

# Exposition on Psalm 124

by St. Augustine

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having faith in the Lord and His help, and how it can deliver us from the snare of the fowlers.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 123:1-2, Psalm 124:2-4, Acts 9:4

**Topics:** "Persecution", "Spiritual Protection"

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## Description

St. Augustine preaches on the Psalms, emphasizing the unity of believers in Christ as one body with Christ as the Head, even in the face of trials and persecutions. He reflects on the martyrs who have gone before us, singing praises to God for their deliverance and longing for the incorruptible bodies promised to them. Augustine highlights the importance of having the Lord within us, as it is He who sustains and protects us from the snares and temptations of the world, enabling us to escape like a bird from the fowler's trap.

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## Transcript

1. You already well know, dearest brethren, that a Song of Degrees, is a song of our ascent: and that this ascent is not effected by the feet of the body, but by the affections of the heart. This we have repeatedly reminded you of: and we need not repeat it too often, that there may be room for saying what has not yet been said. This Psalm, therefore, which you have now heard sung for you, is inscribed, A Song of Degrees. This is its title. They sing therefore while ascending: and sometimes as it were one man sings, sometimes as it were many; because many are one, since Christ is One, and in Christ the members of Christ constitute one with Christ, and the Head of all these members is in heaven. But although the body toils on earth, it is not cut off from its Head; for the Head looks down from above, and regards the body. Acts 9:4 ...Whether therefore one or many sing; many men are one man, because it is unity; and Christ, as we have said, is One, and all Christians are members of Christ.

2. ...Certain members indeed of that body of which we also are, which can sing in truth, have gone before us. And this the holy Martyrs have sung: for they have already escaped, and are with Christ in joy about to receive at last incorruptible bodies, the very same which were at first corruptible, wherein they have suffered pains; of the same there will be made for them ornaments of righteousness. Therefore whether they in reality, or we in hope, joining our affections with their crowns, and longing for such a life as we have not here, and shall never gain unless we have longed for it here, let us all sing together, and say, If the Lord Himself had not been in us....

3. If the Lord Himself had not been in us, now may Israel say Psalm 123:1...When? When men rose up against us Psalm 123:2. Marvel not: they have been subdued: for they were men; but the Lord was in us, man was not in us: for men rose up against us. Nevertheless men would crush other men, unless in those men who could not be crushed, there were not man, but the Lord. For what could men do to you, while you rejoiced, and sang, and securely held everlasting bliss? What could men do to you when they rose against you, if the Lord had not been on your side? What could they do? Perchance they had swallowed us up quick Psalm 123:3. Swallowed us up: they would not first have slain us, and so have swallowed us up. O inhuman, O cruel men! The Church swallows not thus. To Peter it was said, Kill and eat: Acts 10:13 not, Swallow quick. Because no man enters into the body of the Church, save he be slain first. What he was dies, that he may be what he was not. Otherwise, he who is not slain, and is not eaten by the Church, may be in the visible number of the people: but he cannot be in the number of the people which is known to God, whereof the Apostle says, The Lord knows who are His, 2 Timothy 2:19 save he be eaten; and eaten he cannot be, save he first be slain. The Pagan comes, still in him idolatry lives; he must be grafted among the members of Christ: that he may be engrafted, he must needs be eaten; but he cannot be eaten by the Church, save first he be slain. Let him renounce the world, then is he slain; let him believe in God, then is he eaten...But they in whom the Lord is, are slain and die not. But they who consent and live, are swallowed quick, when swallowed up they die. But they who have suffered, and have not yielded to tribulations, rejoice and say, If the Lord had not been in us, etc.

4. ...When their fury was enraged upon us. They are now in anger, they now openly rage: perchance the water had drowned us Psalm 123:4. By water he means ungodly nations: and we shall see what sort of water in the following verses. Whoever had consented unto them, water would have overwhelmed him. For he would die by the death of the Egyptians, he would not pass through after the example of the Israelites. For you know, brethren, that the people of Israel passed through the water, by which the Egyptians were overwhelmed. Exodus 14:22-29 But what sort of water is this? It is a torrent, it flows with violence, but it will pass by...Hence He, our Head, first drinks, of whom it is said in the Psalms, He shall drink of the torrent in the way: therefore shall He lift up His head. For our Head is already exalted, because He drank of the torrent by the way; for our Lord has suffered. If therefore our Head has been already raised up, why does the body fear the torrent? Without doubt, because the Head has been raised, the body also will say hereafter, Our soul has passed over the torrent. Perhaps our soul has passed over the water without substance Psalm 123:5. Behold, what sort of water he was speaking of, The water perchance had overwhelmed us. But what means, without substance?

