

Introduction: Remembering God's faithfulness in the past brings comfort in the present.

Psalm 91 is the second of the seventeen psalms collected in the fourth book of the Psalter. These psalms express the king's comfort in God's faithfulness. Psalms 90-94: Comfort in the greatness of God; Psalms 95-100: Comfort in the worship of God; Psalms 101-102: Comfort in the promises of God; Psalm 103-106: Comfort in the praise of God. [Godfrey]

This psalm is full of precious promises for the people of God. It contains potent word pictures about the perseverance and preservation of God's people. The whole Psalter is composed that we may offer to God what we know is pleasing to Him. As we meditate on a psalm we ought to seek more than how we should express ourselves in God's presence. We ought to seek how the poetry expresses the person and work of our Lord Jesus.

Psalm 91 has an enhanced intensity. What alerts us is the development of this psalm that begins in the first person singular, "I," in verses 1-2. It changes to the second person singular, "you," in verses 3-13. Then it returns to the first person singular, "I," in verses 14-16. We may read this as the lyrics of an anonymous author confessing his confidence in God by using emphatic language (like dwelling in the secret place of the Most High which was represented by the temple's inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies) in verses 1-2; then shifting to prophetic language in verses 3-13 about God's protection; and returning to emphatic language in verses 14-16 about God's faithfulness. Now, if you think about the exalted statements, promises, and purposes expressed in Psalm 91, they are truths only fully appropriate for a divine person.

In Psalm 91 we may distinguish the three voices of the Trinity -- the voice of the Son as the Commentator (verses 1-2), the voice of the Spirit as the Counselor (verses 3-13), and the voice of the Father as the Commander (verses 14-16). We hear an inter-Trinitarian communication that focuses on the incarnate Son of God in His ministry to redeem His people. At the same time, God speaks passionately, powerfully, and persuasively to His people. He promises to be a refuge and fortress where you may take cover.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a theologian and philosopher of the early church, helps us understand Psalm 91. He gives us a way of see how this psalm, which speaks so much of Jesus and to Jesus, helps us in Christian living. Augustine says, "You must concentrate on what He became for your sake. That is what you are able to imitate." We are to imitate Christ in everything that He did having assumed a true human nature. [Goligher]

We outline this Psalm with three themes: a. Commitment to the Promises (91:1-2); b. Covered by the Promises (91:3-13); c. Confident in the Promises (91:14-16).

A. COMMITMENT TO THE PROMISES (91:1-2), *Voice of the Commentator (Son) "I"*

Verses 1 and 2 record a wealth of word pictures for God! When it seems there is nowhere to get away from hassles and worries, the Lord is a shelter, a secret hiding place of safety and stillness. When troubles heat up and you feel like you're in a scorching desert with the sun beating on you, the Lord is a shadow, a cooling shade of relief and refreshment. When you feel hounded and surrounded by enemies or illness, the Lord is a fortress, a mighty tower of protection. When you feel weak and wounded, the Lord is a feathery soft place of comfort. When you feel cold and alone, the Lord is a wing drawing you in so that you sense His warmth and the beat of His heart. And yet, though He can be so comforting and tender and warm, He remains a strong, hard shield against every spear, dart, and arrow. What a God!

Shelter and shadow, fortress and feathers, wings and shield -- God is all these things and much more.

God's protection isn't just a great general truth. It's a precious personal experience. The writer of Psalm 91 doesn't just talk about God's protection as an objective doctrine he picked up somewhere. He speaks from personal faith and experience: *I* will say of the LORD, "He is *my* refuge and *my* fortress; *My* God, in Him *I* will trust" (91:2). Objective doctrine is great, but I can't savor the full wonder of it or impress others with it unless I have tasted it myself. As John Calvin wrote, "We cannot communicate true knowledge unless we deliver it not merely with our lips, but as something which God has revealed to our own hearts."

