**Study of Psalms**

I, like most of you, have applied myself to a deeper study the Word of God during this pandemic. It was not only because I know that I need to spend more time with Him, but also to be able to try to comfort others with the knowledge that Jesus is all we really need.

Two things occurred in the past few days that prompted me to share this with you. One was while corresponding with my old Navy boss in Texas he closed with encouraging me to read and meditate on The Psalms. The other was that I remembered that in the front section of my Gideon Bible is a page entitled “Help in Time of Need.” In this section it addresses a particular concern with a corresponding listing of Scripture references like:

* *Peace in time of Anxiety*: John 14; Philippians 4:6-7; Psalm 4
* *Relief in time of Suffering*: 2 Cor. 12:8-10; Hebrews 12:3-13, Ps. 41; Ps. 91
* *Comfort in time of sorrow*: Romans 8:26-28; 2 Cor. 1:3-5; Ps. 46
* *Protection in time of danger*: Psalm 91; Psalm 121
* *Courage in time of fear*: Eph. 6:10-18; Hebrews 13:5-6; Ps. 46

Many of these above references include “The Psalms.” Every emotion that has ever swept across the keyboard of the human soul is recorded in the Book of Psalms. The book is the essence, the very nucleus of worship . . . and yet it drips with the whole range of human feeling—from joy and love and ecstasy to anger, fear, hurt, and sadness. The Psalms address the full spectrum of human needs. More than any other book in the Old Testament, we turn to this one that contains the collection of psalms in order to find direction for our lives and to be lifted up by its comfort and encouragement. The psalms are designed to meet our needs immediately and they afford profound insight. Where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. And that is the purpose of the psalms: they are God’s music, inspired and written to draw us to grace.

In the coming weeks I will take individual psalms and share them with you—focusing primarily on those that offer hope and comfort as we go through this difficult time. During this study I will draw from commentaries on “The Psalms” from notable Bible scholars like Charles Spurgeon, Matthew Henry, Chuck Swindoll, Dr. John Stott, Dr, J. Vernon McGee, and James Montgomery Boice.

All the psalms are from God and all are wonderful. But some have commended themselves to God’s people as being especially rich and comforting and to which they have repeatedly turned in times of sickness, loneliness, and trouble.

Psalm 91 is one of these special psalms, and I will begin with it. It has been committed to heart by thousands of people, and millions have turned to it with thankfulness in the midst of life’s calamities. In the whole collection there is not a more cheering Psalm, its tone is elevated and sustained throughout, faith is at its best, and speaks nobly. Spurgeon writes that a German physician was inclined to speak of it as the best preservative in times of cholera, and in truth, it is a heavenly medicine against plague and pest. He who can live in its spirit will be fearless, even if once again the plague strikes London.

This psalm has no title, and therefore the author remains unknown. Because it shares some of the themes of Psalm 90, some think Moses was the author. Because it shares some of the themes and phrases of Psalms 27 and 31, some think the author was David. I think Matthew Henry said it well: “*Some of its language, of strongholds and shields, reminds us of David, to whom the Septuagint ascribes it; other phrases echo the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, as did Psalm 90; but it is in fact anonymous and timeless, perhaps all the more accessible for that*.” Yes, it addresses the fears and anxieties we are currently going through. **Read Psalm 91.**

***1****He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.****2****I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”*

***3****Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare  and from the deadly pestilence.****4****He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.* ***5****You will not fear the terror of night,
    nor the arrow that flies by day,* ***6****nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.****7****A thousand may fall at your side,  ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.* ***8****You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.* ***9****If you make the Most High your dwelling— even the Lord, who is my refuge—****10****then no harm will befall you,  no disaster will come near your tent.****11****For he will command his angels concerning you,  to guard you in all your ways;* ***12****they will lift you up in their hands,  so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.* ***13****You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*

***14****“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.* ***15****He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.* ***16****With long life will I satisfy him  and show him my salvation.”*

