

Hope for Mortal Man

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Bible Verse: Psalm 91
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This is a wonderful Psalm and I am so delighted to be able to open it to you, hopefully to bring some fresh perspective on a familiar Psalm and we'll trust the Lord for that as we go. Let's read it as we begin, starting in Psalm 91:1.

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!" 3 For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper And from the deadly pestilence. 4 He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. 5 You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day; 6 Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. 7 A thousand may fall at your side And ten thousand at your right hand, But it shall not approach you. 8 You will only look on with your eyes And see the recompense of the wicked. 9 For you have made the LORD, my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place. 10 No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent. 11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways. 12 They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone. 13 You will tread upon the lion and cobra, The young lion and the serpent you will trample down. 14 "Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name. 15 He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. 16 With a long life I will satisfy him And let him see My salvation."

We are in the middle of a series of related Psalms, Psalm 90, 91 and 92 are intended to be read together. They share some common language together which binds them together and there is a sequence to the themes of these Psalms that is quite compelling. Psalm 90 starts a new book in the Psalms, Book 4 of the five books of the Psalms, and so these three Psalms were brought together as sort of an introduction to the entire book, and what I want to show you here as we start out as we talk about Psalm 91, is the connection with Psalm 90 and 91 in the verbal connections there and then also to help you see the thematic connections as to why Psalm 91 is placed right after Psalm 90, and when you

start to see these things, it just starts to explode on your mind how greatly significant these things are. First of all, let me just point out a lexical connection. Psalm 90:1 opened up with the statement, "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations." Those were words of Moses. That was the way that this Psalm opened and we talked about that last week. Notice in Psalm 91:9 that that phrase is repeated, "you have made the LORD, my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place." So we are meant to read these Psalms together and see them in light of one another.

Now why is that significant? Why does that matter? Why would we emphasize that? Well, here we go. Psalm 90, as we saw last time, was somewhat of a prayer for wisdom in this mortal world, and as we looked at it, we saw that Psalm 90 painted with somewhat darker hues, there were some darker themes to Psalm 90 as it talked about the wrath of God, as it talked about death and brevity and the mortality of man, and it ends with a prayer there in verses 13 through 17, "Do return, O LORD," look at it with me. I really want you to see these things in the text because this gives you a sense of the significance of Psalm 91. Psalm 90:13, "Do return, O LORD; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your servants, satisfy us in the morning, that we may sing for joy. Make us glad." Verse 16, "Let Your work appear." Verse 17, "Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us." In light of the mortality of man, in light of the brevity of life, in light of death and the wrath of God, verse 12 in Psalm 90, "teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom." Then it ends on this prayer. You know, Psalm 90 is a wonderful text that I had preached on many times but as you look at its themes, it is bringing wisdom from a somewhat very sober perspective, you might say. You know, you can't contemplate the themes of death and wrath and the brevity of life for long before it starts to kind of weigh on you. It's no wonder that he ends with a prayer, "Lord, do something and make us glad and give us joy in light of this mortality that is our lot here on this life," and that's, you know, the nature of Psalm 90. Well, Psalm 91 comes on the heels of that and functions as an answer to the prayer in verses 13 to 17 of Psalm 90. Psalm 90 answers the prayer that arises from a contemplation of the mortality of man and says, "Here is hope for mortal man. Here is the answer to the brevity of life. Here is the answer to the wrath of God." Here is the answer to these things that call for wisdom and address the heaving sighs of life for those that only see it from an earthly perspective. Psalm 91 steps into that and brings great light, it brings great hope, it brings a great, it gives the answer to the significance that Psalm 90 is calling out for, "Lord, teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom." Psalm 91 comes and says, "Here is the wisdom for which you asked," and in that light it is a spectacular Psalm as it comes together in this way.

Now the structure of this Psalm revolves around changes in the personal pronouns that are used. In the first two verses, you see it coming together as he's addressing God and he speaks in the first person, "My God and my fortress." In verses 3 to 13, he switches over to the second person pronoun, "you," and is speaking frequently "you" in the second person singular, and addressing the reader directly in verses 3 through 13. Then in verses 14 to 16, God speaks and gives his affirmation to everything that has been said. And so that's kind of the structure, we'll follow that along.

