

THE SHELTER OF THE MOST HIGH

Psalm 91: 1-16, Proverbs 3: 1, 2 and John 15: 7 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Today is the first Sunday of the month of October and we are going to share in the remembrance of Christ's death for us on the cross. This communion time we call "The Lord's Supper." Psalm 91 is so well timed for us today as a psalm to prepare us to come to the Lord's Table. It is a psalm without an historical focus, without an obvious known author, and without any earmarks of who wrote it, why it was written, who it was written to, or how long ago it was written. It is an inspired Psalm, inspired of the Holy Spirit, but the inspiration of the Holy Spirit came to a psalmist that until Glory, will remain anonymous. This psalm is a psalm of confidence for every believer who lives in close fellowship with Jesus, who lives in the secret place or the shelter of the Most High. This psalm carried hundreds of missionaries in China during the Boxer Rebellion. It is not only a psalm for those servants of the Lord facing hard trials, but it is a psalm for ordinary days. The words of the psalm could well be sent as a letter to encourage a friend or a brother or a sister in Jesus. On the other hand, this psalm is perfect for giving to a person who is in the thick of the battle, in the midst of a dark struggle.

As most of you know, repeatedly anti-Christian riots have been going on in northern Nigeria where sharia law has been accepted. The violence has escalated as Christians and Christian homes, villages and churches have been burned. The terrorist group behind the terrorism is a group called Boko Haram—which means "western education is forbidden." They intend to make Nigeria an entirely Islamic nation. They are becoming stronger every day, like ISIS. Although this particular group only started 12 years ago in 2002, Boko Haram became a household word because of its highly publicized kidnapping of 270 school girls in Chibok. Their current leader Abubakar Shekau recently said, "This war is against Christians, I mean Christians, generally the infidels. Allah says we should finish them when we get them." How should we respond as followers of the Lord to such a threat not only against Nigerian Christians, but the threat more and more that is being extended to us as believers in America? The watchword of Boko Haram to Christians is "Deny Christ or Die." They have killed over 4,000 Christians in these last nine months of 2014. Sometime they slaughter 50 or more believers in front of an influential believer to frighten him. One man was found reading his Bible and Boko Haram terrorists blew off his head with an AK-47. Multitudes of Christian women have been abducted, violated, and returned home. Their demand is to profess, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet." As believers in Nigeria are killed, they confess, "I am a Christian, and will always remain a Christian, even to death."

So what does Psalm 91 have to say to saints being martyred across our world. One man named Habila in northern Nigeria had a gun pointed at his face. They told his wife, Vivian, “If your husband does not cooperate with us, you will watch him die.” As Vivian stood there helpless, weeping, they repeated their offer, “Deny Christ or die.” Then they asked Vivian why she couldn’t convince Habila to deny Christ and live a good life. Habila spoke up and said, “Vivian, “don’t worry. The death of a Christian is a great gain, not a loss. Then they ransacked the house for money. It was not enough. The man with the AK-47 placed the barrel of his gun next to Habila’s mouth. The terrorist called out then to Habila, “Since you refuse to become a Muslim, here is your reward!” Then he pulled the trigger. Habila fell to the floor, blood streaming from his face. Vivian cried out in horror. Leaving Habila for dead, the terrorists didn’t count on a miracle. Habila still lived, and finally at a hospital, doctors started to do a skin graft to repair his cheekbone, but as they looked at Habila, his cheekbone was healed. When Habila recently was interviewed by a VOM worker, he asked Habila, “How do you feel about those Boko Haram terrorists who shot you.” His reply was amazing. He replied, “We are condemned criminals...Christ died for us...He loves us. That’s why we must show that love to the people that hate us. Since that day, I pray to God, “God forgive them. God forgive them.” My prayer is that they will know the truth and be saved, not to be condemned. I love them...Even if I have the opportunity to see them, I will hug them and I will pray for them.”

Now at the outset of this psalm, I admit to you that this psalm is a drama in its character. There are three different voices. There is a soloist in verses 2 and 9a. Verse 2 is spoken of the Lord and v. 9a is spoken to the Lord. The words are spoken in the first person. Then there is a chorus, an antiphonal chorus singing in response, speaking in the second person found in verses 1, 3-8 and 9b-13. The drama is completed in verses 14-16 as God is speaking not to the trusting soul, to the soloist or to the choir, but God is speaking of the trusting soul to others. God is talking about what He will do for the trusting soul and why He will do it? What we need to learn today is what Habila knew that day when he was shot in the mouth? What is this Psalm 91 confidence all about? What is this secret place of the Most High? Today, for a few moments, let’s examine this shelter, this secret place of the most high three ways. What does this secret place in God provide in physical protection for the believer? What does this secret place in God mean in the face of fears for the believer? What does this secret place in God keep us from and keep us in, in the life of the believer? We can all learn to share the Psalmist’s confidence and Habila’s confidence if we learn to dwell and abide in the secret place of the Most High.

