

January 14, 2018  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Psalms  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## GOD HOLDS US FAST IN LOVE Psalm 91

Too many parents have had the sad experience of hearing their teenager say, “You don’t love me. If you loved me, you would let me date the highschool rebel.” Or some other sad and foolish conclusion like that. We know that the truth is **because** the parents love the child they will not allow her to date the school rebel.

Too many times, that is probably the kind of attitude and foolishness God hears from us His children. Do we really believe that God loves us? Do we believe that God loves us so much that He will hold tightly to us? Do we believe that God is holding us fast in love even when life has turned upside down?

### My Assurance (vv.1-2).

The principle of God’s sheltering love is stated plainly in the first verse of the psalm. *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty (v.1)*. It is clear that this principle applies to the person *who dwells in the shelter of the Most High (v.1a)*. It is a statement of assurance for the person who is dwelling in God’s shelter. The word *dwelt* pictures this person sitting down and staying put. It is the same word that refers to God who is pleased to dwell with His people. These people remain in the shelter of the Most High. It is not that we come and go or that we show up in God’s presence periodically—like on Sunday.

There is shelter found in our relationship with the Most High. On one hand, it is futile to try to escape from the all-seeing eye of the Most High for He is everywhere. On the other hand, it is reassuring to know that we can rest, remain in His presence, because He the

Creator is everywhere. He who creates all things and maintains all things provides shelter. The shelter is where you go when you are caught outside in a storm. We seek shelter from the heat of the blazing sun under a spreading tree. And in the storms of life and the daily oppression of circumstances, the Most High God is our shelter. This is the assurance for “He” is the one who dwells in God’s presence.

Stated another way, the principle promises that this person *will abide in the shadow of the Almighty (v.1b)*. A similar picture to remaining in the shelter is abiding in the shadow. The shadow is always very near to the object that casts the shadow. Proximity means protect and care. When we walk in fellowship with God, we are in the shadow He casts. When we become self-sufficient and independent, we leave the proximity of God’s shadow.

This protective, comforting shadow is cast by the Almighty. This is an English translation of the name Shaddai which is found most often in the context of Job’s trial. Job and his friends talked much about the might and power of God. But this title even refers to the destruction God can level according to His will. How comforting it is to know that He who is able to destroy all things with a mere word is also able to protect and keep those He loves.

It seems fitting that *The Almighty* is the title that describes God who kept and protected the patriarchs unto the fulfilling His promise. When God introduced Himself to Moses as “I am,” He explained, “*I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them*” (*Exodus 6:3*).

The assurance that walking in fellowship with God is to remain in the shelter of His care and protection means very little to religious people—especially religious Americans. Human nature is generally more concerned that life is pleasant and easy than it is concerned to be in right relationship with our Creator. But let the path of life lead into the valley of the shadow of death and see how important it is that we are assured of God’s caring, protecting presence!

In light of God’s promised care and protection, what is my determination? *I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust” (v.2)*. Because God offers us the assurance of abiding in His presence, we should quickly arrive at the same

determination at which the psalmist arrived. *I will say to the LORD (v.2a).*

The assurance of God's protection and care becomes most important and useful when the pronoun "he" (as in "He who dwells . . .") becomes "I." It is very easy to become content with a "he" kind of relationship with God. In that setting, it is not so much that "I" am walking in fellowship with God, but there are others who are. In that case, it is not that "I" am hearing God speak through His word. It is not really that "I" am being conformed into the image of Christ. But I hang out with other people at church or work who are in fellowship with God. I read books written by people who explain the joy and confidence of abiding in God.

If such is the case, "I" need to be honest in my assessment with the Almighty Creator who sustains all things for His glory. I need to decide if I really do trust Yahweh. Yahweh is the self-existing, independent God who is able to be "Almighty." Can I honestly conclude that I trust in Him?

The psalmist drew four conclusions about this matter of trusting God. He concluded that God is *my refuge*. A refuge is virtually the same thing as the shelter mentioned in verse one. It is the place to which we run when the pleasant circumstances of life turn chaotic. When the lightning begins to flash and the hail begins to fall, you need to find a refuge quickly. How do you respond when someone at work lies about you and it appears that you might lose your job because of the slander? Where do you turn when you just learned that you have a tumor that may or may not be malignant? To whom do you go for advice or guidance when your teenager begins dating an unsaved guy?