So here we go. In breaking down these three sections, let me give you points to follow. First of all, the first point for tonight is the appropriation of God's protection. The appropriation of God's protection, or you could say in light of the title that I've given it, "Hope for Mortal Man," the appropriation of hope. The appropriation of hope, and the opening verse invites anyone seeking wisdom to listen in. This is a Psalm that speaks directly to you if you will hear it. It speaks directly to you and makes promises to you if you will only hear and respond in faith to what is said in the Psalm that follows. Without limitation it says in verse 1, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." Anyone who wants wisdom, anyone who wants an answer to the conundrum of this mortal world in which we live, can find an answer right here and he says, "He who dwells," and you see that word "dwell" again, Psalm 90:1, "Our dwelling place," verse 1 of Psalm 91:1, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High." It says, "Here's your answer if you want an answer to the brevity of life." The Christian faith and biblical revelation does what happens nowhere else, in my judgment, in that it honestly addresses the problem of life, it honestly addresses the problem of death, but it doesn't leave you in a place of morbid introspection if you keep going, you're not meant to simply stop at the problem of death, the problem of mortality, and let that become a darkening force in your mind and in your disposition, what biblical revelation does is it takes you through that and brings you to a point of faith which changes it all into hope and to glory, and Psalm 91 does that in a way that is similar to the way that Ecclesiastes starts and ends.

Turn to Ecclesiastes on the other side of the Psalms and beyond Proverbs here, because you get kind of a summary statement after Solomon has walked through all of the vanity of life and the futility of riches and the futility of pleasure and the futility of everything else under the sun in earthly life, he comes to his conclusion and he says, "Where do you find meaning in life, then?" Verse 12 of Ecclesiastes 12:13, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." He says once you've thought through all of the vanity and the brevity and the mortality of life, here's where you need to come out, the answer to all of that is to fear God, to have faith in God, to know the God of the Bible, the God who has revealed himself, and that answers all of the vanity. It could be no other way. If God has created you to exist for his glory, then to find him by faith, to live for him by faith, to know him by faith is the answer to every problem in life. It is that and that alone which gives life meaning. Everything else will be empty and futile in the end, but to find Christ, to find the God of the Bible, to know him by faith, is to infuse every aspect of life with meaning. It infuses all of your sickness with meaning. It infuses all of your sorrow with meaning, all of your success. Everything in life finds its meaning wrapped up in Psalm 91:1, the one "who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty."

So Psalm 91 now. He opens up and he uses these words "Most High" and "Almighty" to describe the God of whom he speaks. Verse 1, look at it with me one more time here.

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

These terms are emphasizing the majestic and prevailing sovereignty of God. The God of whom he speaks is the God who orders the universe and who is in control of the mortal life of man, who appoints the days of men, and who determines the length of time in which we will live on this earth, and if God is your Creator, and he is, if he's the Creator of the universe, and he is, and he orders everything according to his providence, and he does, then the only place where life is going to find its meaning and true purpose is by knowing this God by faith and trusting him and knowing him, and in knowing him, there is great security.

Look at verse 1 again, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." Shelter, describing a place of protection; a safe place in the midst of a storm. The storm in which he is talking about is not simply an earthly trial or a threat to physical life, the storm, the threat is the whole meaningless of existence abiding under the wrath of God if we don't somehow get out of that and get out from under it. What is the purpose of life if you're going to abide under the cloud of divine wrath and then die? You know, where is any meaning to be found in that, which is the conundrum that was raised by Psalm 90? Psalm 91 comes and by the grace and mercy of God says, "Here's the answer to this conundrum, it is found in knowing this Most High and this Most Sovereign God." We'll abide in the shadow of the Almighty, a shadow picturing a place of respite, a place of protection from a burning noon heat, and so there is shelter, there is safety in this God; there is relief from the relentless assault of life and the assault of mortality. Here is where you find your respite from all of that, it's in the God of whom he speaks here, and the one who comes to this God by faith, enjoys his fatherly care.

