

# In the Shadow of The Almighty

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Date: 18 January 2026

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[ 0:00 ] My name is Jeff. I'm one of the pastors here to Psalm 91.! Shall I pray? Our Father, we thank you for your word.

! I used to holiday at this place called the Basin.

It's up in Sydney where I grew up. You can see the basin. It's just in that picture in the top left, that little body of water. It was great for swimming because it was safe from open water.

There were no powered boats allowed there. And you could only access the campsite next to the basin by a ferry.

That would drop you off at that jetty. You were allowed to swim around the jetty as well as in the basin. But it was a bit more dangerous because of the boats that were there and the ferry that would come by.

[ 1:16 ] Some of the big kids that we holidayed with, they liked to jump off the end of the jetty because that's what big kids do. But you had to be very careful. I know it seems like a dumb thing to do, especially when the whole basin was there.

A safe place to swim already available. But I wanted to do what the big kids did and jump off the end of the jetty and swim in dangerous waters.

They would jump off the end and then they would come back up those stairs and go again. When I stood on the end, it seemed very high.

I was quite young at the time. And so I'd take a step down and then another step down. And I'd grip my teeth and jump. I was so happy that I was cool and risky like the big kids and jumped off the jetty.

As I came up, I heard people shouting. I didn't know what was happening and I turned to discover that I had jumped just as the ferry was coming to dock.

[ 2:25 ] What a fool I was. I had the whole basin to swim in secure and protected. But I decided to swim in the dangerous water and I was about to suffer for it.

Today's psalm is quite different from the ones that we've looked at so far. It's a psalm of comfort, of encouragement and security. We're going to see that God promises safety and security and salvation, but not for everyone, for those who put their trust in the Lord.

Verse 1 kind of sets the tone for the whole psalm and it's a little bit like a title. Let's take a look at it. It says, Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

The rest of the psalm shows two characters. There's the Lord who saves and protects and rescues and comforts and there's a human character who might be like an Israelite king or someone like that.

Verse 1 kind of contains the contents of the whole psalm. There's what the Lord will do and for whom. Specifically, the Lord will provide rest for whoever dwells in the shelter of the Lord.

[ 3 : 53 ] What this means is that while God is loving and desires people to be in relationship with Him, He doesn't provide rest for every person willy-nilly.

Rest in the shadow of the Almighty Do you think you dwell in the shelter of the Lord?

Do you rest in the shadow of the Almighty? What might that mean? Dwelling often means living or remaining.

I guess it could also be like stays or draws near to, maybe listens or follows or watches and observes.

It kind of makes me think of a magnet, but one that you can turn your magnetisation on and off. And so perhaps a person can make a decision to draw near or be drawn near to God.

[ 5 : 02 ] Are you drawn to the Most High? Do you seek Him out? Or do you turn from Him? Do you hide from Him?

Do you find His nature too exposing? Being in the shadow of the Almighty is something that we want or we should want, I think.

In the shadow of the Almighty, there is rest, there is comfort and protection and life. But if you're anything like me, then you resist His comfort.

I desire His good gifts, but I often turn from them. So what will I do? Well, let's take a closer look and see what compelling reason the psalm contains for coming to the Lord.

Point two. The bulk of the psalm revolves around two main pronouns. There's my, referring to the human character, and I, referring to the Lord.

[ 6 : 15 ] And there are more in the passage, but these are the main ones. The main pronoun in point two puts the focus on the king, who says in verse two, I will save the Lord.

He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust. This verse kind of sets the tone for this section of three to eight.

What we see through the psalm is that even though the human character says what the Lord is to them, it's what the Lord does that is the focus.

So look from verse three. Surely He, that is God, will save you from the fowler's snare, from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge.

His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. These verses are particularly about what the Lord will do for the one who trusts Him, and that is save.

[ 7 : 21 ] The poetry of the psalm reminds us that this isn't literal, but it paints a picture of the Lord saving. And so God isn't a bird.

There is no deadly virus, and the Lord doesn't have feathers, but He does rescue and protect from some kind of danger.

The difficulty is that it doesn't actually say what the Lord will save from. The psalmist continues by describing God as a protector in verse five.

You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilent that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

[ 8 : 26 ] The imagery implies that whether it's day or night, enemy or plague, God won't let you down. And again, there are things to keep in mind.

It doesn't mean that the one who trusts the Lord will never die. If we think about Israel's history, we know that they were warned to turn back to God, and when they didn't, they suffered much like this, didn't they?

They were the thousands that fell. And so, at this point, you might be beginning to feel a bit of a tension. If they don't trust the Lord, then they suffer.

And we know that's what happened. We know that's true because it's what happened. But also, if they do trust the Lord, God will protect them from war and death and terror.

But even David and Solomon, Josiah, the great kings, they all died. So, the question is, did God really protect and save them?

[ 9 : 43 ]     Or did they not really trust the Lord? At least, not as they were supposed to. The imagery continues, verse 9.

If you say, the Lord is my refuge and make the most high your dwelling, no harm will overtake you. No disaster will come near your tent, for he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

They will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the cobra. You will trample the great lion and the serpent.

I wonder what this makes you think. If I put my trust in the Lord, will I tread on lions and cobras?

Will I trample the great lion and the serpent? There's something more going on here than trusting the Lord and escaping death.

[ 10 : 47 ]     Because while I do trust the Lord, sometimes I don't trust him. And while I do say, the Lord is my refuge, sometimes I don't act like it and I don't live like it.

Often I act like the earth is my refuge or physical comforts are my fortress. I do desire to dwell in the shelter of the Most High, but I often forget to draw near him.

So while I am encouraged reading a psalm like this, I'm worried too. Because if my salvation is up to my ability to trust or draw near to God, then it seems like I'm stuffed.

