

Dwelling in the Shelter of the Most High

Psalm 91 (select verses)

Portions adapted from, Remember To Live In The Shelter Of The Most High by Dean Courtier @ Sermon Central.Com

When the day is not going well, when you face a daunting task, when something downright scary is coming your way, do you have a favorite Bible verse or chapter that you remember and can say to yourself for comfort?

Life has a good share of problems and dangers – from which Christians are not necessarily excluded - some are small and some are huge and when we are in the midst of such circumstances it's good to have something in God's Word from which we can draw strength. When we're stressed or sad, tired or lonely, fearful or tempted, disappointed or discouraged, we need something to remind us that God is still in control and that things will sooner or later turn out better.

Psalm 91 can give you just such assurance. It is also known as the "**Soldiers Psalm**," because those in the military often turn to it for encouragement in times of danger. I hope it's still true, that "*there are no atheists in foxholes*," and that for most military people you will usually find a small Bible in their pack or a cross worn or tattooed somewhere. There is even a book of devotionals based on this Psalm which is passed out to soldiers as they are deploying (I have just a couple books left if you would like to send one to your soldier). That is why I thought Psalm 91 would be a good place to turn on this Independence Sunday, so that we can tuck a few more of these promises in our heart for those troubles which are yet to come.

Let's start with Verse 1:

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."

It is good to think that God can be our refuge, our fortress, but first we need to notice the requirement for such security. The verse says "***You who live, who abide, who trust;***" not visit, not profess, not hope, but instead "live and abide." This means you build your home there, you set up shop, you relax and settle down in your faith in God's ability to protect.

During His last meal with them, Jesus told His disciples and us: *Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me* (John 15:4).

So our first requirement both for being fruitful and for finding comfort in distressing times, is our willingness to completely give ourselves and our life over to God's care; to settle down in our faith no matter what is coming our way.

There was once a time when you were young your great faith outweighed your few doubts.

I remember when my son Forrester was very young, say around 5 or 6, one day as he was standing up on top of this big rock, I raised my arms towards him and just said JUMP! With a

laugh, he then launched out into space, never doubting for a moment that I wouldn't catch him. Now if I tried that same stunt with his 30-year-old self, I am sure that Forrester would still laugh, but then safely climb back down by himself; age and experience have taught him that just because he jumps doesn't mean there will always be someone who can or will catch him.

Sadly, our FAITH does take a lot of abuse and damage through our growing years. That is why Jesus urges us to remember what we were once like and to return to Him completely with child-like unquestioning faith. But too often we reply to His invitation like the desperate Roman Centurion, "*Lord I believe, help my unbelief.*" **Thankfully Jesus is quite willing to pick us and our feeble faith up from there and help our faith grow through the years.**

In Hebrew the word translated here as Shelter, literally means "a hiding place - to cover, to hide covertly or secretly". In fact in Psalm 32:7 it is translated as "**hiding place**" - "*you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory.*" In this place of shelter there is protection and provision for those who have put their trust in God for every situation and circumstance.

The people who see you in your car, or in the office, or in the supermarket, or in the restaurant, or in Star Bucks, probably do not realize that you are actually dwelling and abiding in Christ. They just see another person going about the business of the day. They do not know that you are a child of the king and that your life is hid with Christ in God. They have no understanding that you are a member of the real royal family. Even if you say so, most of them will either think that you are mad, or they will simply not understand. They cannot see the shadow of the Almighty on your life; but the spiritual world can. Both the angels and the demons know the truth about you and they marvel at who you have now become in Christ.

For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; He will cover you with his feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day,

This "**deliverance**" God offers us is an ongoing deliverance. It is not something the Lord might do, or will do one day, it is not a future promise but something that He is doing daily in our lives. The word "deliver" here is the same as the word "salvation." Our salvation is also ongoing. Yes, when we repented and accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, He did save us. But He also continues to save us every day. The Apostle John did not write that some day we would be God's children, but rather "***we are God's children right now,***" (1 John 3:2). Peter called us God's Holy Nation, His royal priesthood, God's own people. I am certainly glad that God is "the people" I've got to help me survive this life and get ready for the next.

A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

Our Bible gives us some amazing promises of God's protection for His beloved Children. In the letter to the Romans, Paul assures us that, ***We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ... If God is for us, who is against us?*** (Romans 8:28-31).

Such promises seemingly run contrary to evidence of daily suffering which we both see and personally experience. What then is the answer for our times of suffering in the face of God's promises?

Through their own experience in life, the Apostles also acknowledged that God's protection does not necessarily protect us from all painful circumstances; in that God can use pain and suffering to discipline and strengthen us. The Great Faith chapter of Hebrews 11, lists both those who conquered victoriously and those who died tragically as great heroes of faith worthy of our emulation. For as the Apostle Paul wrote...

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:35-37)

Through our life or death, pain or praise, God has promised not only to never leave us, but also to always prosper us, even if perhaps not in ways we would have chosen for ourselves.

I have this quote from pastor and author Paul Scherer penned into my Bible:

"God is almost intolerably careless about crosses and swords, arenas and scaffolds, about all the 'evils' and all the 'plagues.' His caring doesn't mean that he goes in for upholstering."

So like Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, when I am facing a fiery furnace, I can be certain that God will deliver me either from the fire, or through the fire. But according to His choice and through His protection, I know that I will always end up the victor, whether in this life or the next.

So while I can always depend upon God to be ***"My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."*** That does not mean I should test His limits.

Which brings up the last portion of this Psalm I would call to your attention today.

⁹Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, ¹⁰no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. ¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. ¹²On their

hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

Do you recognize this as the verse the Devil used to try to get Jesus to jump off a cliff?

Are you surprised at how well the Devil knows the scriptures and has no compunction against twisting them to his own purposes? Jesus however knew his tricks and answered scripture with scripture, *'It is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."* (Luke 4:12-13). In this first of His times of testing, Jesus knew that no matter what was going to happen, He could completely rely upon God His father for protection, just as He could at His last trial when He cried out, *Father into your hands I commend my spirit.*

This Independence Sunday as we celebrate both the price paid for our freedom from political tyranny and also the greater price paid by Christ to liberate us from spiritual tyranny, may I encourage you to read the rest of this Psalm 91 and return to it often for the faith and assurance it offers you. Through Christ you will always be more than a conqueror no matter what life or the Devil tries to throw at you.

That's God's promise to you today and always.