Look at Psalm 91:2. He says,

2 I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!"

Look at the first person pronouns: I will say to the LORD; my refuge; my fortress; my God; I trust. And the whole point here is with these first-person pronouns the psalmist is declaring his faith. He steps forth out of the shadows of the mortality of life and he triumphantly declares his faith in the God of whom he speaks. He says, "This God is my refuge. This God is my fortress. He is where I find my protection." And in the context of this, beloved, what I want you to see is he is talking about something far greater, something far more significant than simply finding protection in the midst of the immediate earthly problems that he might have been going through. This is more than, I mean, you could apply it in this way if you're so inclined, it's not a bad application, but this is more than the threat of physical death of which he speaks, it's more than just coming here and saying, "I'm facing surgery and, you know, I'm going to trust the Lord like this." It's fine to do that but what I want you to see so that you don't miss the import of this great great Psalm is that he's talking about something that goes to the very meaning and the very essence of life. It is here in this God of whom he speaks that a man

is – and only here, I should say – it is here and only here that a man is able to transcend what would otherwise be a perfectly meaningless existence in this passing transient world.

Now let's just see these things back-to-back and go back to Psalm 90 for just a moment here. He says in Psalm 90:9, he says, "all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years like a sigh. For the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away." We live this life, it's filled with trouble and then we die and we go away. "What is the point of that," he says, and he cries out, "teach us to number our days that we may present to You a heart of wisdom," looking honestly, staring the futility of life directly in its face, praying for wisdom, praying for help, and now in Psalm 91 there comes this great refreshing stream from which to drink that says here is the answer to the futility of life, it is found in a true knowledge by faith in the true God of the universe, in the Lord, in Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God who has revealed himself to his people. Here and here alone is the thing that unlocks this otherwise meaningless existence.

So it's more than just the fact that you get protected from death in a particular circumstance, this is saying that in the God of the Bible whom we now know in light of New Testament revelation as the Lord Jesus Christ, in Christ is the answer to the meaninglessness of existence, and in Christ you have security and protection from what would otherwise be a meaningless life. Whether you live or die, this is what you find, and the psalmist says that Yahweh, the LORD there in all caps, Yahweh, the covenant keeping God, the promise keeping God, the God of his people, he is sovereign over all, that's who he is in his own essence, and look at what he says, verse 2, "I will say to that covenant keeping God, 'My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!'" He's saying that the God who is the real true God of all, the God over all, that's my God. It is a declaration of faith. He says the God that is over all is my God and as a result of that, I am safe in him. I am safe in him. My life has meaning, my life has purpose going forward. I am protected from all of the emptiness that otherwise would mark the reality of life, I'm protected from all of that because I belong to him. He's mine. To be, and here's the thing, beloved, whatever else is happening in life for you, to be under the care of that God is the answer to your mortality. To be in union by faith with the Lord Jesus Christ is to have the most significant, the most significant aspect of life, the most central purpose of life, the essence of life has just been defined for you in Scripture, it is by faith in this God to whom the Bible reveals. And if you have him, you have all. If you do not have Christ, you have nothing, even if you have everything that the world could offer you.

So Psalm 90 exposes the emptiness of life, Psalm 91 gives an answer that comes from outside this world. God, as it were, I'm speaking quite metaphorically here, God, as it were, steps into the world and injects meaning into it in a way that would otherwise be utterly lost to you. So it is in Psalm, in these first two verses that you find the appropriation of hope. By faith, he says, this is my God. I have hope. I have security. I have everything that I need. My soul is satisfied in Christ and in Christ alone.

So, you know, I ask you, I'll ask you a time or two or three throughout the evening here: do you know God with that kind of faith? Do you have that kind of faith where despite the surrounding circumstances and the things that discourage and cause you despair, can you step out of the circumstances and say, "That God is my God. He is my refuge. He is my fortress. I declare it and I'm satisfied in Him." That is biblical faith. That is spiritual growth. That is spiritual maturity, and this is what Scripture sets forth, and what I want you to see is its lofty, it's noble. It is the most wonderful thing that ever could happen. All of a sudden with all of the death and discouragement and despair around you, all of a sudden you find that there is this high ground in rarefied air to stand and say, "My life has meaning. I have everything I need to because I know this God." And that's what it calls us to.