So this makes me ask more of the psalm. Is there more happening than I first saw? Is it more than simply an encouragement and a challenge to a modern Christian?

Well, there were some clues in the verses we just read. I wonder if you heard them. In Matthew chapter 4, the devil tempted Jesus with some of these words.

[ 12 : 14 ]     It says, Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down, for it is written, he will command his angels concerning you and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against stone.

Now, Jesus responds to this temptation by saying, No, it is also written, Do not put the Lord your God to the test. But the fact that Jesus doesn't jump isn't the point.

The point is that when the devil read the psalm, he knew that the you, the one whom the Lord protects, was the Messiah.

God's king, specifically Jesus. Jesus is the one who will tread on the great lion.

Jesus is the one who will overthrow the great serpent, the devil. Therefore, while it's true that whoever trusts the Lord, the Lord will save and protect, it's particularly about Jesus.

[ 13 : 39 ]     Jesus is the one who perfectly trusts in the Lord and whom the Lord saves. And don't we see this perfect trust in the Garden of Gethsemane?

When Jesus is looking down the barrel of a particularly gruesome death, he prays to God saying, Not my will, but yours. Jesus completely trusts his Lord God.

He knows the Lord is completely trustworthy even if he loses his life. I may like to say, I put my trust in the Lord, but my trust wavers.

Jesus is the one who perfectly says and always says, I will say of my Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress and my God in whom I trust.

And so as a result of his trust, the Lord says to him, point three, I will save him.

[14:50] In these final three verses, the Lord says what he will do for the one who loves him and that is he will save him. Look from verse 14. Because he loves me, says the Lord, I will rescue him.

I will protect him for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honour him with long life.

I will satisfy him and show him my salvation. Six times in these three verses, the Lord promises, I will to the one who loves him.

And what will the Lord do for him? Rescue, protect, answer, be with, deliver and honour, satisfy him with long life, show him his salvation.

This is a long list of what the Lord will do for the one who loves him. And these are all things that we would want, wouldn't you think?

[15:52] I want protection. I want to be rescued. I want help in trouble. I want long life. So is it for us?

Well, do you love him? Do you acknowledge his name? I think I do.

I say I love the Lord. Do you? It can be tricky to answer what this means, can't it? Because what does it mean to love the Lord?

Is it to say I love you? Is it hugs and kisses? Probably not. Maybe it's knowledge of the other.

Maybe it's relationship. Perhaps it's sacrifice or giving of oneself. So how are we to know? Well, we should look again to the one who perfectly loves the Lord.

[16:57] That is the Son of God. Surely the Son loves the Lord. Surely the Son loves the Father. Surely he knows him and has a genuine relationship with him.

We've already seen that the Son is the one who trusts him in the face of death. So I suppose we see the love of the Son at the cross as well.

But if the Son and the King is the one who perfectly loves and perfectly trusts, shouldn't he therefore not suffer and die?

Because the Psalm says the one who trusts and loves will be saved and see the Lord's salvation. It sounds backwards, doesn't it? Why doesn't his trust, his perfect trust and love save him?

Well, it does. Because trusting the Lord doesn't mean easy life. Trusting the Lord means giving your life.

[18:13] The language of the Psalm suggests that the one who trusts in the Lord will be protected in a deadly situation like a lion's den. And this is true.

But in reality, the deadly situation isn't a lion's den. It's sin. The Psalm is saying if we trust the Lord, he will save us from the deadliness of sin.

It's like we all jumped off a safe jetty in front of a ferry bearing down on us. We were like children trapped, about to be chewed up.

When I did that, thankfully, one of my friend's parents dived in risking his own life to pull me out of the way. Our desire to trust God and dwell in the shelter of the Almighty is like reaching for a jetty because we know that it's safe but not being able to.

As well as being distracted by the currents and the waves. Jesus dived in because we couldn't save ourselves.

[19:41] He trusted his Lord and God that diving in would be for his glory and for our salvation. And so, because Jesus saved us, we are able to trust and love the Lord.

not everyone does, but we can dwell in the shelter of the Most High. We can say of the Lord, He is my refuge, my fortress, my God in whom I trust.

But you know as well as I do that there are a thousand reasons that we find to stop trusting, to not give our lives to the Lord.

Whatever those distractions are, they draw our eyes away, don't they? Draw us away from trusting the Lord into the choppy waters, whatever they are.

All Peter had to do was to keep his eyes focused on Jesus. Come, Jesus said. But he didn't trust.

[ 21 : 04 ] He got frightened by the waves. He got frightened and he turned away and he began to sink. And what's fascinating and troublesome about Peter's response is that he thought the waves in his peripheral vision were the danger that he had to deal with, that he had to swim away from.

But he had it backwards. He had forgotten that Jesus had called him into a new relationship, one that is based on trust. If Peter would only trust and not worry, not fear, then he would stay on top of the water.

But he stopped trusting. He feared the waves and he began to sink. Jesus has called us into a new relationship with him, one that is based on trust and he expects us to focus on him in trust to the exclusion of all else.

But when we stop trusting that the life and safety and protection that he promises are better, when we fear and worry about the waves and the winds of the world thinking that we need to handle them as ourselves, things like our financials, things like our future prospects, things like our hopes and dreams, saying of the Lord Jesus, he is my refuge, my fortress, my God in whom I trust takes boldness and takes sacrifice.

us. But only those who give their lives to him like he has given his life for you, will he save?

[ 23 : 10 ] Will he satisfy with long life? Will he show his salvation? How about I pray that we would do that? Our Father, we thank you for this psalm of encouragement.

We thank you, Lord, that you rescue and protect and save those who trust in you. We thank you that Jesus has shown us the way to trust in you and that his trust saves us too.

Help us to hand our lives over to you to the exclusion of all else. Amen.