Why do I speak of living under God's shadow? I'm not talking about a God who exists somewhere out in the blue. I'm talking about the God who loves me personally; and about a Savior, Jesus Christ, who was nailed to a cross and died for me personally; and about the Holy Spirit, who guards and guides me personally so that nothing can destroy me or separate me from God's love in Christ. "He is *my* refuge and *my* fortress; *My* God, in Him *I* will trust."

These opening two verses are spoken in the first person singular, "I." The truth of this situation is stated and is confirmed by a divine name. The person speaking comments that the secret location of safety and stillness ("secret place") is the work of the Most High (Elyon). The place of shade ("under the shadow") that provides relief and refreshment is the result of the Almighty (El-Shaddai). The shelter from hassles and worries ("refuge") and the stronghold from surrounding enemies or illness ("fortress") is the blessing of the LORD (Jehovah). The place of comfort with tenderness and warmth ("trust") is the mercy of my God (Elohim). Whoever the human author is that grasps these promises, the only Person who knows these things fully and is commenting on God's promises is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Listen to the Commentator who is committed to the promises. Are you committed to the promises?

B. COVERED BY THE PROMISES (91:3-13), *Voice of the Counselor (Spirit), "You"*

If you make a list of everything that scares you and worries you, that list might get pretty long. But God knows that list even before you make it. God knows what scares you and me. The writer of Psalm 91 comes up with quite a list of scary things -- and then he says we don't have to be scared. Already in verse 3 he speaks of "the snare of the fowler," the hidden traps set by those who are out to get you. He speaks of deadly pestilence, dreadful diseases that strike many people down and strike fear into everyone else. He says God will surely save you from such things if you take refuge in Him.

We are fearful and slow to believe. So verses 5 through 8 give a more detailed description of the dangers and to say that although you may have to *face* these dangers, you don't have to *fear* them -- not if you're under God's wings.

Sometimes your deepest fear may be "the terror of night." If you're a child, you may be terrified of the dark. But even if you're an adult, you may feel uneasy when you're alone in the dark: you hear things and imagine things that frighten you. Then again, you may have outgrown your fear of darkness, but you may be more afraid than ever of another kind of darkness: the unknown. Maybe you're terrified if you can't see exactly what's going to happen next or how things are going to turn out.

Maybe it's a definite danger that is shooting straight at you -- what the psalmist calls "the arrow that flies by day." You know you are under attack. There have been burglaries in your neighborhood. Or your boss is going to fire you. Or your spouse is going to leave you. Or somebody is going to sue you. The arrow is sharp and swift, and it's coming at you in broad daylight. But whether its day or night, whether you face open arrows or hidden dangers, you don't have to be afraid if you are under God's wings. God won't let anything destroy the person who trusts in Him.

What if you're facing a terrible disease? Once again, God is enough. "The pestilence that walks in darkness" may invade your body. A disease like cancer can sneak up on you. You may not see it coming, and there's no clear explanation why it suddenly starts growing in your body. Then again, you may face plagues and problems that spread openly, as if in the brightness of midday. But whatever the illness or plague and whichever way it approaches, there's a place of safety under God's wings.

You will be a nervous wreck if you don't believe in God's good plan and His constant protection amid all dangers. You don't really know all of the dangers and "close calls" you have escaped in life. It's not a matter of luck. Could a bit of bad luck end your life at any moment? No! God is in charge. Not a hair can fall from your head, not a hair can be burned or singed, apart from the will of God. God's plan may include tests of our faith and threats to our life, but everything He plans is meant to show His children just how great a refuge He is. Without the dangers, we'd soon forget that our safety depends on God. Without enemies and challenges, there would be no victories.

God's wings shelter His people from dangers of every kind, says Psalm 91 -- and that includes the danger of God's own wrath against sin. That's the biggest reason you need to be close to God: not just to be safe from this or that danger, but so that you can be safe from the Lord himself and from His anger against sin. Jesus said in Luke 12:4-5, "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

Only God has the power to throw you into hell, and only when you take refuge in the shelter of His wings and under the shadow of Jesus' cross can you have safety and warmth and comfort. Trust in Jesus' death to pay for your sins and make you right with God. Believe His promise of eternal life. Then you can be sure of eternal life, even if people all around you are perishing, as described in verses 7 and 8. If you are God's child, protected under His wings of pardon, you may see God's wrath against the wicked, but you will not have to endure it yourself.