 Dr. J. Vernon McGee tells of two different men in his congregation who entered military service and claimed verses of Psalm 91. One claimed 91:5: “*You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day.”* He felt it brought him through combat safely. Another who became a naval aviator claimed 91:7-8: “*A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.* ***8****You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.”*

 Psalm 91 may be compared with Psalm 46, which calls God “*our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble”* (Ps. 46:1). Martin Luther loved that psalm and turned to it often because he had so many troubles. Psalm 91 has also been compared with Psalm 90, which is a prayer of Moses. Both Psalm 90 and 91 call God the “*dwelling place”* of his people, which is probably why they have been placed together in the Book of Psalms. But as one commentator stated, the psalms differ greatly in their tones. Psalm 90 is somber and stately; Psalm 91 is bright and simple. The one breathes deep insight; the other cheerful trust.

 Charles Haddon Spurgeon was not overstating the case when he wrote, *In the whole collection there is not a more cheering psalm; its tone is elevated and sustained throughout, faith is at its best and speaks nobly.*

This psalm has an unusual distinction; it is the only passage of Scripture, which is quoted by the devil (Matt. 4:6; Lk. 4:10-11)! This is more important than it sounds, because actually the devil misquoted it, or rather misapplied it. He urged the Son of God to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple and trust God’s promise (verses 11 & 12) that His angels would protect Him, so that He would not hurt Himself. The devil is not the only person who has attempted to misapply Psalm 91, as if it promised an unconditional security in any and every circumstance.

 Our Lord knew, however, that to jump from the roof of the Temple on the basis of this psalm’s promise of divine protection would be to tempt God. Only children of God who are living in the will of God can expect the protection of God. Even then, they have no guarantee of being shielded from all harm (see v.15). What they know is that ultimately, whatever their circumstances may be, they are secure in God’s love. Psalm 91 is, in fact, the Old Testament equivalent of Romans 8:31-39:

***What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?****32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.****35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?****36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”* ***37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[***[***m***](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%208&version=NIV1984#fen-NIV1984-28140m)***] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

 The best way to grasp the sequence of thought in Psalm 91 is to see that first the believer speaks to God (verses 1,2); then the psalmist addresses the believer (verses 3-13); while finally God intervenes, speaking to the reader, and Himself confirms the believer’s assurance of security which is the theme of the psalm (verses 14-16).

 **The believer’s** faith (verses 1,2) is grounded upon who God is. He is *the Most High* and *the Almighty* on the one hand (v. 1), infinite in superiority and power; but on the other he is *the Lord* (v. 2), Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, bound to His people by a solemn undertaking.

 The first verse of the psalm expresses the theme--what the rest of the psalm will be about: *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.* Then, as soon as the psalmist makes the statement he immediately breaks in to confess his own faith before commending it to us: ***2****I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”* This is the equivalent of the of the apostle Thomas’s confession of faith after Jesus had appeared to him following the resurrection and Thomas fell at his feet, exclaiming, “*My Lord and my God”* (Jn. 20:28).

 So, here is the **first part of the application**: *Is Jesus Christ your Lord and God? Is the God of the Bible your refuge in times of trouble? The psalm’s* ***promises are for you******only if he is.***

 And what promises they are! There are **four metaphors for the security** we **can have in God**. God will be our “*shelter”* and *“shadow”* (v.1) and our “*refuge”* and *“fortress”* (v.2). There are also four names for God, which give substance and strength to the metaphors. He is “*the Most High, the Almighty”* (v.1), “*the Lord,”* and *“my God.”* (v.2). When the **psalmist** identifies God as the God in the last expression, it is a way of **saying that** the **shelter, shadow, refuge, and fortress** are **for those who really do dwell in God** and trust him.