Second, God is *my fortress*. The Hebrew word behind this English word comes from the idea of hunting, capturing in a net, being pursued. Where does the rabbit run when being chased by a fox? Either down a hole or into the briar patch. To where did David flee when pursued by Saul and later by Absalom? The fortress is the place of safety and security where we go when the enemy attacks.

In the wild west, the agitated native Americans did not attack all the time. Like radicalized groups in our day, those natives would occasionally go on a raiding and destruction spree that meant death and loss for the pioneers who were trying to build farms on what the

natives considered to be their land. In order to survive the occasional uprisings, the United States government built forts where the pioneers could enter and be safe until the mighty army of Washington could put down the "rebellion" of the "enemy."

You and I cannot expect to live in this world without making enemies. The world lies in Satan's power. The world is primarily populated by people who the Bible considers to be God's enemies, children of Satan who deserve God's wrath. They are naturally going to be opposed to children of God who try to live righteously. Where is your fortress into which you run when opposed?

Third, God is *my God*. Your God is your refuge and fortress. Again the personal pronoun is very important. You cannot live on your parent's, your teacher's, your friend's, your pastor's relationship with God. Trouble and chaos have a tendency to help us see if our relationship with God is genuine and legitimate.

Fourth, it is God *in whom I trust*. Our relationship with the "Almighty, shelter, refuge, and fortress" is built on trust. We trust Him when He tells us we are His enemies because of our sins. We trust Him when He offers us the blood of Christ as the payment for our sins. We trust Him when He promises that He removed our sins and gives us eternal life. Do we trust Him when He promises, "I will never leave you or forsake you"?

If we really experience God the loving heavenly Father as our refuge and fortress, how will that impact our daily relationship with Him? Our response to pesky troubles will reveal steadfast confidence that God is in control. Our response when out of control circumstances overwhelm us will reveal that we are just continuing to depend on God like we do in good times and bad times.

### **Your Blessings (vv.3-13).**

From **my** assurance, we turn to **your** blessings. The pronoun "you" is singular throughout these eleven verses. The psalmist is addressing you and me individually. Great blessings come to you who have made the LORD your refuge. *Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place – the Most High, who is my refuge (v.9).*

You have made the LORD your dwelling place. God is the dwelling place, the refuge whether or not anyone cares to

acknowledge the fact. The first two verses already established that fact. The entire Bible establishes that fact. But you must recognize this reality in your own life.

Can we be so bold as to say that you *must* make the LORD your dwelling place? Because that is a matter of trust, this challenge is the very same challenge the writer to the Hebrew Christians gave: *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6).*

How did you do that? How does a person make God his or her dwelling place? Each offender of God (i.e. all humans) arrive at trusting God the same way. It is through God's mercy and grace. Paul taught regarding salvation, the deliverance from sin, *So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy (Romans 9:16).* In Ephesians 2:8-9 we read that great truth: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).*

Jesus Christ taught us that God the Father graciously draws His enemies to God the Son where He makes them see Jesus as their Savior. He promised, *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (John 6:37).* *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44).* We become wholly dependent on God because of God's grace, for God's glory alone.

Rather astonishing blessings accompany your choice. Beginning with verse three, we find eight statements that describe the practical ways in which God is our refuge. We must consider them seriously.

First, *He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence (v.3).* The snare of the fowler is a circumstance that overtakes us unexpectedly while we are walking along life's path. The deadly pestilence is not something we caused or were even aware of. It might refer to an actual plague or be a picture of unwanted detrimental circumstances. God will deliver you!

Second, *He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge (v.4a).* This is the picture of a hen or bird who instinctively gathers her helpless, inexperienced chicks under her wings for safety. God will cover you in His refuge!

Third, *His faithfulness is a shield and buckler (v.4b).* The mention of the shield and the buckler represent double armor for protection in battle. God's faithfulness to His truth will protect you!

Fourth, you will not fear things that go "bump" in the night or terrors of the day (vv.5-6). There are two mentions of night stuff and two mentions of day stuff. You will not fear *the terror of the night (v.5a).* You will not fear *the arrow that flies by day (v.5b).* You will not fear *the pestilence that stalks in darkness (v.6a).* You will not fear *the destruction that wastes at noonday (v.6b).* We are not afraid of any of these things because we experience God as our fortress and refuge. We know that He will protect us.

Fifth, you will not fall while most others do. *A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you (v.7).* God will protect you.

