The blessing of living under cover (Safety in His Shadow)

Text: Psalm 91

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**Scriptures:** Matthew 4:1-11; Psalm 91

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 46, 119:105-112, 121, 177, 527

Series: Occasional

Theme: Enduring safety in the presence of God

Proposition: In Christ you are eternally secure

**Introduction**

When we are small children and scared of something or somebody, we hide under the covers of a bed or couch. This makes us feel safer in a scary world. As we grow into adults, we know that there are many dangers in this world. So many things can and do go against us. Losses of health, wealth, employment, family and friends. As fallen creatures in a fallen world we are naturally insecure, separated from our Creator, cut off from the only One who can give us the comprehensive insurance cover we need in the face of so many risks.

In our text, the psalmist, whose identity we do not know, makes a general statement: *“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty” (verse 1).* The words “dwell” and “abide” both speak of permanent rest, of a place of constant lodging. The word “shelter” conveys the idea of a hiding place where a person is covered. The word shadow expresses shade from heat and or protection from the burning sun.

These words all speak of enduring security; something we all need. Many people look for this in all the wrong places, but our text today in Psalm 91 points us to the right place; by remaining in the sheltering shadow of the Almighty. As frail ‘children’ in a scary fallen world, we all need to be ‘under cover’, we need refuge. That’s our 1st point.

1. **The Need for Refuge**

If I asked you “What is the Psalm before Psalm 91?” I think you all know that the answer: 90! Psalm 90 is quite a sad and sombre section of the Bible because it is about the brief, temporary nature of life. *As for the days of our**life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labour and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away.* The message here is that life on this earth a short-lived struggle. There is a collective focus in the plural pronoun ‘our’. All people are in the same ‘sinking boat’. All of us getting older one day at a time. We are all headed for the grave. “*You turn man back into dust*” (v3) is true for each one of us.

Psalm 90 speaks of the sorrow of life and Psalm 91 gives hope of refuge but in doing so shows the need for a place of refuge in the early section of the psalm (v3-6):

1. ‘The snare of the fowler’ speaks of sudden and unexpected adverse events in life.
2. ‘Terror of the night’ is fear that keeps you awake: tossing and turning in restless anxiety.
3. ‘the arrows that flies by day’ is battle imagery which applies to life’s struggles that pierce your peace and wound you as you live.
4. ‘Pestilence that stalks in darkness’ refers to a sickness unto death. A terminal illness.
5. ‘Destruction that wastes at noonday’. A coming calamity. There is a universal human consciousness of a coming end. A doomsday, an apocalyptic future.

Verse ten speaks of a tent; a fragile fabric temporary dwelling which is very easily damaged, squashed, burned, or flooded. Most of us have been camping. When there’s a big storm coming it is best to pack up your tent and go home or find a motel. Our lives on this earth are lived in this flimsy ‘tent’ of our physical bodies.

But there is another more severe threat to our security hinted at in v8: “the recompense of the wicked” a coming punishment for sin. We are all conceived under the fierce condemnation of God. David’s confession in Psalm 51:5, *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me”,* is true for us all*.* We are all naturally objects of the perfect, righteous anger of God. You and I cannot hide ourselves from God (Adam and Eve tried!) David understood this well when he wrote in Psalm 139:7 *“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?”*

There is only one place to hide. That is paradoxically in the very presence of God. Just as you need to be close to a person who stands in the bright midday sun in order to be shaded, so to abide in the shadow of the Almighty we need to be very close to Him. Our text in verse one speaks of proximate dwelling with God “*in the shadow of the Almighty*”. Up very close and very personal. The place of refuge is close to God Himself, as we see in our second point:

1. **The Place of Refuge**

You might find a place of refuge from an approaching tsunami on a high hill. You might find a place of refuge from an evil government as an asylum seeker here in NZ. But your escape will be temporary and incomplete; other threats will come.

The place of refuge spoken of in this Psalm is different. Look at: verses 1-2 *“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will sayto the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust*”.

There are no less than four divine names in these two verses! The Most High (El Elyon); The Almighty (El Shaddai); The LORD (YHWH) – covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; God (Elohim). These four references drive home a clear message: ONLY with the Living God is there complete refuge, cover, protection to be found. Apart from Him there is no permanent shelter, no enduring shade, no eternal refuge, no lasting hiding place.

God is likened in this psalm to a mother bird who protects her young: v4 “*He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge*”. Here’s a dictionary definition of a pinion “*The outer rear edge of the wing of a bird, containing the primary feathers*”. This is an image of gentle, tender, care and protection. Remember when the Lord Jesus Christ said: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling*” (Matthew 23:37). God desires to protect his people.

