

(IN)DEPENDENCE DAY zcc6.29.14 Psalm121

*I will lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? 2 My help comes from Yahweh, who made heaven and earth. 3 He will not allow your foot to be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. 4 Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. 5 Yahweh is your keeper. Yahweh is your shade on your right hand. 6 The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. 7 Yahweh will keep you from all evil. He will keep your soul. 8 Yahweh will keep your going out and your coming in, from this time forward, and forever more.*

Let me start by saying I will be paraphrasing several scriptures today and giving you the book, chapter, and verse. I encourage you to consider writing down where to find those Scriptures and check them out for yourself later.

This coming week our country observes our most important national holiday. Who knows what it is? (Independence Day.) Is there a brave soul out there, young or old, who can tell us why Independence day might be our most important national holiday? [Without the events surrounding this holiday all those years ago, we would still be British subjects instead of Americans.]

So, stay with me here--WHO did we Americans declare our independence FROM? [From the British or England.]

So, we celebrate our independence from England on July 4<sup>th</sup>—if that is the case, do they have a July 4<sup>th</sup> in England? [Yeah, it is the day after July 3<sup>rd</sup>—and I KNOW I asked you that last year, but I was trying to see if you paid attention...]

As we celebrate this important holiday—I want to point out that of all the characteristics we Americans have, independence is one that stands out most of all. We REALLY get into that spirit in small towns and communities in the South.

As I thought about independence and the good it can bring—I also thought about our relationship to one another and to God. I have several verses to read today, and the general idea is not one of independence, but of dependence—dependence on God.

God's word also calls for us to help each other and to depend on each other for help and support and even for correction when we go astray. For the sake of time, I won't read it—but Leviticus 25:35 says that we are to look out for those around us who are in need. In a sense, then we are to be able to depend on each other in hard times.

Deuteronomy 22:4 tells us that we are to even help those who don't know they are in need. In this case, I am supposed to be able to depend on David or Roger or Wilbur or Shirley or Sam or any of you take care of my horse or ox or donkey if they find it in the ditch or if it just gets away—especially if I am out of town and unaware. Again, we are supposed to be able to depend upon the people of God to care for our well-being, even that of our animals.

We had something like that happen at our house some time ago. We had a dead tree-top fall on our power lines and it caught our yard on fire. We were not aware it was going on, but the dad and brother of one of Andrea's classmates stopped and called the fire department and then started working to put out the fire. We didn't even know there was a fire.

We, the people of God are also supposed to be dependent on God himself. Proverbs 3:16 says that if we will acknowledge him, he will direct us. If we will call him God and acknowledge our dependence on him, he will guide our ways and send us in the right direction.

In Psalm 121, which we just read, we found the Psalmist touting total dependence on the power, the love, and the protection of God in all things. Moment to moment and over a lifetime.

Not only are we to be dependent on our brothers and sisters and on God in our every day life, but we are also to be dependent as we seek to serve and to do God's work.

The prophet Isaiah acknowledged that it was God himself who gave him words to say to the people—in chapter 50: verses 4-9:

*The Lord Yahweh has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him who is weary. He wakens morning by morning, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. 5 The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious. I have not turned back. 6 I gave my back to those who beat me, and my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair. I didn't hide my face from shame and spitting. 7 For the Lord Yahweh will help me. Therefore I have not been confounded. Therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be disappointed. 8 He who justifies me is near. Who will bring charges against me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. 9 Behold, the Lord Yahweh will help me! Who is he who will condemn me? Behold, they will all grow old like a garment. The moths will eat them up. .*

I can promise you that anything but that kind of dependence on God will ruin a prophet or a minister—and possibly ruin the people they are trying to shepherd. Being up here dividing the Word of Truth is pretty scary on any given day. To do it without depending on God's leadership and his power would be both terrifying and disastrous.

Many of the difficulties in churches come from the pastor and/or the people trying to do what they want and saying what they want and seeking their own will instead of depending on God for their words and their direction.

AND personal independence is not just a problem for prophets and ministers. It is also a problem for deacons and for church members. How many times have you been in a heated business meeting where you know the words and the attitudes could NOT have come from God? If you can say that happened even once: That's one too many times!

