

Psalm 91:1-16

1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, 2 will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." 3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; 4 he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. 5 You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, 6 or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday. 7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. 8 You will only look with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. 9 Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, 10 no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. 11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. 12 On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone. 13 You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot. 14 Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. 15 When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. 16 With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Psalms is one of the most comforting books in the Bible, especially during times of stress. I don't need to tell you that this is a time of stress. Right now we have to be careful about where we go and what we do. There is danger in just leaving the house. Here in Virginia we are in a "phase in" period. But a lot of people act like it is a pivotal point to where we are out of danger and life is back to normal. I have seen many in the stores with no face coverings and failing to keep their social distance. There is still a lot of danger out there. We are still faced with an abnormal disruption of life like none of us have ever experienced. We are anxious, eager, and excited for life to get back to normal and to get back into church. But we can't push it. Today it is not safe. Things are not back to normal, far from it. When faced with times of trouble we can find comfort in God's holy word, the Bible. Psalms is one of most comforting books of the Bible.

In today's Psalm it is easy to interpret it as receiving shelter from God. There are a lot of symbolisms and metaphors and there are many interpretations of protection from God. The Psalm is a source of encouragement and strength because God provides security and protection. That's what we want - reassurance from God that things will be OK. Psalm 91 says that God will protect you from a deadly pestilence. Deadly pestilence is a fatal epidemic disease. Does the Scripture really say that God will protect you from a deadly fatal epidemic disease? Well, I encourage you to look it up and see for yourself. Psalm 91:3 God will deliver you from deadly pestilence (NRSV).

This is a time to exercise caution in our daily lives, caution in our push to get out, and caution in our efforts to get back to normal. It is easy for us and tempting for us to go to the Scripture and look for words of comfort, then when we find them, it is tempting to think it's OK, don't worry, be happy. However, the Scripture is about more than just the divine protection that is promised. The Scripture is a profession of faith. It is a confirmation of faith. The confidence, trust, and assurance in what Scripture promises are a result of faith. It is very important to understand that the condition on divine protection is if you entrust your whole life and self to God. When it comes to the Bible we must be careful with our interpretation and not project our own wants into what the text actually means. You can't just say things like "I just turned it over

to the Lord" and then forget about it. That's like making a mess. Then don't clean it up and don't worry about because mama will come along and clean it up. To do so is to take advantage of another and abuse your relationship. There is key factor of the utmost importance in the Scripture reading for today. God is not about taking care of you solely for your advantage. If you look close at the Scripture you'll see there is a reputation of different words that are used to say the same basic thing. The first is to live in the shelter of the Most High, and the second is to abide in the shadow of the Almighty. They are both essentially saying the same thing with emphasis on God. What we have is repetition for emphasize. The image portrayed is a matter of entrusting your whole life to God. It is trusting in God completely. It is a close relationship, a life thoroughly God centered. The Scripture is not about the reward. The Scripture is about faith. The reward is a result of faith.

Jesus teaches this Scripture. I love it when the Bible gives us lessons from Jesus. The Devil takes Jesus up to the pinnacle of the Temple on order to tempt Jesus to jump. In doing so, the Devil quotes Psalm 91:11-12. Hey, don't worry, God will protect you. God will command the angels to guard you and lift you up. You won't crash against the rocks. Go ahead. Do it, you'll see, jump, jump, jump (liberal paraphrase). Notice the response of Jesus. He refuses to claim God's promise of protection for his own benefit. And he says that to do so would test God. What is important is not testing divine power and protection but first and foremost trusting in God. Trusting in God is not for the benefit; trusting God is a matter of faith formation. When we look for our own benefit then we take the Scripture out of context. We want the benefit. But, the benefit comes as a result of our devotion to the divine.

I am reminded of a lesson about a man and a wood stove. This guy sits in front of a wood stove and thinks "When this thing puts out some heat, then I will put some wood in. It is a reward first mentality. We see in the Bible that the reward is a result of faith. We learn from Jesus that the Scripture means that trusting God is what is important. There is no magical guarantee against danger, threat, or difficulty and Jesus did not seek to avoid danger at the expense of being faithful

In its commentary on Psalm 91 the Harper Collins Bible Commentary says that God does not remove the dangers. What God does is provide strength for the struggle. It is most important during times of hardship that you take care of your spiritual being. Make sure you allocate time to worship God. Make daily devotions the main priority in your daily life. Block out time for prayer and study the Bible and use this time to get closer to God.