Now, probably a little convicting for some of us to, you know, we think about the petty things that we get wrapped up in and the petty things that discourage us, and we realize that we fall short of this high aspiration that is laid forth before us, but what I want you to see is that this is the birthright and the prerogative of every true believer in Christ to have this attitude and this prevailing disposition in your mind, "This is my God. This is my refuge. I'll live life with a sense of purpose and confidence despite what happens. As mortality starts to seep more and more into my life and take more and more of my earthly strength away, I'm going to be renewed in my inner man, I'm going to be strengthened day by day by my faith in Christ." This is reality for the Christian and it is a reality of surpassing glory and worth that transcends everything in life.

So let's go on. Point 2: the application of hope, let's say. The application of hope. When you come to verse 3, there is a notable shift in the pronouns that are being used in this major section of the Psalm. As I said earlier, he shifts to the second person "you." In verses 3 through 13, he uses that pronoun, "you," the singular pronoun, "you." You singular, not y'all as we say around here. In verses 3 to 13, he's using a singular form of the pronoun "you." Some 20 times he uses the pronoun "you" in the singular form, and so what he's doing now, having opened with this statement and declaration of faith, now he is bringing it to the reader and he is going to apply it to you. He intends for his declaration of faith to be appropriated by his reader by faith as well. He intends for you to take what he said in the first two verses and make it personal, and in so doing, he declares the greatness of this God with all manner of declarations of his attributes, all manner of declaration of promises. This is a very pastoral Psalm. The psalmist here is writing to encourage you. He is writing to strengthen you individually as you walk in this mortal world. So you're meant, you're meant to pick up Psalm 91, read it in light of Psalm 90, and find that there is a direct word from God through his word to encourage her soul personally and individually. This is meant to be appropriated. There is no excuse for anyone walking out of this room tonight in a discouraged, disheveled state of soul. There is no excuse for that if you know God, if you know Christ. If you're exercising faith in him, what is said in this next section is designed to lift your spirits and to encourage you and to strengthen you even as you walk through the difficulties of this mortal world.

So what he does here, remember what he did in these first two verses is he stated in a very general way the theme of God's protection. Look at it there again in verse 1, "He

who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." That's his general theme. Now in verse 3 he takes it and he applies it in a variety of ways to cover all of life and the result of that general principle is that God's people live life with a sense of safety and well-being. This is to be the prevailing dominant sentiment that we have as we go through life, is trusting the God who is our shelter and our refuge, trusting him to exercise that loving sovereignty in our life no matter what his providence has ordained for us.

So let's look at it and enjoy it together. He says there in verse 3, he says,

3 For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper And from the deadly pestilence. 4 He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. 5 You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day; 6 Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon.

What he's doing here is he's using a variety of different metaphors, of different word pictures, to describe the various kinds of threats that come to us throughout the course of life, and what he is saying, what he is communicating here is that God protects you in the midst of this mortal life, God protects you like a mother bird cares for her young. He guards you like a soldier's hardened armor in battle protects him from the assault of the enemy, from the arrows and the threat and the ammunition of the enemy. God is guarding you. He is protecting you through all of those things.

Now, let me just back up and say that for those of you that have been raised and nurtured in legalistic religion, that have been raised that, you know, it's a matter of pleasing God with your obedience to external rules and if you screw up on the rules, man, watch out because God's gonna get you for that; well, then you need, you know, it's really hard to get out of that mindset and to view God as someone who is basically hostile to you and his response to you is premised and conditioned on your external obedience, and so the answer to everything is for you to try harder. That's a pretty miserable way to live, isn't it, for those of you that have been exposed to it, and you know something about the crushing weight that that puts on your conscience and you view God as someone distant. Well, Psalm 91 gives you a clarifying perspective that changes the whole perspective.

You know, one of the things in seven and a half years of ministry here at Truth Community Church, one of the prevalent things that I've been trying to do again and again and again through everything I've said in the pulpit is to just try to convince you, to persuade you from Scripture, that God is good to his people; that God cares for you; that God is providentially concerned for you and ordering everything for your benefit and for your good, and I have to keep saying that and keep repeating it because your carnal heart is prone to shrink back from that and not trust God for who he is. I don't know how we ever justify that in our minds. How can we ever question the goodness of God after Christ went to the cross in order to redeem us for himself? When Christ suffered for us, when Christ bled for us, when Christ was buried for us, when Christ was raised for us, when

Christ ascended to heaven for us, when he intercedes at the right hand of God for us, how do we ever think anything other than God is perfectly loving, perfectly good, and perfectly committed to our well-being throughout all of eternity? How do we ever think anything else, I ask you? But we question it, don't we? We have the remnant of Adam's doubt in our hearts and sometimes we fuel it with our anxiety and not responding to things by faith.

