**The Only Safe Place Series**

**“God’s Presence”**

**Introduction**

Today I am beginning a new series of sermons entitled “The Only Safe Place” looking at Psalm 91. This morning we will be considering the first four verses that describe God’s presence. Next week we will look at verse five through thirteen that describe God’s protection. The last week we will consider verses fourteen through sixteen that describe God’s promises. God’s presence – God’s protection – God’s promises.

Unlike other Psalms, Psalm 91 is without a title or instructions to the choir director. We are uncertain as to who the author is or when the Psalm was written. Many believe that all of this ambiguity is purposeful because this Psalm is for people throughout the ages who face the snare of the trapper, deadly pestilence, terror, and violent attack.

Psalm 91 has supplied both Jews and Christians with a refuge in time of trouble of all kinds, including supernatural assault, deadly plague, and worldly violence.

In Jewish thought Psalm 91 conveys the themes of God's protection and rescue from danger. The Talmud calls this Psalm the "song of plagues" stating that the “one who recites it with faith in God will be helped by Him in time of danger.” Christian ministers have recited this Psalm as they sought to comfort those in their parishes and communities who were threaten by deadly disease. Christian missionaries have recited this Psalm as they sought to bring the Gospel to new areas of the world filled with poisonous snakes, wild animals, and infectious illness.

German physicians spoke of Psalm 91 as the best preservative in times of cholera, and spoke of it as a “heavenly medicine against plague and pest.” Soldiers of every stripe and rank have quoted the Lord’s promise found in verse seven, “*A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not approach you,”* labeling Psalm 91 as “The Soldier’s Psalm.” The Psalm was quoted often here in the US after the 9/11 attacks.

One biblical scholar notes, “the Bible offers many promises of protection but in Psalm 91 all the promises seem to be brought together in one collection, and [form] a covenant.” (David T. Adamo) Another theological writes, “It is one of the most excellent works of this kind which has ever appeared. It is impossible to imagine anything more solid, more beautiful, more profound, or more adorned. (de Muis) The great British Pastor and Preacher, Charles Spurgeon wrote, “In the whole collection there is not a more cheering Psalm, its tone is elevated and sustained throughout, and faith is at its best.” And as I have stated, Psalms 91.1 is our 911. It is our call to God for help. And it is my prayer that God will dispatch the Holy Spirit to work deep in our hearts as we study this Psalm. It is my prayer that we would dial 911 to God and ask Him for His presence, His protection, and His promises.

Our text for this today is Psalm 91.1-4. Here now the Word of God:

*1He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.* ***2****I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!”****3****For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence.* ***4****He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.*

**Hebrew Poetry**

Psalm 91 is written in the style of Hebrew Poetry. There are three different types of Hebrew Poetry in the Bible. One is Instructional Poetry, which is written to teach principles of living like the book of Proverbs. Another is Dramatic Poetry, which is written in a narrative to tell a story like the Song of Songs. The last type of Hebrew Poetry is Lyric Poetry, which is accompanied with music like the book of Psalms. The key to understanding Hebrew Poetry is that the Poet is concerned with matching ideas instead of matching words that rhyme. Hebrew Poets are “wordsmiths” or “thought-smiths” that use words to create visual images to create mental pictures that reinforce the main point of the poem.

**God’s Presence**

God’s presence is the main thought behind verses one through four. Dwelling in the shelter of the Most High, abiding in the shadow of the Almighty, and trusting in God as our refuge and fortress is the main idea the Psalmist wants to drive home. Notice the movement towards more and more permanence with each verb in verses one and two. First you dwell, then you abide, and then you trust. The idea is like moving into a new home or apartment. When you first move into the structure it is just a new dwelling. But after a while you start enjoying the way that the sun shines into the kitchen window as you eat breakfast. Or sitting in your comfortable chair in the living room reading a book. And after several months of dwelling and abiding you become more and more secure in your surroundings. The dwelling became a house, the house became a home, and the home became a safe place for you and your family. And this is what God is inviting us to enjoy. Dwelling, abiding, and trusting securely in God Himself. Dwelling, abiding, and trusting securely in God’s presence.

The Most High is our shelter that gives us shade from the heat of the day. The Almighty is our refuge and protection from the storms and rain. (Is.4.6) For in the day of trouble He conceals us in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide us. (Ps.27.5) Lord, *You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance.*(Ps.32.7) Many seem to regard dwelling and abiding in God’s presence as only a thing for mystics, monks, or the super spiritual. But here the Psalmist tells us that dwelling and abiding in God’s presence is for all those who put their trust in Him.

God promises to come to those who purposely dwell in the shelter of the Most High.

No one and no thing can harm us in this exalted position because the Most High is a tower of strength against the enemy. (Ps.61.3) In the Lord’s presence we are promised the coolness of the Almighty’s shadow. The enemy seeks to overwhelm us with the heat of the moment but the Almighty provides a protective shadow for those who will abide in Him.

