

Protection

Series: Promises of God

Psalm 91:1-7

August 16, 2020

I was thinking about fear this week and realized that I do 2 things that many people are too afraid today. You know one of them is flying, but one of the most prevalent fears in adults is the fear of public speaking. That is not to say that I don't have my own phobias.

A phobia is an extreme or irrational fear of or aversion to something. Let me show you this breakdown of phobias.

FOUR QUADRANTS IMAGE

- Top Left: Natural Environment: add to that Lilapsophobia: fear of tornadoes and hurricanes.
- Top Right: Animals: add to that Ophidiophobia: fear of snakes.
- Bottom Left: Mutilation/Medical Treatment: add to that Algophobia: fear of pain.
- Bottom Right: Situations: add to that Enochlophobia: fear of crowds.

We all have fear.

We have just begun a series "Promises of God." We are looking at 7 promises of God that we can believe in, as certain as the dawn of a new day. Last week, we talked about the promise of His presence when Jesus said, "And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."¹ Today, we are going to talk about God's protection.

I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin. I want to look at Psalm 91:1-7:

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection. Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day. Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday. Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you.²

I know what you are thinking: "What's Gary going to say about this passage?"

Well folks, I'm only going to say what the Scripture says. I don't do what's called "proof text", which is to find a Scripture, then twist it to say what you want it to say. I'm going to simply look at what the Bible says here.

Psalm 91 is one of the finest Psalms in the entire Bible. One commentator wrote, "It is one of the most excellent works of this kind which has ever appeared. It is impossible to imagine anything more solid, more beautiful, more profound, or more ornamented. Could the Latin or any modern languages express thoroughly all the beauties and elegancies as well of the words as of the sentences, it would not be difficult to persuade the reader that we have no poem, either in Greek or Latin, comparable to this Hebrew ode."³

¹ Matthew 28:20b (NLT2)

² Psalm 91:1-7 (NLT2)

³ Adam Clarke's Commentary, Psalm 91

Unlike other psalms, Psalm 91 has no title, nor can it be determined on what occasion or by whom it was composed. As a Bible student, I would have appreciated this information so as to have context for what is written. Without it, we have to look solely at what it says, and what the Lord is telling us today.

So, what's Psalm 91 telling us?

First, God will protect you day and night.

There are three verses that talk about this.

Verse 1: *Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*⁴ The Hebrew for the word "shadow" implies darkness. It comes out clearer in the Message Bible: *You who sit down in the High God's presence, spend the night in Shaddai's shadow.*⁵

Verse 5: *Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day.*⁶

Finally, verse 6: *Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday.*⁷

What's going on here is a classic literary technic in the Psalms called parallelism. Parallelism is composed of two (sometimes three) balanced segments. Here's an example:

*Your unfailing love will last forever. Your faithfulness is as enduring as the heavens.*⁸

In Psalm 91's case, we see antithetic parallelism, where there is contrast from the first to the second.

So: *You who sit down in the High God's presence [during the day], spend the night in Shaddai's shadow.*⁹ *Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day.*¹⁰ *Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday.*¹¹

The writer of Psalm 91 is using this kind of parallelism to make this point: God protects us day and night. There is no time that God is not looking after us.

There are times when God puts someone on our thoughts as if they were standing right in front of us. It might be in the middle of the day or the middle of the night. Why does He do that? He wants us to pray. Something is going to happen to that person, and we are to get involved and get on our knees in prayer.

In 1960, the Mau Mau uprising gripped Kenya. During that time, missionaries Matt and Lora Higgins had to drive through hostile territory on their way to Nairobi, well aware that many had met violent deaths at the hands of Mau Mau terrorists in that area. After dark, about 17 miles from Nairobi, the Land Rover they were driving failed. Matt tried in vain to repair the vehicle. The couple was forced to lock the doors and pray for safety. They awoke safely, repaired the car, and traveled on to Nairobi. Some days later, they heard an interesting story from an individual who was in contact with terrorist

⁴ Psalm 91:1 (NLT2)

⁵ Psalm 91:1 (MSG)

⁶ Psalm 91:5 (NLT2)

⁷ Psalm 91:6 (NLT2)

⁸ Psalm 89:2 (NLT2)

⁹ Psalm 91:1 (MSG)

¹⁰ Psalm 91:5 (NLT2)

¹¹ Psalm 91:6 (NLT2)

groups: As Matt and Lori had slept that night; three terrorists had come upon them and intended to kill them. Suddenly, though, the terrorists had seen 16 strongmen surrounding the car, and fled in fear! Matt and Lora were puzzled about the identity of the 16 men – until they returned to America several weeks later and heard the thrilling testimony of a friend: “On March 23, God burdened my heart for you. I called the men at our church, and 16 of us met together for emergency prayer on your behalf!”¹²

God’s promise of protection is day and night. At whatever time of day or night the threat may come, you will be kept safe.

Second, God will protect you like a mother hen.

Verse 4:

*He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection.*¹³

After a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their trek up a mountain to assess the damage. One ranger found a bird literally petrified in ashes, perched statuesquely on the ground at the base of a tree. Startled by the eerie sight, he knocked over the bird with a stick. When he struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother’s wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings. She could have flown to safety, but refused to abandon her babies. When the blaze had arrived and the heat had scorched her small body, the mother had remained steadfast. She had been willing to die so that those under the cover of her wings would live.

That’s how God is for you. He’s like a mother hen. He will always keep His eyes upon you.