So we come back to this again and again and again, that God is good to his people without exception, and those who belong to him by Christ are on the receiving end of a fatherly love, a fatherly care, a fatherly protection that he will never suspend in its operation, that he will never take away anymore than a mama duck on the pond would abandon her little ducklings to a threat from underneath them; anymore than a mother bird would abandon her little ones chirping for their morning meal. As that mother bird gladly provides and protects, in an infinitely greater way that's how God deals with us as his people. Now I ask you in light of those things, how can you ever justify doubt? How can you ever accuse God of ill intentions toward you just because life doesn't go quite the way that you want it to? How do we ever get into that position? It's inexcusable, beloved. It is not right for us to think about God in hostile adversarial terms after all that Christ has done for us and is doing for us even now in keeping us, preserving in this faith for a final salvation to be revealed at the last day.

Here's the problem. I'm about ready to take off my shoes and throw my shoes just to make an emphatic point here. That's not a very good idea. Here's the problem: for most of you, if not all of you at one time or another in your life, your inclination is to accuse God of unkindness or unfairness in his dealings with you and quick to justify yourself and say, "I don't deserve this. I've been good. I've done all the right things. Why are these bad things happening to me?" When your whole perspective should be the exact opposite. When you start to justify yourself and start to dwell in the self-pity, your accusation should not be, "God, why is this happening to me," your accusation should be against the man or the woman in the mirror and saying, "Who are you to question the goodness of God in light of the greatness of Christ and all that He has done for you?" We should not be pointing the finger at God for unkindness, we should be pointing the finger at ourselves for our lack of faith after all that has been revealed to us in Christ. That's the only proper way to think about life. Don't agree with your doubts and your unbelief, agree with God that he's good, that he's great, that he's a wonderful King over your life, and come to him by faith, the faith that says in verse 2, "This is my God in whom I trust. Period." Because that's the kind of faith of which he's worthy.

Now in verse 4, the psalmist says, "He will cover you with His pinions," pinions are the outer parts of a bird's wing that enable flight to take place, "under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark." The wings that enable flight. What's he saying here? Why is he making this point? Beloved, it's so wonderful, it's so magnificent. Everything about the essence of God that enables him and empowers him to exercise sovereignty over all of the universe over the course of planets and over the course of human history, everything about his essence that enables him to do that is exercised for your protection as well. The full exercise of his sovereignty is at work in the

fullness of his providence in your life to guarantee a good and loving and faithful outcome for you in the end. Everything about the power of God is exercised for the benefit of his people. He holds nothing back. He protects you from human threats, verse 3, he delivers you from the snare of the trapper. He protects you from nonhuman threats, he delivers you from the deadly pestilence. Is it a human threat, a human foe of which you're concerned? God protects you. Are there other matters of life, other matters of illness, other matters of stress or difficulty? He protects you there as well.

And in the brilliance of this Psalm, in the brilliance of this Psalm, look at verse 5. He states that this isn't a momentary thing that kind of comes and goes, this is constant. Verse 5, "You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day; Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon." Notice the time elements that are embedded in these two verses: night and day; darkness and noon. He's using a figure of speech called a merism, and that's just a fancy term for saying he is expressing a totality by using and listing several individual parts. So night and day is a statement of ongoing unbroken protection. Darkness and noon, similar thing. The idea here that he is expressing is that there is a continual protection day and night throughout all of the course of your life that God exercises over you. His sovereignty is never suspended. His love is not withdrawn. He keeps you, he protects you because he loves you, and this is the God that you know by faith. So he is expressing, and notice he's saying you will not be afraid of these different things. You will not be afraid is a negative way of saying you have complete security in the protection of your God. It is absolute. There are no exceptions to it all.

Then he goes on and he highlights how personal and how individual God's care is. Look at verses 7 and 8.

