

## The Graveyard Shift

### Psalm 134:1-3

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*Psalm 134:1 A Song of degrees. Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. 2 Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. 3 The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.*

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#### Introduction:

A Song of Degrees – the Hebrew word translated as degrees is *ma'alah* and literally means “a journey to a higher place.” Therefore, the title simply means a “psalm of elevation.” If you will look in your bible today, observe that starting in Psalm 120 and carrying through to Psalm 134, you will find a subtitle to each of the Psalms as “A Song of Degrees.” Out of these 15 psalms, five are titled “A Song of Degrees of David” (Psalms 121; 122; 124;131;133) and one is titled, “A Song of Degrees of Solomon” (Psalm 127).

As you may be aware, I am fond of the English Standard Version of the Holy Bible. They interpret the phrase “A Song of Degrees” as “A Song of Ascents.”

While it is hard to pin down exactly what this phrase and the significance of these 15 psalms are, it is generally accepted that these psalms were songs, sung by those making their pilgrimage to one of the three main Feasts in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is located in a mountainous area (Psalms 48:1-2; 125:1-2), therefore, as the pilgrims finally made their way to the top of the mountain, they had to “ascend” to the city of God.

Other’s believe these are to be sung as they climb the 15 steps leading to the Temple. Other’s think it is a reference that each one of the psalms “rises higher” than the previous until the last step where the 134<sup>th</sup> Psalm is sung on a crescendo of praise.

Today, we are not Hebrews, making our pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem, but we are all pilgrims of this world...we are all just passing through this life. This morning, we have come to worship and praise Jesus the Christ.

As this is the last of the “Songs of Degrees”, no matter whether it means it is the last one to be sung as we would enter into Jerusalem or that it is the pinnacle of the Psalms to be sung as we enter the final steps into the Temple in Jerusalem, this Psalm is special. It only has three verses, but it is always about quality rather than quantity.

So journey with me today as we reach the point of achieving the final step of the journey. Let us join together in worship...let us sing aloud the words of this psalm right now. Let us read the Psalm together this morning, it is only three verses. You will find them on the screen and in your bulletin.

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*Psalm 134:1 Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. 2 Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. 3 The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.*

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Please try to imagine that you are in the eighth century B.C. You are Hebrew and have journeyed from your home to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover at the Solomon's Temple (completed in 960 BC). No matter how long the journey has been, you don't enter Jerusalem without visiting the Temple mount. The sun is setting and the torches have been lit. Oh the splendor of the House of God. Tears well up in your eyes as you come to the end of your journey. The fire light is reflected off the Temple walls and the presence of the LORD is seen.

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*Psalm 134:1 Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD.*

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“Behold” – the writer of this psalm (unknown and unattributed) begins by saying, “behold”. This Hebrew word is translated as “behold, come or look.”

“bless ye the LORD” – could be translated as “say good things about Jehovah.” When we refer to the blessings of God in our lives, we are saying that “God does good things for me.” The Psalmist is exhorting the people to “say good things.”

During our weekly Prayer Meeting and Bible Study, I always ask for prayer concerns and praises. May I say that the list of petitions far exceeds the praises. This ought not to be. We should always be ready to proclaim to others that “God does good things for me.” Don't you agree?

The Psalmist also uses God's covenant name of “*yhwh*”, the tetragrammaton<sup>1</sup>, or Yahweh which we get the anglicized word Jehovah.

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<sup>1</sup> Tetragrammaton is Greek and means four letters translated as yhwh or jvh. In the *Bible* it is used for the Hebrew name for God revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 3). It consists of the four consonants Y H V H (or Y H W H) and regarded by Jews as too sacred to be pronounced. It is usually transliterated as *Jehovah* or *Yahweh*.

“...all ye servants of the LORD” – The call goes out from the people to those that are “servants of the LORD.” These servants referred to in this psalm were most likely the Levitical priests (1 Kings 8:10-11). Each day assignments were made for each priest.

...which by night stand in the house of the LORD - The evening staff would come in during their shift to perform their duties in the Temple after the sun set. The servants referred to are the evening shift of priests, the night watchmen about the innermost places of the Temple including the Temple and the inner courts.. Others kept the altar fires going while others gathered and counted the money given that day and put it in the treasury. Some worked in the storage rooms caring for the food offerings presented to the priests. Some priests would make repairs when needed, served as musicians, singers, and doorkeepers, opening and closing all the inner gates of the Temple mount (Numbers 1:50-53; 3:6-9; 4:1-33). Other duties would include preparing the incense and making the showbread. The tasks were many. There was enough work to go 24 x 7.

I worked the night shift one time while stationed in Mobile, Alabama. It was during the evening that most of the maintenance was completed. The atmosphere was a more laid back, but the workload increased. I learned more about aircraft maintenance during that time and I really enjoyed it. I found out a lot about myself during those days. I relied on the maintenance manuals to keep the USCG helicopters and aircraft flying.

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*2 Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.*

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*Lift up your hands in the sanctuary* – the pilgrims brought a stop to all the work from the servants. They were encouraged them to stop what they were doing and “lift up your hands in the sanctuary.

I am encouraged by this verse. I realize that many times we can be so busy doing the work of the LORD, whether in ministry or doing maintenance, cleaning, teaching, and preaching, we should always be ready to lift up our hands unto the LORD. For the Hebrews this meant an outward action overflowing from the heart of the worshiper.

The sanctuary refers to the Temple on Mount Moriah. Zion is another name for Jerusalem. For us today, it could represent Keys Valley Baptist Church this morning.

We Baptists shy away from raising our hands. However, could we lift our hands in praise in our church this morning and “say good things about God?” Let’s try it together, shall we. “Lift up your hands in the Church of God”.

and bless the LORD – Bless is the Hebrew word *barak* meaning to kneel; by implication to bless God (as an act of adoration), and (vice-versa) man (as a benefit).

So let's look at this verse and I will comply with what the psalm is asking. I raise my hands in the sanctuary and fall to my knees, saying good things about God.

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### *3 The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.*

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This psalm is antiphonal (antif a nal), meaning that is responsive. This psalm includes the exhortation from the people for the “servants” to “bless the LORD” and the response from the priests is “The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.” In the previous two verses, the people called upon the priests to bless the Lord (vv. 1-2) and in this verse, the priests respond by blessing the people. Notice that this is a singular, personal blessing to the people, they use “thee”. “The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion, more specifically, “from the place where you worship.”

#### Conclusion

What can we glean from this Psalm?

#### We Can Apply This Psalm Literally

We should exhort one another to proclaim the blessings of God, literally 24 hours a day.

#### We Can Apply This Psalm Missiologically

Missiology is the evangelistic function of the believer, and therefore the Church of God. We have missionaries serving in many “spiritually darkened” areas. They are doing the work that God has called them to do, and yet, there are times when the people need to exhort them to “Tells us about the good things God is doing for them.”

#### We Can Apply This Psalm Personally

Like the pilgrims going to Jerusalem to participate in the Feasts, we are all on a journey. From the cradle to the grave, we simply put one foot in front of the other. Sometimes life seems very dark. We need to encourage one another to “bless the LORD.” Oh how this life can drag us down at times. Darkness fills our thoughts. It is then that we need to drop everything and shout; “God does great things for me.”

As servants of the Most High God, we are to serve Him day and night in His house. As the people who had traveled from far and wide were finishing their journey, they would finish with this psalm that entreats the priests to “bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord!

If you find yourself tossing and turning and cannot sleep, as routinely happens to me, get up out of bed and begin blessing the Lord.