. They cry out, "God, you are faithful, so I will be faithful. I trust you; *be good, O Lord, to those who are good....*" John 15 reminds us that "we can do nothing apart from Jesus." And that is the message I give for you this morning: Apart from Christ your life will be one of perpetual frustration, insecurity, and turmoil. Yield! Quit building your house on the sand and build on the only sure foundation - Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

If you call yourself a Christian, but you're living your life without the hope and confidence that comes from trusting Jesus with everything, then I invite you to surrender your will to him and to come to his mountain of mercy this morning; experience the peace and security that come from surrendering control. Have you heard hundreds of sermons that you believe in your head, but not with your life? Are you are living with the same tension you did when you came to faith? The tension between the peace and security you desire and the reality of your life. Your heart will be restless until you find rest in him. What are you waiting for? What is that one thing that you are holding on to? Let go and let Jesus hold you, like he held Peter after he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Fix your eyes upon Jesus the author *and* finisher of your faith. Do you believe in the possibility of change or are you content with a "ho-hum" life?

For those of you who are struggling to love the sinner I urge you to ask God to search your heart. "Sinner-phobia" can rob life from others who look to us to be like mountains. There are those who look to us for evidence that a relationship with God really brings peace and security in a world of uncertainties. Maybe instead of trying to keep these people out of your life you could breathe life into them.

And if you have never trusted in Jesus and would like to I invite you to trust him this morning with your whole life. As you saw from this Psalm, being a follower of Christ is not a walk in the park. Your circumstances will not automatically get better. As a matter of fact they may get worse, but the scepter of the wicked will not *rest* on the land. *Those who trust in the Lord can not be moved!*

Jesus died for your sins so that you could have peace with God and know him in relationship, right now. He also rose from the dead so that we could have peace for eternity.

*Come to him all you who are weary and burdened and he will give you rest...rest for your souls!*  
This is the good news Jesus offers to all of us and it is the good news this Psalm concludes with...

*Peace Be Upon Israel!*

And may peace be upon all of us as we trust in the Lord!