 **Spurgeon wrote**: *“The blessings here promised are not for all believers, but for those who live in close relationship with God. Every child of God looks towards the inner sanctuary and the mercy seat, yet all do not swell in the most holy place, they run to it at times, and enjoy occasional approaches, but they do not habitually reside in the mysterious presence.*

Having said that, here is the **second application**: *Do you live in close fellowship with God? Do you rest in the shadow of the Almighty? Is he your place of habitual dwelling?* The psalm is written to **urge us to trust** and **cling to God** in **all circumstances.**

Chuck Swindoll, in his living insights on these verses offers the following insight: *Do you need a refuge? A willing, caring, available ‘someone.’ A trusted confidant and comrade-at-arms. Can’t find one? Why not share the psalmist’s shelter? The One he called my Strength, Mighty Rock, Fortress, Stronghold and High Tower. The psalmist’s refuge never failed him. Not even once. And the psalmist never regretted the times he dropped his heavy load and ran for cover. Neither should we.*

 Having quoted this confession of faith, the psalmist(verses 3-13) now endorses it, encouraging believers in it and assuring them of their safety. He first explains that God will do for the one who trusts him. The most striking feature of this section is the use of the singular you throughout, which is a way of saying that these truths are for each person individually. **They are for you if** you will **truly trust** or **abide in God**.

Bold imagery is used to illustrate the divine defense, which is promised. God will defend them as a mother hen hides her chicks under her wings; His *faithfulness* will be to them as a soldier’s *shield* (v. 4). What, then, are the perils from which believers will be delivered? They are variously described: *the fowler’s snare . . . the deadly pestilence* (v. 3), *the terror of night . . . the arrow . . . by day* (v. 5), *the pestilence and the plague* (v. 6).

 Verse three sets the tone for this section by saying that God will save the trusting soul from two kinds of dangers: **first,** *the subtle snare of enemies,* described as the trap a fowler (bird catcher) used to catch birds, and **second**, *death by disease or pestilence.* This does not mean that those who trust God never die from infectious diseases or suffer from an enemy’s plot, of course. James Boice says that he believes that it *means that those who trust God are habitually delivered from such dangers*. What Christian cannot testify to many such deliverances? Indeed, our entire lives are filled with deliverances from many dangers, until God finally takes us to be with him.

 There is a story about Lord Craven, a Christian who was living in London when plague ravaged the city in the 15th century. In order to escape the spreading pestilence Craven determined to leave the city for his country home, as many of his social standing did. He ordered his coach and baggage made ready. But as he was walking down one of the halls of his home about to enter the carriage, he overheard one of his servants say to another, “*I suppose by my Lord’s quitting London to avoid the plague that his God lives in the country and not in town.”* It was a straightforward and apparently innocent remark. But it struck Lord Craven so deeply that he canceled his journey, saying, “*My God lives everywhere and can preserve me in town as well as in the country. I will stay where I am.”* So, he stayed in London. He helped the plague victims, and he did not catch the disease himself.

 There is a similar story from the life of Charles Spurgeon. In 1854, when he had been in London only 12 months, the area of the city in which the young preacher lived was hit by cholera. Many in Spurgeon’s congregation were affected, and there was hardly a family in which someone did not get sick, and many died. The young pastor spent most of every day visiting the sick, and there was hardly a day when he did not have to accompany some family to the graveyard.

 Spurgeon became physically and emotionally exhausted and sick at heart. He was ready to sink under the heavy load of pastoral care. But as God would have it, one day he was returning home sadly from a funeral when he noticed a sign in a shoemaker’s shop on Dover Road. It was in the owner’s own handwriting, and it bore these words: *Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling,* a quotation from Ps. 91:9-10.