What is this secure, safe place like? What is it like to be covered by His pinions and to live under His wings? In this dwelling place where there is direct communication with God: *“I will answer Him” (v15);* There is comfort in and through times of distress : *“I will be with him in trouble”* (v15); This is a safe dwelling place where there is rescue: *“I will deliver him”* (v14); This is a privileged dwelling place: *“I will honour him”* (v15); This is an enduring dwelling place of contentment: “*With long life I will satisfy him”* (v16); This is a dwelling place where Christ is visible: I will *“show him my salvation”* (v16). The word salvation here is Yeshua, Joshua, Jesus.

We can see Jesus, God’s salvation in this psalm. A fallen sinner needs the refuge which is only available through Christ. This place of refuge is where the child of God is covered with the blood of His Son, he or she is covered with the perfection of the righteousness of Christ. He or she is covered with the Love of the Saviour. In Christ alone you are near to God and receive His protection. This psalm is not only a declaration of truth about the safety of others: “*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty*”, it is a personal testimony of faith, as we see in our 3rd point:

1. **The security of refuge**

The Psalmist writes in v2: ***I*** *will say to the LORD, "****My*** *refuge and* ***my*** *fortress,* ***My*** *God, in whom* ***I*** *trust!"* This is the personal voice of the writer who himself has found shelter and covering, enduring shade from the heat of life. He himself is very close to God, who is His place of safety, stronghold. He trusts in the Almighty.

The voice in verse thee changes to the individual “you”: **v3** “*For it is He who delivers* ***you*** *from the snare of the fowler, And from the deadly pestilence*”; **v4** “*He will cover* ***you*** *with His pinions, And under His wings* ***you***  *will find refuge*”; **v5** “***You*** *will not be afraid of the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day*”; **v10** “*No evil shall be allowed to befall* ***you****, No plague come near your tent”*

How is this protection, this divine shelter possible when God is fiercely, furiously angry at the sin of the sinner? There are three parts to the answer in verses 14 and 15. The voice of God Himself explains in v14a:

1. *"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him”.* Here is the key. We can find refuge in God when we love Him. When we are in close personal relationship with the Most High. The unbelieving world does not love God. They hate Him, they ‘shake their fist’ at Him. But those who love God are those who know His love: “*We love, because He first loved us”(1 John 4:19).* Those who love God find refuge in Him; their heart is captured.
2. Verse 14b: “*I will protect him, because he knows My name”.* To know the name of the Lord is to know Him through His Word. Christ was led by Satan to stand on the very top of the temple. In Matthew four we read that He is invited to jump off. Satan misuses Psalm 91:13-14 to tempt Him: (Matt 4:6). *"If You are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, Lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'"* The temptation was to turn from trust to presumption, to ignore the need for active obedience, active faith. It would be like saying “I’ll jump in front of this bus, God will protect me”. Passive resignation is not faith.

Christ knew His heavenly Father. He knew the Scriptures. He was then able to perfectly resist temptation. God protected His Son because He knew His Father’s name. Here is a lesson for us. There is power in the living Word to protect us. The more you are in the Word, the less likely you are to sin. This is a powerful motivation for worship service and Bible study attendance. Those who know who God is and what He has done find refuge in Him. He captures their head, their mind, their thoughts.

1. Verse 15a “*When He calls to Me, I will answer him, I will be with him in trouble*”. This is the promise of Romans 10:13 (Joel 2:32) *"Whoever will call upon the name of the LORD will be saved.".* Those who call upon the name of the Lord find refuge in Him. Their desire – to rely upon His strength – is captured. As David wrote in Psalm 56:3;“When I am afraid: I will put my trust in you”.

Sometimes we struggle with personal assurance, asking “am I saved? am I safe”? The experience of confidence in security in Christ varies in different people and at different stages of our lives. The Westminster Larger Catechism (81) expresses this truth in these words: *Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of faith, true believers may wait long before they obtain it; and, after the enjoyment of such assurance, may have it shaken, diminished, or temporarily absent, yet true believers are they never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God as keeps them from sinking into utter despair.* There is encouragement for us all in this Psalm to attend to the means of grace: The Word and sacraments, testimony through fellowship with those who are strong in the Lord.

Brother and Sisters today we see this Jesus through the eyes of faith. We look forward to seeing Him face-to-face when we go to be with Him in glory. You cannot run for cover away from God, you must run towards Him. You cannot run towards His Holiness without covering for your sin. You need Christ. I need Christ. We all need Christ. There is no other way. "*And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved*." (Acts 4:12). Only in Christ is there shelter, refuge, protection from the wrath to come.

The place of refuge is in the presence of the Living God, covered with the blood of His Son, covered with the perfection of the righteousness of Christ, Covered with the perfect love of the Saviour. The Christian is ‘under cover’. The Christian man, woman, child dwells in the shelter of the Most High. The Christian abides in the shadow of the Almighty, under the protective cover of God in Christ. Here are here alone is there perfect rest of the soul.

AMEN