Jesus said that the only fear worth having is the fear of God and a fear for the eternal destiny of your soul. That's one reason we shouldn't fear anything that might destroy only our bodies. Right after that, Jesus gave another reason not to worry about our physical safety: nothing can happen to us apart from God's will. Anybody or anything that might try to harm us can't do a thing without God's permission and plan. Jesus said in Luke 12:6-7, "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." This means that whenever any type of harm comes our way, God will either shield us from it, or, if he does allow it to strike us, he will turn it to our profit.

Sometimes, even when we belong to God, we find it hard to rest in the assurance of his care. So God keeps piling on promises to overcome our doubts. God tells us not only of his own wings of protection but also of his winged workers, the angels. Look at verses 9-13.

What a comfort! God himself watches over us. He gives His mighty angels clear, definite orders to guard us and help us along in everything we do, in all our ways. Sometimes the angels have to work overtime, in all those near misses. Perhaps you've had experiences, too, in which it seemed the angels must have been working overtime. Even when we don't have close calls, even when we don't see any immediate threats and everything seems calm and normal, we could never survive on our own. Only because God cares for us and because His angels carry us can we move ahead in safety.

At the deepest level, this isn't just a matter of physical safety. As Jesus said, it's not the body but the soul that matters most. When you are under God's wings and being carried on angel's wings, the Lord doesn't just protect your body from snakes and lions. He protects your spirit from that old serpent Satan (Rev. 12:9). He protects you from the devil, who roams about "like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Of all the dangers you face, none is more horrible than Satan and the demonic forces of evil. And yet God shields you from these dangers too. It's great to know that the Lord protects your body for as long as he wants you to live here on earth, but it's even greater to know that God protects your soul from Satan and gives you power and authority to trample on demons.

Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson (1824-1863), who became a Confederate general in the Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee said to a captain, "Captain, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready, no matter when it may overtake me. Captain, that is the way all men should live, and then all would be equally brave."

These central verses are spoken in the second person singular, "you." The voice of counsel describes the versatile protection through the imagery of birds and fortresses in verses 3-6. Next He speaks of individual protection in verses 7-8. Then He expresses miraculous protection in verses 9-13. The only Person who knows these things fully and is able to apply God's promises is the Spirit of God. Listen to the voice of the Counselor. Are you covered by the promises?

C. CONFIDENT IN THE PROMISES (91:14-16), *Voice of the Commander (Father), "I"*

Psalm 91 comes to a grand and glorious conclusion as God Himself speaks personally and declares His promises in verses 14-16.

What marvelous promises! How can you know that God's protection and comfort are yours? By trusting and loving Him. God says, "Because he has set his love upon Me ... I will deliver him." What does it mean to love God? It means having a sweet confidence and delight in His goodness. When you love and trust God and acknowledge His name, honoring the name of Jesus above every name, God guarantees that He will rescue and protect you.

God also says that when you belong to Him, you will "call upon" Him, or pray to Him in faith. Living in faith involves continual conversation and communion with God. When you dwell in the shelter of the Most High, it means that Most High also dwells in you! His Holy Spirit lives in you and keeps you in the secret place under God's wings, the place of prayer.

There you can enjoy God's warmth, love, and protection and talk with Him and claim His promises.

In that place of prayer you look to the past work of Jesus in His death and resurrection as the basis for forgiveness and blessing. You also look to the future with confidence in the living Jesus and with trust in all God's promises. If you know Jesus, you won't go through these days hoping your luck will hold up. You'll pray confidently to the One who bought you with His blood and who promises to protect you and answer your prayers.

