

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NIGHT WORKERS

(*Psalm 134*)

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If you were to see only the *119th Psalm*, you might think that all of the Psalms are quite long. However, if you realized that the Psalms were in fact songs that the Jews sung in worship to God, you would not be surprised to find Psalms of varying length. Some Psalms (such as *119*) are in fact very long; however, some are surprisingly short. One such short Psalm is *Psalm 134*.

Psalm 134 is said to be the last Psalm in a series of Psalms called the Songs of Degrees or Ascents, which begins with *Psalm 120*. This collective title is not given by inspiration; like all of the notes that appear above the Psalms (including those ascribing an author to the Psalm) they are simply copied marginal notes found in ancient manuscripts. No one is quite sure why these Psalms were given the title they were given by the ancient editor(s), but as you read through them you can envision them as songs perhaps sung as a medley of sorts. This set of Psalms takes you through the gamut of human emotions – from the gloom of the Babylonian exile to the glory of the Lord’s many blessings: temple worship, personal purity, and congregational unity to name a few. *Psalm 134* closes out the set of Psalms fittingly enough with an encouragement to servants of the Lord who must serve during the night. Two key words stand out in a Psalm with so few words: the word Lord, which appears five times, and the word bless, which appears three times.

In Old Testament times, there was no such thing as a security system and no full-time police force like we are blessed to have today. However, the threat of thieves breaking through and stealing was just as real then as it is now (cf. *Matthew 6:19*). The danger of thieves was especially acute to the temple of the Lord – the temple had many objects of great value that enemies of the Lord’s people (and certain unscrupulous individuals among the Lord’s people) would have desired. Further, the temple needed to be guarded from those who might in some way profane it. These dangers produced a need for people to watch the temple during the night. *Psalm 134* is an encouragement to these night watchmen: “Behold, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who by **night** stand in the house of the Lord” (*Psalm 134:1*).

Having worked a night job in the past, I can state for a fact that working through the night is very difficult; keeping guard at night would without a doubt be even more difficult. The job for these temple watchmen would have been even more difficult than that of a standard night watchman, as the text pictures them continually standing. Imagine guarding something as precious as the temple without the aid of electricity (i.e. pitch black) and not being able to rest or take a break – such an activity would be nerve wracking! There might also be a temptation on the part of some to grow weary in such work – desiring sleep over service. One can see the need for a Psalm encouraging these workers to make the most of their time – to spend their time complementing the Lord instead of complaining. Hence the two key words of the Psalm – “bless” (what they should be doing) and “Lord” (upon whom they should be focused).

Christians today are guarding the temple of the Lord, both in the sense that their individual bodies are living temples (*1 Corinthians 6:19*) and that individual Christians add themselves to a living temple known as the church (*1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 1 Peter 2:5; 1 Timothy 3:15*). It is also the case that Christians are guarding the temple of the Lord in the night – in a world of sin and darkness, waiting for the dawn of a new and eternal day (*2 Peter 1:19*). Entrusted with such a service, Christians would do well to heed the double encouragement offered by the Psalmist: “Behold, **bless** ye the Lord, [...] Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and **bless** the Lord” (v. 1-2). What is promised to the temple workers of times past is promised to the Christian today who faithfully and joyfully undertakes his task: “The Lord that made heaven

and earth bless you from Zion” (*Psalm 134:3*).