7 A thousand may fall at your side And ten thousand at your right hand,
But it shall not approach you. 8 You will only look on with your eyes And
see the recompense of the wicked.

This section is making an emphatic application to the reader of faith and what he is saying is this, he is saying God's hand is on you even as thousands fall around you, even as the mountains collapse into the sea. In times past are the brothers and sisters in Christ that went before us, had to trust in God in the midst of world wars as bombs were dropping down on their churches even in London. I had a friend who pastored in London, he is now in the States, but in his church I saw this pew, a projectile during World War II, I believe it was World War II, had fallen through their roof and landed on one of the wooden pews in their church and yet had not exploded. That's the kind of life that our brothers and sisters in Christ were living through in those dark days where bombs were literally falling on them. Some of them died, sure. This isn't a promise that you'll always be protected from death, rather it is a promise of something even better, it is a promise of something even more important than your earthly life, it's that whatever comes to you no matter what is happening in the world around you, God has not taken his eye off of you anymore than he has taken his eye off the sparrow that falls to the ground. If you know and exercise faith in the God of whom he is speaking here, God sees you with that

individual protective eye and his hand is on you no matter what comes to you. No matter what comes to you.

And who is it, who is it that enjoys this security, this protection? Who enjoys this hope? Verse 9, remember he's talking in the second person singular. All of these things of which he's been talking about, no fear, perfect protection, who does it belong to? What's the condition of this blessed position in life? Verse 9,

9 For you have made the LORD, my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place. 10 No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent.

What he's saying is there is real security for those with a real abiding faith. Look at it, all of those promises of protection in the merism, in the metaphors that went before, belong to the man that is described in verse 9, "you have made the LORD my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place." You have rested your faith in this God of whom I speak and therefore all of this wonderful protection, all of this wonderful meaning that is injected into life that would otherwise be wasted, all of this belongs to you by faith.

So I'll ask it a second time: is your faith real like this? Do you exercise this kind of conscious living, vital trust in the God of Scripture, in the Christ of Scripture? Well, if you do, what the psalmist is saying here is this, what he's saying, the idea here in this passage is, "My sovereign God whom I know like this, what He does for me, He'll do for you as well." There is a wonderful promise given to those who will exercise the kind of faith that the psalmist describes as being his own. It's not exclusive for him. It's not exclusive for Israel. This is the promise that is offered to everyone who would put their faith in Christ. God for his people does this, he provides unseen supernatural help to them throughout all of life so that, beloved, so that, I'll keep my shoes on and use them to step on toes here, so that, I say it pastorally, so that whatever is deeply troubling your heart tonight, whatever you brought into the room on your heart, should be filtered through the reality of the fact if you're a Christian, "My heavenly Father has His wings over me. He has His protective wings over me. He has brought me near to His bosom. He cares for me and even in the midst of this heartache and this conflict and this suffering and this lack, in the midst of it He has drawn me near and I am safe in Him and I am satisfied in Him no matter what else may be true."

Now the psalmist goes on, alludes to the fact that part of the way that God ministers his supernatural care is through the ministering spirits called angels. Verse 11,

11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways. 12 They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone.

There's just this promise that God is surrounding you with supernatural help that you cannot see with your physical eyes but you are to appropriate this by faith and say, "I am just surrounded before me, behind me, to my left, to my right, above me and below me, I

am surrounded in an environment of the supernatural care and provision and love of my heavenly Father."

Now, a little side note but it's a biblical side note, it's a biblical tangent here so it's not even a tangent at all. This kind of promise, the theme of this Psalm is not an invitation for you to become arrogant or presumptuous. Look over at Matthew 4 when our Lord was tempted by Satan. Satan, that diabolical adversary of the people of God and of all of humanity, Satan had the audacity to twist this very passage of Scripture and to turn it into a temptation of our Lord.