What is more, God says, "I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation." God promises not only to rescue you but to honor you! He promises to give you His own personal stamp of approval, which means more than all the honors the world can offer. Even more, God promises you a share in the honor of Jesus Himself, as you reign with Him forever and ever! What honor could be greater? What could be more satisfying? The Bible says that in God's presence you have fullness of joy; at His right hand you have "eternal pleasures" (Psa. 16:11).

"With long life I will satisfy him," says God, "and show him my salvation" (Psa. 91:16). Long life doesn't just mean 70 or 80 or even 100 years. It means *eternal* life! In some cases, God's protection doesn't mean a long life here on earth. But it does mean life that goes on and on forever. Even when you die, you don't really die. Your lungs might stop breathing and your heart might stop beating, but you will go right on living. Jesus said in John 11:25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

In Jesus, you will not even *see* death. Jesus said in John 8:51, "Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." When you draw your last breath, that awful enemy death wants to rear up and seize you, but the angels of God swoop in instead and carry you to glory. You never actually see the awful face of death. As your heart stops, you see only the splendid angels of God and the loving face of your Savior. What a magnificent promise!

The concluding verses 14-16 are spoken in the first person singular, "I." It is most appropriate to hear the voice of the Commander, God the Father, as He addresses God the Son and all who belong to Him (verse 14), who call on Him (verse 15), and who are delivered by Him (verse 16). Listen to the voice of the Commander. Are you confident in the promises?

Conclusion: God's plan may include tests of your faith and threats to your life, but everything He plans is meant to show His children just how great a refuge He is. Without the dangers, we'd soon forget that our safety depends on God. And without enemies and challenges, there would be no victories.

Though you may have to face these dangers, you don't have to fear them, not if you're under God's wings where you take cover.

God gives His mighty angels clear, definite orders to guard us and help us along in everything we do, in all our days. Hebrews 1:14 asks, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" Sometimes the angels may work overtime. Even when we don't have close calls, when we don't see any immediate threats and

everything seems calm and normal, we could never survive on our own. Only because God cares and His angels carry us can we move ahead in safety.

Living in faith involves continual conversation and communion with God. When you dwell in the shelter of the Most High, it means the Most High also dwells in you. His Holy Spirit lives in you and keeps you in the secret place where you take cover.

Let me ask you, “Are you trusting God?” I am NOT asking, “Have you trusted Jesus Christ for your salvation?” I am NOT asking if you are a Christian. I am asking, “Are you trusting Jesus for today and tomorrow?” This trust is not a trust for salvation. Do you trust God as you face this virus? Do you trust God as you come out of the security of your home? I am neither criticizing nor condemning. These are questions you will have to ask yourself. These are serious questions. What does it mean to trust in God? It means to put your confidence in God. Putting confidence in another person is the highest act of human friendship. Putting confidence in God is the highest act of divine worship. God deserves your undivided confidence. Do you trust Him? Jesus did. [Goligher]

Remembering God’s faithfulness in the past brings comfort in the present. Take cover.

Prayer: Eternal God, who makes all things to turn for the best to them that love you, and who preserves and keeps all those who commit themselves to your protection, grant us of your bountiful grace that we may continually call upon you with our whole hearts, that, being delivered from all dangers, we may in the end enjoy that salvation which is acquired for us by Jesus Christ, your only Son, our Saviour. Amen. [*Prayers on the Psalms: From the Scottish Psalter 1595*, The Banner of Truth Trust, p. 104f. (edited)]

Resource: David Feddes, **Under His Wings**, Psalm 91, *The Radio Pulpit*, January 1998, Vol. 43, No. 1, The Back to God Hour

Liam Goligher, **The Shadow of Almighty**, Psalm 91, 05/17/2020, Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, PA, www.sermonaudio.com

W. Robert Godfrey, **Learning to Love the Psalms**, Reformation Trust Publishing, Sanford, FL, 2017, p. 159, 160, 161, 163

Psalter Selections: 57A, 61, 63B, 91A [*The Book of Psalms for Singing*]

17B, 36B, 57A, 63C, 91A (Shadow of Your wings) [*The Book of Psalms for Worship*]