

April 26, 2020

“God Alone Can Keep Us Safe”
Psalm 91

FCF: Feeling uncertain

PROPOSITION: (anchor) God alone can keep us safe.
(magnet) So we must look to Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

There is a great deal of uncertainty in the air today, especially related to this pandemic. How long should restrictions be in place? What would a “phasing in” look like? What is the balance between personal freedom and love of neighbor? What lasting effects will this have?

Such uncertainty is really nothing new. Many of us were dealing with quite a bit before all this came along. Career plans gone sideways. Financial woes. Relational pain. Waiting on medical tests. We know uncertainty. In His goodness, the Lord gives us words for such times.

SCRIPTURE READING: *Psalm 91*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

This month marked the 50th anniversary of Apollo 13, NASA’s “most successful failure.” Two days into the flight, an O2 tank in the service module exploded, crippling the spacecraft, forcing the crew to abort the mission and use the moon’s gravity as a slingshot back to Earth. It is a dramatic story of ingenuity and a stark reminder of the dangers that come with space travel. The reason for all the training and the system redundancy is that space is hostile and dangerous.

But not terribly unlike life here on Earth. Each of us face constant threats in so many ways - physically, relationally, emotionally, spiritually. Life is not safe anywhere. Where can we go? That brings us to Psalm 91. This is what the psalmist would have us to see. God alone can keep us safe. So we must look to Him. God alone can keep us safe. So we must look to Him.

Unpacking that, there are three things we need to consider as we look to God to keep us safe. First, our need. Second, our source. And then third, our hope. Each of these is vital.

I. OUR NEED

First, our need. Consider the many threats we face. This is set before us in vv.3-13.

A) Threats from Man

1. Snares

Threats from man. The “snare of the fowler” - plots and schemes to entrap or enslave.

2. Arrows

Snares and then arrows - enemy assaults coming towards us not only by day but even by night.

B) Threats from Nature

Those represent clear threats from man. But then we face threats from nature as well.

1. Creatures

Lions and snakes representing strength and stealth. They may be symbols for human beings who seek to prey upon the weak and unsuspecting. But they may well point to a hostile world.

2. Disease

Then there are diseases - plagues, the pestilence that stalks and the destruction that wastes.

All of which is a catalogue for the danger around us, making clear the extent of our need.

Application:

Which is a reminder of how vulnerable we really are. Now how do we typically respond to such things? Fight or flight. Fight - we hunker down and press on. We do something. We analyze, strategize, organize. That's fight. Then there's flight - we wish and pretend it would all go away. We binge something. We abdicate and medicate. None of which is going to satisfy.

This psalm shows another way. God alone can keep us safe. So we must look to Him.

II. OUR SOURCE

Our need is great. Where can we go? That takes us to our source (**READ Psalm 91:1-2**).

A) The Names of God

1. His greatness

Four names of God, the first two emphasizing His greatness - the Most High and the Almighty.

2. Our reliance

The second two point to our reliance on Him - the LORD and my God. Relational and personal.

B) The Images of God

The psalmist wants us to hear these names of God. And to take in these images as well.

1. Of strength

Images of strength - God as a shelter, refuge, and fortress. Each of these are places of security, safety, and rest. This is where you run in the storm, when you need to hide or are under attack.

2. Of tenderness

But then we hear something surprising, an image not of strength but tenderness - a shadow. And as we read on, we see this is the protective cover of a mother bird - "the shadow of your wings."

So we see not only who God is but what He is. Which means He is our source of safety.

Illustration:

The plague was the most feared disease in the world, wiping out hundreds of millions of people. In 17th century Europe, "plague doctors" prescribed concoctions, witnessed wills, and performed autopsies. They are known today for their strange appearance - leather gloves, long coats, beaked masks. The beak was filled with herbs believed to be able to protect the wearer from the germ-filled air. It didn't. And those primitive remedies weren't of much use either.

Application:

Why do I mention that? Because once you reject a false hope of protection you might be tempted to think there is no hope of protection at all. Which simply isn't true. Now many of us have had our hopes exposed. Our health, our wealth, our great plans - it's all so very vulnerable.

God is our source, our strength. He alone can keep us safe. So we must look to Him.

III. OUR HOPE

Which then brings us to our hope. How does this flesh itself out? What does it look like? There are two parts to this. First, our relationship with God and then our assurance from God.

A) *Our Relationship with God*

1. The psalmist speaks

The psalmist points us to our relationship with God in vv.1-2. He speaks of dwelling, abiding, trusting God. The idea being that those who draw near to God can have peace with and in Him.

2. The LORD speaks

So the psalmist speaks. And then the LORD speaks (**READ Psalm 91:14-16**). You hear the two sides here. The believer holds fast in love, knows God's name, and calls to Him. Then you hear the LORD's eightfold pledge to His own. It's so rich, so encouraging, so worth taking to heart.

B) *Our Assurance from God*

And in the context of this relationship with God then comes this assurance from God.

1. His presence in trouble

His presence in trouble (**READ Psalm 91:15**). He promises not deliverance from trouble but His presence in it. Which fits the broad pattern of Scripture. Think of what we heard from Genesis 50 and Joseph's words to his brothers. Or Paul's assurance in Romans 8 - all things, even hard things, brought to bear for our good. Or Jesus's words in Luke 21 (**READ Luke 21:16-18**). What does all that mean? That the LORD will not save us from trouble but in and through it.

2. His salvation from judgment

That's part of the assurance. But there's something else (**READ Psalm 91:7-8**). The list of threats and dangers in Psalm 91 represent this recompense, God's judgment upon His enemies. What then is the promise? We will surely and forever be spared from that. It will not touch us. How can we know this? Because, like the walls of a fortress or the wings of a bird, another has born the force of all that for us. Jesus is our great shelter, refuge, fortress and the tender shadow.

Jesus is our hope against the greatest peril, the harshest threat, and worst danger of all.

Application:

Why is all that important to know? Because Satan's most effective strategy is to deceive and confuse us on this very thing. "If God really loved you, He wouldn't let you suffer." It's the very thing Satan tried with Jesus in the wilderness temptation. If you believe that, then when the pain comes, you will pull back and give up. But, again, what is the promise? Not that God will keep us safe from trouble but that He will keep us safe in and through trouble - even the worst.

That is our sure hope. God alone can keep us safe. So we must look to Him.

CONCLUSION:

Let's go back to the Apollo 13 mission. Real heroism was displayed during those six days of working and waiting - not only by the crew but the engineers in Houston. The astronauts

- Jim Lovell, Fred Haise, Jack Swigert - were completely dependent upon the folks on the ground for their survival and safe return. And they would have been foolish not to utterly lean on them.

That's very much where we are before the Lord every day. Our need is so very great. Our source is so very sure. And our hope, rightly understood and embraced, is so very good.

That's the message of Psalm 91. God alone can keep us safe. So we must look to Him.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) God alone can keep us safe.
(magnet) We must then look to Him.