WHAT DOES THIS SECRET PLACE IN GOD PROVIDE FOR THE

BELIEVER? (I.) Let's turn to Psalm 91: 1-4. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust. For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler." The psalmist tells us this secret place provides four provisions for the believer. What are they? **(1) This secret place in God provides a shadow that covers us as believers.** "He who dwells in the shelter/secret place of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." The safest place in the world is a shadow, if it is the shadow of the Almighty. You have to live close to the Lord to abide in His shadow. Are you abiding close to the Lord? Not knowing who wrote this psalm doesn't change the fact that it is a Davidic picture. Psalm 36: 7 is David's psalm that states, "How precious is Your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of Your wings." In another Davidic psalm, Psalm 57: 1, we read, "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me. for in You my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge till the storms of destruction pass by." Again David spoke in Psalm 61: 4, "Let me dwell in Your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of Your wings!" Selah. In one more Davidic psalm, Psalm 63: 7, David wrote, "For You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I will sing for joy." Jesus wants to gather us as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but (often) we would not."—Matthew 23: 37. Our God shelters us beneath the wings of the cherubim. **(2) This secret place in God is a refuge that provides security.** Hymn—"Under His Wings"

We read in Psalm 91: 2, "I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." This psalmist is crying out, "Let come what will, in Him will I trust." This psalmist is confident in God, and refuses to cast away his confidence. He is safe and knows how safe he is. Parents, I call us to learn the wonderful song, "Safe am I!" Don't let your children grow up doubting the safe place we have in the secret place of the Most High. **(3) This secret place in God is our rescue from being trapped.** Notice verse 3. "For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence." This snare of the hunter represents those hidden dangers in life that unexpectedly catch us and bring us down, that make us fall." The deadly pestilence could mean a deadly disease that marches across the land or the world. God does not give an absolute promise that no Christian will die from polio or an A-strain flu or Ebola. Good men do die at times, but often God can and often does preserve the believer in such a time. **(4) This secret place in God is an impenetrable shield.** Notice verse 4. He will cover you with His pinions/feathers (a figure of speech) and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and buckler." As Moses said in

Deuteronomy 32:11, God so provides His impenetrable shield in Himself. We read, “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions or feathers or wings.” See also Deut. 33: 27. Whether the figure of an eagle actually catching its young is documented by biology, God has watched more eagles than all every ornithologist who has ever lived. If God used this figure of an eagle to describe His protection and impenetrable shield, be certain God never lies. His Word is eternally sealed in heaven. Bless God, how many of us have been caught in the everlasting arms of God when we have fallen out of our nests in life? Yes, God’s provision in His secret place, beneath His shadow, inside His fortress, prevented from the devil’s snares, and protected by His impenetrable shield is a mighty provision. Bless the Name of the Lord. Secondly,

WHAT DOES THIS SECRET PLACE IN GOD MEAN IN THE FACE OF FEARS FOR THE BELIEVER? (II.) Go with me to Psalm 91: 5-8. We read,

“You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. 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 recompense of the wicked.” Here are six reassurances for the believer in the secret place of the Most High. **(1) We don’t need to fear our own nightmares or our night attacks.**

Psalm 91: 5a is awesome. “You will not fear the terror of the night.” Whatever these night attacks are—sudden sickness at night, sudden enemy attacks of pain at night, or whatever comes to rob us at night, night aggravates the magnitude of the enemy’s night attacks. We don’t know the extent of the night calamity nor do we know how to measure in the darkness the danger we are up against. **(2) We don’t need to fear serious accidents.** v. 5b. “You will not fear the arrow that flies by day.” Whether this arrow is the arrow of pestilence, or battle or a sudden fall, a wreck, a plane crash, or whatever it be, God calls us not to fear. **(3) We are not to fear mysterious and deadly diseases.** Psalm 91: 6a is clear: You will not fear the pestilence that stalks in darkness.” This is something that must often tries to frighten us all. The new diseases that slip in under medical radar, in the night, as it were. There are so many new unknown diseases and plagues we have never heard of before that happen today. God calls us not to fear them. **(4) We are not to fear visible disasters.** Notice Psalm 91: 6b. “You will not fear the destruction that wastes at noonday. Some destructive forces come out against us in broad daylight. They attack our minds, our spirits, our souls and our bodies. Beloved, we can sometimes get so scared of one more attack that we prefer to stay in bed and hide beneath the covers. **(5) We are not to fear what we see happening to others.**