You know the story. We'll pick it up in verse 5 of Matthew 4, "the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning you'; and 'On their hands they will bury You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" That's what the passage we just read, he's quoting from Psalm 91:11 and 12. We're preaching a text that the devil himself knew and knows. Well, Christ answers that in verse 7, he says to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" What we are to do in response to Psalm 91, what we are to do in response to the greatness of this loving protection that God gives to us is this, beloved, here's what you're to do: you're to trust him, not test him. The protection and provision of God is not an invitation for you to be foolish, to be careless in life, it is to trust him as you obey his revealed will in Scripture, that whatever comes to your life in a life of obedience to him, will be filtered to you in a manner that is loving and is designed for your good in the end. When you trust God like Psalm 91 describes, when you know and trust Christ like we've been talking here this evening, here's the thing, here's the implication for you: no matter what the financial or physical or relational adversity is that you're facing, no matter what it is, these are absolutes that we are meant to condition our mind and view all of life through, when you're trusting God like this, then you, my friend, you, my brother and sister in Christ, you have serenity in the face of danger, you have serenity in the face of hardship, you have serenity in the face of the deepest sorrows of life. Why? Why? Because this God of whom Psalm 91 speaks has stretched his wings over you and brought you near and no matter what you might lose in life out of faithfulness to him, is inconsequential in comparison of being under the shadow of his wings.

He is worthy of that kind of faith from you. He is worthy of that kind of trust no matter what comes. You cannot, you cannot look at the cross of Jesus Christ, you cannot look at the empty tomb, you cannot look, metaphorically speaking, you cannot look unto heaven and see your elder brother at the right hand of God interceding for you, praying for your perseverance in the faith, you cannot look at Christ and come to any other conclusion. You cannot do that. And for some of us, it's just time for us to stop talking about the hardship that we've had in the past, it's time for us to stop complaining about how hard life has been or how hard life is, and to get serious about saying, "No. No. No. No. No, that's not what defines me. What defines me is the Lord God, Jesus Christ is my refuge and my fortress. He is my God in whom I trust and that is sufficient for me." We would do within the walls of this room, we would do each other worlds of favor if we talked to

each other about this realm of our blessedness rather than reciting for each other the past problems that we've had, wouldn't we? Wouldn't this be a whole lot more edifying and reassuring and comforting and emboldening? Our hearts speak of that which we love and may the Holy Spirit help us apply this as he sees fit.

Now let me say this, look at verse 13 with me. Psalm 91:13. You know, and the reason that I emphasize, the reason that I emphasize that is not to be critical of anyone but this is what the glory of God, this is the response that the glory of God and the glory of Christ requires from us. This is the only proper way for us to live and think and speak, that he is so worthy of that, that that will dominate my speech and my heart affections henceforth and forevermore. My refuge. My fortress. My God in whom I trust.

Now this protection, look at verse 13 with me, I know I said that earlier and then went off. That's all right. Verse 13,

13 You will tread upon the lion and cobra, The young lion and the serpent
you will trample down.

Do you know what that's indicating to us? It's not that trust in God like this excludes you from adversity, it's not that it excludes you from threats and danger. Hardship fell on the righteous man Job that was not of his own making. Christ literally suffered in his earthly life and on the cross. It's not saying that God will exclude you from adversity, rather Psalm 91 is a promise of protection in the midst of the adversity. The lions may be around and the cobras may be curling for a strike, the idea is even in the midst of those immediate mortal threats, God's hand will be upon you controlling and directing the outcome of everything that comes into your life to the fulfillment of his perfect will, and without exception to the goodness of your soul and the glory of God in the end. These great truths, my Christian friends, are designed to define the very way that you look at life. This is the lens through which you look at this mortal world and it influences everything that you think about it and everything that comes into your life as a result. "If this has come to me, it's been filtered by God's hand and I'll trust Him for it. Period. Period. End of sentence. End of paragraph. End of chapter. End of story."

So the security is not that we avoid everything that is negative in life, rather it is that God filters our circumstances to us and, my friend, if you're groaning under adversity here this evening, these promises are meant to be sweet to your soul, to encourage you and to give you hope, and I think that we just appropriate them in part by realizing our doubt and our unbelief and saying, "I won't tolerate that in my heart any longer. There can't be quarter for that in my heart any longer because this is who my God is. He's my shield, my refuge, my fortress, my God in whom I trust. With the totality of my life, I trust Him and Psalm 91 is telling me that He'll honor that."