Sixth, you will observe the wicked reaping what they sowed. *You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked (v.8).* Because you trust God, you will not sow or reap wickedness.

Seventh, you will be exempt from trouble because of your Guardian Angels. No evil or plague will harm you. *No evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent (v.10).* Part of the reason for the escape is that God-sent angels are keeping you. *For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone (vv.11-12).*

Even creatures will not harm you. *You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot (v.13).* Okay, we need to stop and think about this for a moment. We are not about to bring snakes into our worship service to prove that God protects us from serpents. You better not go down to the Atlanta Zoo and jump in the lion's lair. And in the same way, Jesus refused to put God to the test – don't jump off the pinnacle of the temple.

Apparently a lot of God's choicest servants have discovered that God doesn't deliver or that the guardian angels weren't doing their job. Many of you must be sitting there wondering why these promises don't apply to you.

The application is actually fairly simple. God is the divine filter. The history of God's work proves that His servants suffer. What can you say to Job about God's promised protection? What about all of the apostles, Christ's chosen servants, who all were persecuted and died as martyrs (even John who died on Patmos)? How do we apply these promises to Christians in nations where they are persecuted, imprisoned, even beheaded? And have you been delivered from all disease and trouble?

God is the divine filter in that God's servants are tried, tested, and killed only in God's will. Listen to God's plan according to Romans 8:28-39.

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:28-39).*

Oh. God's plan often does involve tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Indeed! Look at the conclusion: *As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered"* (v.36). Hear the prayer of the martyrs who trust God in the Great Tribulation: *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"* (Revelation 6:9-10). And God answered their prayers in the later part of the Revelation: *"Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years"* (Revelation 20:4).

The great blessing of God is not that His servants never face hardship. The blessing is that every hardship is within the scope of God's will. Whether He delivers us through it or in it, He is still protecting us.

### **His Covenant.**

God promises deliverance. *"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name"* (v.14). In this statement is mention of a twofold protection. Deliverance means that sometimes it is God's will for God's glory to deliver His people. God illustrated that kind of protection when He delivered David from Saul, Elijah from Jezebel, Hezekiah and Jerusalem from the Assyrians, and Peter from Herod. But sometimes God chooses to deliver through death unto eternal life.

The second word is protection. Many times God protects His people from trouble in life. Ultimately, God protects His people for eternity.

There is a twofold reason that God delivers or protects. First, He will protect because *"He holds fast to Me in love."* God is never

going to let go of His child. Even when it seems like God has wandered off and become like a lost parent in a department store, He is actually right beside us. Not only does He know the test we are facing, He permits the test and is in control of the test. What is considered to be utter and ultimate failure from human perspective is merely part of God's plan of holding on to us to make us like Himself.

Second, God protects because *"He knows My name."* This means that God knows every intimate detail about us. He knows if we love Him and trust Him. He knows if we are being sincere in our confessions to Him. He knows what we can stand, how much we can endure, how we will respond. He knows how He will get glory from "\_\_\_\_\_." You fill in the blank with your name.

If we trust Him, we will want to talk to Him about the issue. God promises to hear. *"When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him" (v.15).* God will answer me. The answer might be confusion, or "no" or "wait." But God will answer. Keep talking.

We must continue to trust that God will be with me in trouble. Even when friends and family forsake you, God will not. An important key in enduring trouble is to develop a very real relationship with God. Like His presence is so very real.

Third, I trust because God will rescue me. Sometimes He rescues from the test. Sometimes He rescues through the test into glory.

Fourth, God will honor me. Sometimes in the circumstances of life, God desires to exalt a person for His own glory. Like the freshman quarterback from Hawaii who was suddenly thrust into the fray of battle at the NCAA Football championship Monday night. In many ways the game was a mystery. And the coaches decision to put this kid who had not played all year into the game at halftime made no sense to anyone. But at the end of the game when the kid gave clear and straight forward testimony about Jesus Christ and His grace on national television, all Christians understood. That was God's plan. Ultimately, God will honor His children forever in His eternal presence.

In the end, God promises salvation. *"With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation" (v.16).* God will satisfy His people

with long life. God will show salvation. How long and how satisfying will be the eternal state of the martyrs of the tribulation? Can we honestly say with Paul, *"For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17).* If God chooses to make life comfortable for us, we should thank Him and praise Him. If God allows difficult circumstances that are causing us to trust Him more and conforming us to Christ, we should thank Him and praise Him.