5. In the first place, what means, Perchance our soul has passed over? Psalm 123:5. Understand however the meaning to be this: Do you think our soul has passed over? and why do they say, Do you think? Because the greatness of the danger makes it hardly credible that he has escaped. They have endured a great death: they have been in great dangers; they have been so much oppressed, that they almost gave consent while alive, and were all but swallowed up alive: now therefore that they have escaped, now that they are secure, but still remember the danger, the great danger, say, Do you think our soul has passed over the water without substance?

6. What is the water without substance, save the water of sins without substance? For sins have not substance: they have destitution, not substance; they have want, not substance. In that water without substance, the younger son lost the whole of his substance...Do you wish to see how the water is without substance? Take away with you to the world below what you have acquired: what will you do? You have acquired gold: you have lost your faith: after a few days you leave this life; you can not take away with you

the gold you have acquired by the loss of your good faith; your heart, destitute of faith, goes forth into punishment-- your heart, which if full of faith, would go forth unto a crown. Behold, what you have done is nothing: and you have offended God for nothing.

7. Men hear that common proverb; and the proverbs of God slumber in them. What proverb? Better in hand than in hope. Unhappy man, what have you in hand? You say, Better in hand. Hold it so as not to lose it, and then say, Better in hand. But if you hold it not, why do you not hold fast that which you can not lose? What then have you in hand? Gold. Keep it in hand, therefore: if you have it in hand, let it not be taken away without your consent. But if through gold also you are carried where you wish not, and if a more powerful robber seeks you, because he finds you a less powerful robber; if a stronger eagle pursue you, because you have carried off a hare before him: the lesser was your prey, you will be a prey unto the greater. Men see not these things in human affairs: by so much avarice are they blinded...

8. Let them escape the water without substance, and say, Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us over for a prey unto their teeth Psalm 123:6. For the hunters were following, and had placed a bait in their trap. What bait? The sweetness of this life, so that each man for the sake of the sweetness of this life may thrust his head into iniquity, and be caught in the trap. Not they, in whom the Lord was, they who say, If the Lord Himself had not been in us; they have not been taken in the trap. Let the Lord be in you, and you will not be taken in the trap.

9. Our soul is escaped, even as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers Psalm 123:7. Because the Lord was in the soul itself, therefore has that soul escaped, even as a bird out of the snare of the fowler. Why like a bird? Because it had fallen heedlessly, like a bird; and it could say afterwards, God will forgive me. Unstable bird, rather set your feet firm upon the rock: go not into the trap. You will be taken, consumed, crushed. Let the Lord be in you, and He will deliver you from greater threats, from the snare of the fowlers. As if you were to see a bird about to fall into a snare, you make a greater noise that it may fly away from the net; so also, when perhaps some even of the Martyrs were stretching out their neck after the enjoyment of this life, the Lord, who was in them, made the noise of hell, and the bird was delivered from the snare of the fowlers. The snare was the sweetness of this life: they were not entangled in the snare, and were slain; by their slaughter the net was broken; no longer did the sweetness of this life remain, that they might again be entangled by it, but it was crushed. Was the bird also crushed? Far be it! For it was not in the snare: The snare is broken, and we are delivered.

10. ...Our help stands in the Name of the Lord, who has made heaven and earth Psalm 123:8. For if this were not our help, the snare would not indeed remain for ever; but when the bird was once taken, it would be crushed. For this life will pass away; and they who shall have been taken in by its pleasures, and through these pleasures have offended God, will pass away with this life. For the snare will be broken; be ye assured of this: all the sweetness of this present life will no longer exist, when the lot assigned to it has been fulfilled; but we must not be enthralled by it, so that when the net is broken, you may then rejoice and say, The snare is broken, and we are delivered. But lest you think that you can do this of your own strength, consider whose work your deliverance is (for if you are proud, you fall into the snare), and say, Our help stands in the Name of the Lord, who has made heaven and earth....

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