That brings us to our third point here: the affirmation of hope or the affirmation of God's protection, and in this final section after the psalmist, as it were, has addressed his fellow man in verses 3 through 13 with the personal pronoun "you," now the voice of God steps

into the Psalm and God speaks directly in affirmation of the first 13 verses of the Psalm. God himself confirms what the psalmist has just said. Look at verse 14,

14 "Because he has loved Me [in response to that faith], therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name. 15 He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble;

Do you see it there? This is what I was just saying. It's not that you're excluded from trouble, it's even better than that. God is with you in the trouble.

I will rescue him and honor him. 16 With a long life I will satisfy him And let him see My salvation."

What does this genuine trust look like? What is this faith of which the psalmist speaks? Verse 14, "he has loved Me," speaking of strong desire and passion. The end of verse 14, "he has known My name. He will call upon Me." This Psalm is speaking about a faith, a kind of faith that engenders this protection from God, is an active trust. It is rooted in a true knowledge of the revealed God. Watch this – it's active trust based on true knowledge of the revealed God and in response to that knowledge, in response to that God, this faith earnestly yields to this God in affection and in dependence. "God, I see You revealed in Your word. I believe Your word. I love You for it and I will trust You with all of my soul, with all of my heart, with all of my life."

That is the kind of faith of which this Psalm speaks, active trust, a true knowledge of God, yielded affection, trusting dependence, and I ask you if you know God like that? If you care about God like that? To know him enough to trust him? This is a sharp contrast to the autonomy of an unbelieving man. I had some correspondence with an atheist recently which was very interesting. It has nothing to do with this message so I won't go any further except to say that everything that he said to me was just dripping with autonomy and hostility toward the God that he denied who even existed.

And in this passage, this closing passage here in Psalm 91, God's protection is expressed in eight progressive aspects. I only point this out to you but walk-through it with me here. Verse 14, "I will deliver him." Having delivered him, "I will set him securely on high." Having set him securely on high, "I will answer him. I will honor him. I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him. I'll satisfy him. I will let him see My salvation."

Beloved, beloved, what you're meant to see here is that the psalmist has expressed his own faith to open the Psalm, he's invited you to join with him in like precious faith, and promised you all of these blessings that we saw in the middle section of the Psalm, and now at the end of Psalm 91, God comes and lends his affirmation and takes it and extends it even further saying, "This is what I will do with a man who has this active faith and dependence on Me. I will do all of these things." He takes us from delivering us from the trouble to security that cannot be shaken. He takes us from trouble to peace. He takes us from isolation in this mortal life, to companionship. He takes us from mortality and death

to a promise of long life and satisfaction. From earthly death to eternal salvation. And beloved, what I want you to see is this: these great promises in verses 14, 15 and 16, are recorded in the first person voice of the very God who Scripture says cannot lie. There can be no other outcome, not because you're so great or your faith is so strong or mine. There can be no other outcome because this is what God has promised and God is faithful and God cannot lie. This tells you what the outcome is for all of life for the one who has this kind of faith in Christ.

And as New Testament believers, we know the safety even more fully. We have a fuller revelation of it. Look at Romans 8 with me. In Romans 8 we just see the New Testament extension of this in light of our salvation in Christ. Verse 35, you see the same spirit. The God of the Old Testament is the same God in the New Testament. This is how God promised his people and cared for them in the Old Testament, this is what we see in the New Testament as well. "Who will separate us," verse 35, "from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 'For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In Christ, God has covered us with Christ's righteousness and we are safe from his wrath against our sin. Having saved us, Christ keeps us forever. When judgment comes, he will deliver us to life eternal.

Beloved, this is the gift of your God to you. This is the security that he gives to you in Christ. This is the gift of Christ for everyone who puts their trust in him and what I want you to see as we close here now, is this, is that this kind of security and blessing is a gift that the world cannot give to you, and on the other side, it is a gift that the world cannot take away. Have you come to Christ in this kind of trusting, yielded faith? Those who exercise that kind of faith in the Most High God will certainly enjoy his protection. Beloved, I'm here to tell you in light of Psalm 91, that is the only hope for mortal man.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for Your grace, for Your mercy, for Your kindness to us in Christ, and I pray that all under the sound of my voice would know the blessing of the security of trusting in Christ in the way that this Psalm has so blessedly pointed us to. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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