One of my favorite psalms is Psalm 46:

*God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!*¹⁴

Third, God will protect you from disease. Ah, this is the one you’ve been waiting for. Let’s look first Verse 3:

*For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.*¹⁵

The original word translated “trap” in Hebrew is *dabar*¹⁶, spelled “d-b-r” (because Hebrew doesn’t have any vowels) signifies an evil or slanderous word spoken. The original word translated for “deadly disease” in Hebrew is *deber*, which is the same letters (d-b-r), and it signifies a putrid pestilence.¹⁷ So, by using the same three letters (d-b-r), the writer of Psalm 91 is saying, “Not matter what d-b-r is trying to attack you, God will rescue and protect you.

Then verse 6:

*Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday.*¹⁸

¹² Bill Bright, “How You Can Pray With Confidence” (1995 Campus Crusade for Christ), pp. 32-33.

¹³ Psalm 91:4 (NLT2)

¹⁴ Psalm 46:1-3 (NLT2)

¹⁵ Psalm 91:3 (NLT2)

¹⁶ דָּבַר

¹⁷ Adam Clarke’s Commentary, Psalm 91:3

¹⁸ Psalm 91:6 (NLT2)

I can across the meme.
BE BRAVE MEME.

The psalmist gives us two references to mortal diseases that often reach epidemic proportions, whether they come night or day.

So, in these days of COVID, we read “Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday.” Don’t worry about it.

Yet, you may have a part of you that says, “That’s all nice and all, but...” I’m going to stop you right there. There is no “but” in “faith.” As soon as you say “but”, you turn faith into doubt.

Let me give you an example from Mark 6:

Jesus left that part of the country and returned with his disciples to Nazareth, his hometown. The next Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. They asked, “Where did he get all this wisdom and the power to perform such miracles?” Then they scoffed, “He’s just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us.” They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him. Then Jesus told them, “A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family.” And because of their unbelief, he couldn’t do any mighty miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then Jesus went from village to village, teaching the people.¹⁹

The people of Nazareth had almost assuredly heard what Jesus had been doing: healing the sick, casting out demons, and the like. I’m mean, news of a hometown boy becoming famous would absolutely made it home. Yet when Jesus came home, all they had were “buts.” “He’s just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us.” They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him. And because of their “buts”, Jesus couldn’t do any mighty works.

Our “buts” limit what God can do. Our “buts” stifle healing. Our “buts” restrict miracles. Our “buts” keep us from the protection of the Lord.

Now, I am not saying to go into a COVID ICU without protection. That is not it. What I am saying is stop being afraid. There is a real COVID-phobia out there; don’t be afraid.

Here is a quote I came across:

FEAR IMAGE

Don’t be afraid.

Finally, God will protect you from attacks.

Let’s look at verse 7.

Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you.²⁰

On July 9, 1755, at the beginning of the French and Indian War, a British detachment was ambushed by French and Indian forces in what has come to be called Battle of the Monongahela in Pennsylvania. Every British officer and every person on horseback was wounded or killed that day, except for one. A certain Colonel George

¹⁹ Mark 6:1-6 (NLT2)

²⁰ Psalm 91:7 (NLT2)

Washington was the one man that saved force from utter annihilation. He rode unprotected with volley after volley aimed at him. After the battle, he found four musket ball holes through his coat and more in his hat. He reported combing lead fragments out of his hair. He had two horses were shot from under him during the fighting, yet rode out on a third. In his words: "Death was leveling my companions on every side of me!" Washington attributed his preservation to the protective hand of God. Shortly thereafter, what transpired became the subject of revival preaching and Sunday sermons. Everyone concluded that God had a special purpose in keeping young Washington alive.

Fifteen years after the battle, Washington met one of the chiefs on the other side. The chief told him that he and his warriors had singled Washington out with their rifles. They repeatedly failed to bring down their special target. The chief himself fired a dozen carefully sighted shots that yielded no results. He finally determined further effort was useless. He instructed his men to save their ammunition and direct their efforts elsewhere. The chief said he realized the Great Spirit was protecting this young officer and that He had a special purpose in preserving his life.²¹

When we're faithfully fulfilling the purposes, God has for our lives, He will protect us and not release us until all are completed.

My friends, Psalm 91 tells us of God's protection, no matter day or night, no matter what d-b-r comes after you. Just no "buts."

Tribal wars are nothing new in Central Africa. In fact, a number of years ago, a war between the Tutsi and Hutu tribes spilled over the boundaries of 8 African countries, with atrocities on both sides. In one case, in a Christian village in the Congo, Tutsi soldiers broke down the door of a young Hutu preacher's house and stood poised to slaughter the entire family.

The preacher father begged, "Wait. Please allow us a moment to pray before we die." The request was angrily granted, and the family knelt to pray.

But the expected shots never came. After praying, the family slowly stood up and discovered that the soldiers were gone, not only out of their house, but out of the village, as well.

Several months later, as the young preacher was telling this story to a church meeting in a nearby town, he heard a voice from the back saying, "I can tell you what happened."

The man stood and said, "I was one of those Tutsi soldiers who broke into your house. I had your children in my gun sights as you knelt and prayed. Suddenly a tremendous wall of fire surrounded you. We couldn't even see beyond the flames and we knew the house would burn down with you in it, so we got out. Then, when we were outside and saw your house engulfed in flames and yet not being destroyed, we fled out of your village as well. We realized that this was not a kind of fire we are familiar with, but a fire sent by God. And if this is how your God responds, I want to know Him too. I am tired of the fighting and killing. That is why I came tonight."²²

²¹ Adapted from Feavel, Douglas. *Uncommon Character: Stories of Ordinary Men and Women Who Have Done the Extraordinary*, Abridged 3rd Edition (p. 57-59). Aneko Press. Kindle Edition.

²² From a sermon by Melvin Newland, *God is at Work Today!*, 10/24/2009