Individuals are also to depend upon God for their strength. The Bible tells us that when we are tempted, God has already made an escape route—as way for us to withstand that temptation. Hebrews 4:13-16 says:

*13 There is no creature that is hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. 14 Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold tightly to our confession. 15 For we don't have a high priest who can't be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace for help in time of need.*

Here is some comfort—even though we will be required to answer to God for all we say and do—he understands our weaknesses and he understands how to strengthen us because of the incarnation—because Jesus—God incarnate—walked and talked and suffered and died here on the earth. We also know that he was tempted in all things just as we are. The last verse of that passage says that he will grant grace or mercy and help. We can depend on him and on his love and mercy.

In Acts 26:21-23, Paul tells Agrippa that he was arrested by some Jews and that they tried to kill him, but that God protected him and preserved him to stand before Festus and Agrippa.

More than just protection, we are told that God also provides guidance for our everyday lives through his Spirit.

In John 16:5-15, Jesus says:

*But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' 6 But because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your heart. 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I don't go away, the Counselor won't come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he has come, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment; 9 about sin, because they don't believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to my Father, and you won't see me any more; 11 about judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged. 12 "I have yet many things to tell you, but you can't bear them now. 13 However when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take from what is mine, and will declare it to you. 15 All things whatever the Father has are mine; therefore I said that he takes† of mine, and will declare it to you.*

In I Corinthians 2:4—Paul tells us that it is the Holy Spirit who illuminates his written Word and the words of his prophets and ministers. Not one of us can expect to change a heart or change a life—we have to depend upon the Lord of all to prepare hearts and minds through the Holy Spirit.

Also, we as a church can get into trouble if we try to be independent, if we try to be and do without the leadership and power of God. You might ask if that ever happens—and I would reply that in my opinion it happens more often than not. Sad thought, isn't it?

I would propose that that very thing is what is wrong in many, many churches today. They have declared their independence from each other and from God—each person is doing his own thing and the church is going through the actions of worship—just as THEY want to do it and teaching the Word as THEY want it understood. They are electing officers that THEY want and choosing to build or not to build based on their opinions. Even the jobs are assigned or left undone based on personal preference or popularity, instead of God's leadership.

Again, that is not the way it is supposed to be. And of course it is not how it is at Zion.

Romans 12:1-8:

*1 Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. 2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God. 3 For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think reasonably, as God has apportioned to each person a measure of faith. 4 For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members don't have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, if prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; 7 or service, let us give ourselves to service; or he who teaches, to his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, to his exhorting: he who gives, let him do it with generosity; he who rules, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*

As a church and as individuals, if we are going to do the work God has for us, we must seek his face and depend upon his leadership. As we enter a new time and deal with a new world, this is the only way we will get it done effectively. Each one of us has been gifted and sent to this place. If we are dependent upon God and his Holy Spirit—as a church and individually, the work he has for us will get done in his time and the resources we need will be provided—whether it be time, money—or body-parts for this body of Christ.

How about it—Are we dependent or independent?

First, as a church. Are we honestly listening to God's voice? Are we asking for his hand in our dealings? Are we praying daily—together and separate? If we are going to be his people and be his church, we will have to meet and pray and seek his face, always dependent upon him for all our strength and guidance.

The answer to that, for your leadership, is “yes we are!” But we can do more—and we are, even now, committing to seek God more and listen better.

How about us individuals? Do we depend on him as Christians? Do WE seek his face? Do WE seek his strength and guidance?

I know life is too busy and too complicated and there is very little time to spend it on our faces before God—right? No, “wrong” is the right answer. It is BECAUSE life is so busy and complicated and because we seem to have so little time that we simply must let God help sort out our lives moment to moment. That comes from an attitude of dependence and from seeking his face.

As a leader in this church—but also as a member and an individual with lots of things going on in my own life, I stand today and commit to being more mindful of seeking God's guidance and God's hand and God's power in my life and in my work—at Zion and at LifeNet Health.

If you are a Christian seeking a church home—here we are. Zion is a wonderful place to serve, whether we are having worship here or in the church, or whether we are having a concert or a cruise-in or going out to minister to others. We are open to serving God in any way we can and I believe we do so uniquely and quite well thank-you-very-much.

Maybe though, you are here today and you have exercised your independence to the degree that you are depending on yourself or your actions or your goodness to gain salvation? The Bible says that will never happen. We can't be “good enough” by our own power. The only way we can come before the Father is to depend upon the work of the Son—Jesus Christ. Maybe you would like to take that step today.

You know, we Americans declared our independence from England long ago—but if we REALLY want to be SOMEBODY—we will set aside our pioneering and independent nature for once and declare our dependence on God.