Those who live in South Florida know how wonderful a little shade can be from the intensity of the sun. I drive a Mustang convertible and there are times that the sun is so intense that I’ll try to find a little sliver of a shadow from a utility pole when I’m stopped at a stoplight. Or I’ll pull along side of a box truck enjoying a blanket of shade while I wait for the light to turn green. But there are certain times of the year that I purposefully leave the top up because the sun is so intense and the possibility of thunderstorms. What I’m saying is that we are living in the time of intense uncertainty and we should purposefully seek to the canopy of the Almighty’s shadow and enjoy Him as our only refuge.

The Psalmist tells us the outcome of this abiding position is that we *will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust.”* This is a good verse for us to memorize and say to the Lord throughout our day. *“My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust.”* We should say this several times a day, “The Lord is my *refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust.”* This phrase is a confession of faith “The Lord is my *refuge and my fortress,”* as well as a confession of resolve *My God, in whom I trust.”* Especially during these times we need to make a clear confession of faith and to have firm resolve. The Lord is my refuge, my fortress, and I resolve to trust Him! And the majesty of these two verses are elevated when you notice that the Psalmist uses 6 names for God in just these 2 verses. He is the Most High, the Almighty, the Lord, our Refuge, our Fortress, and My God. These titles reveal to us the One true God and underscores the truth that there is none like Him! He is the Most High, the Almighty, the Lord, our Refuge, our Fortress, and My God. Therefore, I will put my trust in Him!

**Intimate Protection and Care**

The Psalmist continues by underscoring the divine protection and care that comes to those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High. He *delivers you* *from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.* (91.3-4)

The striking feature of verse three and four is the use of the personal pronoun “you.” The use of the singular “you” is underscoring that these truths are for every single person individually. The Lord delivers you! The Lord covers you! His wings are a refuge for you! His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark for you! The Lord provides intimate protection and care for you! For YOU!

*For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper. (91.3a)* The Psalmist describes us as poor little birds that are apt to be lured to our destruction by cunning foes. But if we draw near to God, He will see to it that the most skillful deceiver shall not entrap us. (Spurgeon) With every temptation the Lord provides His little children a way of escape to avoid the snare of the trapper. (ICor.10.13) Truly the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation. (2Pt.2.9)

*For it is He who delivers you . . . from the deadly pestilence. (91.3b)* The Lord will protect His people in times of plague and disease. This doesn’t mean that believers are immune to infectious disease or exempt from the enemy’s plot. The Lord is reminding us that He is our only help in times of need. (Ps.40.17; 70.5) But lets face it, as we enjoy our normal daily lives we become blind to all the good and protection the Lord provides to us. As entitled children we take our good health, our jobs, and our mobility for granted.

Brothers and sisters, do not be deceived. *Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.* (Js.1.16-17) We should praise God for all of His good and perfect gifts He has bestowed upon us and thank Him that He has delivered us from the snare of the trapper and the deadly pestilence countless times without us even knowing it. Maybe times like these should remind us of how gracious, merciful, and kind our Heavenly Father has been to us. He should get all the glory because *it is He who delivers us* even when we didn’t notice.

*He will cover you with His pinions* (His feathers)*, and under His wings you may seek refuge; (91.4a)* God describes Himself as a mother hen caring for her baby chicks. Jesus used this same analogy near the end of His life when He desired to gather the inhabitants of Jerusalem the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings but they were unwilling. (Mt.23.37) Brothers and sisters, the Lord desires to gather us and cover us with His wings. Don’t allow anything to hinder you from dwelling in the shelter of the Most High.

*His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. (91.4b)* The Psalmist offers a contrast of the mother hen with a warrior equipped for battle. The warrior uses his shield to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. The Hebrew word for “bulwark” signifies something that is wrapped around a person for protection from attack. The Bible tells us, “*For the Lord will go ahead of you; yes, the God of Israel will protect you from behind*.” (Is.52.12b) His godliness will lead us forward and the glory of the Lord will protect us from behind. (Is.58.8-9) The point is that the Lord’s faithfulness protects us from attacks that are coming and attacks that are behinds us. Brothers and sisters, none of us saw this virus coming but the Lord did! And now as we are hopefully moving away from this pandemic none of us know how this will affect us in the future but the Lord does! The Lord’s faithfulness protects us from the past and equally provides us protection for the future. He is my God, in whom I trust!

**Closing Thought**

Brothers and sisters, the main point of today’s text is that the Lord’s presence is the only safe place. He calls us to abide in His presence and as we do He provides personalize and intimate protection and care for His children. The Lord providing His presence as a safe place for His children is at the center of His redemptive plan and fulfillment in Christ.

The Lord prophesied through the Prophet Isaiah, “*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel (which translated means, ‘God with us’).”*(Is.7.14; Mt.1.23) Did you hear that! God with us! Yes, *the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.* (Jn.1.14) The Father sent His only Son to tabernacle with us!Jesus told us that He would not leave us as orphans; He will come to us. (Jn.14.18) *For He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,”**so that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.* (Heb.13.5-6) As the angel said to Mary, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you!” “Don not be afraid!” (Lk.1.28-30) And as Jesus told us, “*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”* (Jn.15.7) But if I can offer you some advise. Don’t waste your prayers on temporal things. Ask the Lord to flood you with His presence because God’s presence through Christ is the only safe place.