 Spurgeon was deeply and immediately encouraged. He wrote, “*The effect upon my heart was immediate. Faith appropriated the passage as her own. I felt secure, refreshed, girt with immortality. I went on with my visitation of the dying in a calm and peaceful spirit. I felt no fear of evil, and I suffered no harm. The providence which moved the tradesman to put those verses in the window I gratefully acknowledge, and in the remembrance of its marvelous power I adore the Lord our God.”*

 **Verse four** contains **two appealing images of God’s protection**: **first,** *that of a mother hen,* sheltering and protecting her young and **second,** *that of a warrior’s armor.*

 Jesus claimed the first of these two images for himself, saying as he looked over the city of Jerusalem, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing”* (Matt. 23:37). Jesus would have saved and sheltered Jerusalem and its inhabitants, but the people were not willing. They would not come to him. They would not “*dwell*” in the shelter of the Most High. They cried out for his crucifixion instead.

 As for the **second image**, we may **recall God’s words to Abraham** when he was returning from his attack on the kings who had raided Sodom and Gomorrah and carried off Abraham’s nephew Lot. Abraham had won the battle, recovering Lot, the women, and their possessions. But Abraham was in danger of retaliation by these kings. It was then that God spoke to him in a vision, saying, “*Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward”* (Gen. 15:1). That is what God will be to us, if we will trust him.

 It leads us to a very important question: *What exactly is it that is said to be the believer’s “****shield and rampart”* (v.4). God of course;** but in what respect? The KJV says, “*His* ***truth*** *will be your shield and buckler.”*  The NIV says it a bit different and James Boice believes this translation provides a richer translation on this point. The Hebrew word means more than mere truth. It has to do with God’s entire character, described as faithfulness. Still something is lost if we do not also realize that the Hebrew word for faithfulness is based on the word for truth and that what is involved here is God’s faithfulness to his promises—that is, to his word. In other words, **it is when we believe God’s Word and act upon it that we find him to be faithful to what he has promised and learn that he is in truth, our shield from dangers and our rampart against enemies**.

 **Verse seven** describes thousands falling on either side of those who trust God, noting, “*You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.”* This interprets the death of the thousands as God’s punishment for sin and places the deliverance of God’s people in that context. In other words**, it is not a promise that those who trust God will never die of disease or even in some military conflict, but that they will not suffer those or any other calamities as God’s judgment against them for their sin. The blood of Jesus Christ has atoned for their sin.**

 Much of what is found in verses 9-11 is like what we have discussed already. It tells us that “*no harm will befall*” us, and “*no disaster will come near your tent”* (v.10). But there are a **few new elements**.

 **One** of them, probably the **chief idea** because it comes first, is that there is a **condition to the kind of protection the psalm has been promising**—that the individual “*make the Most High his dwelling”* (v. 9). This is more than merely believing in God or coming to God occasionally when danger threatens. It **means resting in God continually and trusting Him at all times.** It means living “*all of life* **in God.**” Martin Luther wrote that this refers to “*one who really dwells and does not merely appear to dwell and does not just imagine that he dwells”* in God.

 The **second new element** reinforces the first and is a reference to angels, the psalmist saying:

*For he will command his angels concerning you* *to guard you in all your ways;* ***12****they will lift you up in their hands,  so that you will not strike your foot against a stone* (Vv. 11-12). This is the verse the devil quoted as part of his temptation of Jesus Christ, recorded in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. It is the only verse of Scripture actually quoted by the devil, at least that we have a record of. But as he always does—he gets it wrong. He left out “*in all your ways”*—that is, in the way marked out for us by God and not our own willful ways. For that was the very essence of the temptation, he wanted Jesus to go his own way rather than trusting God and being contented with God’s way, even if it meant going to the cross. The devil wanted Jesus to test God by convincing Jesus to jump off a pinnacle of the temple, trusting the Father to send angels to bear him up so he would not be dashed to pieces when he fell and thus impress the people. Jesus replied rightly, saying, “*It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test”* (Matt. 4:7—quoting Deut. 6:16). Testing God by jumping off a pinnacle of the temple would not be going in the way God had given him to go. It would be the very opposite of trusting God; it would be “*baiting*” him or “*putting him to the test*.”