Notice verse 7, “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.” God is telling us not to lie down in utter torment

about what is happening in Iraq or Nigeria or here in America to others. God gives us living grace until the moment we need dying grace. He doesn't want us living with our hearts failing us for fear. **(6) We are not to fear what happens to the wicked.** Psalm 91:8 states, "You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked." We will see the reward of living for ourselves, but also the recompense for the wicked, which we must not fear. Thirdly and lastly,

WHAT DOES THIS SECRET PLACE IN GOD KEEP US FROM AND KEEP US IN, IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER? (III.)

Go with me to Psalm 91: 9-16. "Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge—no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. 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. You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot. "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation." What does this secret place keep us from as believers? Five descriptions! **(1) It is a place where we are with the Most High God.** Notice v. 9. "Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge. Beloved, our refuge is a keeping spot because the secret place of the Most High is in God Himself—"with Him." Song—"I'll Go With Him, 2x—All the Way!" **(2) It is a place where we are free from evil damage or harm,** v. 10. "No evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent." David said in Psalm 38: 12, "Those who seek my life lay their snares; those who seek my hurt speak of ruin and meditate treachery all day long." Yet, there is no safer spot than dwelling in God, in Him as our shelter and secret place. **(3) It is a place where we are guarded by angels.** (Guarding angels) Notice v. 11. "For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways." I know the truth of angelic deliverance more than once in my own life. It is true. **(4) It is a place where we are carried by angels.** Verse 12 states, "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." The devil knows scripture and he tried this on Jesus in the wilderness temptation after Jesus had been fasting for 40 days. Regardless of God's promises, we are never to presume on them and allow the enemy to say to us as he said to Jesus, in Luke 4: 9-11, "And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." The awful thing about God's promises is that we may quit dwelling securely in the place—the secret place of the Most High—on His bosom—on His everlasting arms. We may

yield to temptation and listen to the devil and presume on following him in risking outside God's will. Jesus wouldn't. God help us not to say, "I will test the promise." No, that is sin, to tempt the Lord, to put Him to the test. When the time is needed, He will be there to carry us by His angels, but not if we tempt or test Him. **(5) It is a place where we are able to stop anything harmful.** Verse 13 is awesome, but God wasn't asking us to pick up deadly serpents to test him. Folk quite often die in religious snake handling in the south. It's foolishness. See Acts 28: 3. The Psalmist gives us the promise for when it inadvertently happens that we are bitten and venom is ready to kill us. The best anti-venom I know is Psalm 91: 13—"You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot." God stopped the mouths of the lions in the den for Daniel, but Daniel didn't regularly jump in the den to get ready for a possible test up ahead. What does this secret place protect us in, as believers? **(1) It is a place that keeps us in love with God and He delivers us.** Psalm 91: 14 states, "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name." We are not only kept from evil in the secret place, but when we obediently stay put in Jesus, we are kept secure in His love. Praise the Lord! Where we love God, and God delivers us, Psalm 91:14 **(2) It is a place where we call God and He answers us and delivers us.** God keeps us in answering range. Notice v. 15. "When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him." It isn't as desperate when we call the name of the Lord when we are dwelling in the secret place of His bosom where John leaned. For babies, the medical community has finally decided that the place babies thrive best is when they stay most often secure in the place—and that place is on the bosom of their mother, on her breast. It's no different for the believer. It's not a screaming call hoping God is nearby when we are leaning on His everlasting arms. Call Him while He is near and we are near to Him. Song—"Call Him Up And Tell Him What You Want." **(3) It is a place where we see God's salvation and experience real life-long life and life to the fullest.** Psalm 91:16 "With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation." It is the place where God's benediction is ever on us and we hear it in our hearts. "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you. The Lord be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." It's in the secret place where we find comfort, and eternal hope until we awake in Christ's likeness and the Day dawns and these dark and earthly shadows of death flee away. Are you there today beloved, under His wings? I love you and He loves you more. He is calling you now to the secret place. Get there now. Amen.