 The Lord’s trust in his Father also resulted in Satan’s defeat, another part of the psalm the devil omitted (v.13). The psalm tells us that if we go in God’s way, trusting him to uphold us, then we will “*tread upon the lion and the cobra”*; we will “*trample the great lion and the serpent.”* The Bible elsewhere describes Satan as “*a roaring lion”* (I Pet. 5:8) and that “*ancient serpent”* (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). Jesus triumphed over him by trusting God. Likewise, in Christ, the righteous will be victorious over Satan too.

 Here is **one more thought about this incident**. When Jesus replied to Satan, he rejected the temptation to jump from the temple, trusting the angels of God to keep him from being killed. But the angels were there anyway, though invisibly. For after Satan had completed his temptation, we are told God’s “*angels came and attended him”* (Matt. 4:11). In other words, **God was upholding Jesus even in the temptation**.

 The **last three verses** (14-16) of this psalm **contain a confirming oracle from God**. Finally, the **Lord himself is heard to speak**, neither to the believer nor to the psalmist, but to the reader, approving the believer’s faith and the psalmist’s theme. God declares what he will be and do for the one who loves him and calls upon him. So even centuries after this was written by Moses (or David), this promise is there for us to claim.

 In these **last verses God adds his seal to what the psalmist has been saying**. God **promises three things** to **those who trust him**.

1. *Protection for the one who is in danger* (v.14). The psalm speaks throughout of the many dangers that threaten God’s people, but its central message is that God will rescue and protect from all such dangers those who trust him. Those who have trusted God know this and praise God constantly for his help and protection.
2. *An answer for the one who is in trouble* (v.15). One of the great blessings of following hard and faithfully after God is knowing that when we call upon him, he will hear and answer us. These verses say that God will deliver and honor such a person. They also say that God will be with the believer “*in trouble,*” which is a way of acknowledging that God does not always lift a Christian out of troubles. Some-times it is his will that we endure them and profit from them. We are **told in Romans** that we **acquire hope**, **develop character**, and **learn perseverance** from **what we suffer** (Romans 5:3-4). When we **go through such circumstances, God goes through them with us**. He **sustains us in our suffering**.
3. *Long life and salvation for the one who seeks God’s satisfaction* (v.16). Long life is a blessing frequently promised to the righteous in the Old Testament (Ex 20:12; Deut. 30:20; Ps. 21:4; 23:6; Prov. 3:2, 16), but the **promise is not necessarily for prolonged days** on this earth—but **rather for a complete or full life**. Here there is the **added promise** of a “*salvation*” **in heaven**, yet to come.

These last three verses also make a point that has been developed several times already—the **promises are for those who trust in or love God**. Therefore, they are blessings that some believers miss out on, simply because they are always fretting and do not trust God as saying that his blessings are for those who love God and acknowledge his name (v.14), call upon him (v.15), and seek satisfaction in what he alone can provide.

Do you know that? Or are you still trying to find satisfaction in the world? Do you love the world more than you love Jesus? Dr. John Stott reminds us of what Paul wrote in Romans 8:28, observing that “*God is the supreme object of the believer’s love as well as faith, and it is to those who love God that the assurance is given that ‘in all things God works for their good.’”*

Dr. Stott’s **final** comment on Psalm 91 says something that I think we are already beginning to grasp in our brief look at one of the psalms. He says: *It is not impossible that, like the prophets, the psalmist wrote more than he knew, for the ultimate meaning of security is that eternal life and salvation which are found in Jesus Christ alone.*

**Prayer:** *Our Heavenly Father, bless each and every person affected by this pandemic and surround them with Your love, protection, and angels. Let them know there are millions of us out here praying for them and their loved ones. We ask that You bring about an awakening of Your presence as never seen before and that many would come to know You as Lord and Savior. We give You all the praise and glory forever, Lord, and know that even in the darkest hours, You are always with us. Amen!*