

A Hidden Life

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[0:00] Well, we're going to read now from God's Word from Psalm 91. Psalm 91. And we're going to read the whole Psalm together.

Let's listen to God's Word. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say to the Lord, My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust. For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.

He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge. His faithfulness is a shield and a buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

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

[1:15] Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place, the Most High, who is my refuge, no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him. I will protect him because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him.

I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and honour him. With long life, I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.

This is God's word. Well, as we have that passage open in front of us, let's pray together again. Let's ask God for his help. And just a simple prayer from the Psalms.

[2:27] Open our eyes that we might see wonderful things in your word. We ask this, Heavenly Father, in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. Well, I was saying to one or two people earlier on that your minister used to be my history teacher.

And so I can never quite bring myself to call him by his first name. I always think I should refer to him as Mr. Anderson. Or that I should have brought some homework with me this evening to leave here.

But it's really nice to be with you tonight. And I wanted to share this psalm with you all because it's always meant a lot to me. It's one that I've often come back to at different points in life.

But also because I think it feels very apt. It's a psalm that speaks a lot about safety and security and where to find it.

[3:30] And I think this is something that lots of people are concerned about, isn't it, at the moment. Maybe many of us here. And there's three things I want to kind of draw out of the psalm as we look at it together.

And the first is verses one to two. It is the confession believers make. The confession believers make. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

In these opening verses, the psalmist is confessing his faith. And he tells us that God is his shelter.

In verse one, if you look at the text there, he speaks generally. But in verse two, he gets very personal. Do you see that? He changes to I.

The God he speaks of in verse one is his God. And he's not a person. What he gives us there is a kind of life sentence. I will say to the Lord, my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.

[4:42] A few years ago, I was part of a church that often recited creeds and confessions together during a service. And these kind of short summaries that we have of the kind of core things that

Christians believe.

And when it came to that point in the service, before we recited it all together, Paul or Stuart or Chris, the three guys who tended to lead the services, they would always say these five words. They'd ask this question, Christian, what do you believe? And we would all reply something like this. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth or some other creed or confession.

It was an opportunity for all of us to confess our faith, whatever had happened that week, however we were feeling, to make it personal.

And the psalmist would like that. Christian, what do you believe? I believe that the Lord is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.

[5:53] I wonder if that's your confession tonight. Can you say that? It's very personal. And it's also theological. We see this in the four different names he uses to speak of God.

He calls him the Most High, the Almighty, verse 1. And then he uses God's covenant name, the Lord, verse 2, Yahweh. And then my God. He was using names that God had revealed.

So the psalmist doesn't believe in a higher power. He doesn't believe in the man upstairs or God in the general.

No, his confession of faith is specific. Now, not everyone does this. Not everyone likes it when Christians move from talking about God in general to talking about God in a more specific way. Talking about their relationship with God. Stating that there is only one God. To be specific about God. To hold to the way that he has revealed himself can often cause us trouble.

[7:10] But if Jesus is Lord, then we must. Just notice how he describes God. He calls him a shelter. He speaks of abiding in his shadow.

God is his refuge and fortress. And what I want to do tonight is kind of pick up that first word, shelter, and put it in bold font, and underline it, and highlight it.

The word shelter can be translated covering, or hiding place, or secret place. Now, there's a couple of kids here tonight, but when I was a boy, we loved to build dens.

I don't know if you can really do that anymore. We would take all kinds of big branches, and hay, and we would build these big shelters in the woods near our school.

We'd put down our jackets on the ground. It'd get really muddy. Our parents would get really annoyed. It probably broke all the health and safety rules. And they were amazing places. And we hid there.

[8:25] But the psalmist says that he has a hiding place. But it's not really a place, is it? It's a person. His life is hidden, hidden away in God.

Just listen to Paul putting it in kind of New Testament language. Since then you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. If you're a Christian this evening, you're united to Christ by faith.

Your life is hidden away with him. Hidden with Christ in God. That is the real you. It's untouchable.

[9:26] And one day, that wonderful identity will be clear for you, clear for all to see. That is something to know when your life is in bits.

That is something to know when you're in utter despair. That is something to know you have a hiding place. And Jesus will never ask you to leave it.

That's the confession believers make. Notice secondly though, verses 3 to 13, the security believers enjoy.

The security believers enjoy. Here the psalmist switches from talking about his own faith to telling anyone who'll listen what it is like to have God as their refuge.

Just look how he begins in verse 3. For he will deliver you. Or notice the word because in verse 9. Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place.

[10:35] He's saying, if you make the Lord your shelter, then let me tell you what will happen. And the answer is that a whole host of threats will be overcome.

As one writer puts it, he uses military and maternal imagery in these verses to get his point across. We see that in verse 4.

Believers are safe and shielded. Safe under God's wings like a little bird and shielded from harm like a warrior in battle.

According to the psalmist, if you put your trust in the Lord, you'll be safe from danger, safe from disease, safe from destruction, safe in the dark. And safe in the day.

Now, there are some animals mentioned in this section, verse 13. But isn't there another animal here tonight? Isn't there an elephant in the room?

[11:38] Isn't there an elephant in the room when we read these verses? Because the simple fact is that Christians do suffer, don't they? Christians get cancer, have depression, Christians lose children, die in accidents, live with chronic pain, face persecution, have broken relationships, and on and on and on and on.

And I can recognize some of you from behind your masks this evening, just a small number. I hardly know any of you. But I do know this, that in a group like this, there will be all sorts of suffering in the past, in the present, and in the future.

So is this psalmist, is he kind of over-promising? Is he like the politician who tries to get your vote and says one thing and does another?

The man or woman who campaigns in poetry, but governs in prose? I mean, it sounds like prosperity teaching, doesn't it? Verse 9, because you have made the Lord your dwelling place, in other words, because you've done what I said back in verse 1, no evil.

And we say, what about the ICU ward? What about depression? What about something like 9-11? What about the murder of that MP recently?

[13:22] Well, listen to Daniel Estes. This psalm, he says, must not be read in isolation, but in conversation with the rest of the Bible.

I think that is such a helpful phrase. Scripture interprets Scripture. He goes on, it is true that the Lord is always present with his people, even during their darkest distresses, but he may well use adversity in their lives to produce godly virtue.

So, Psalm 91 should not be taken as a guarantee against all adversity, not in isolation, but in conversation.

Now, we see this even within the psalm. It could have stopped at verse 14, couldn't it? But look at verse 15. I will be with him in trouble.

I think that little word, in, might be the most important word in the whole psalm. And I think we also need to remember that this is poetry, isn't it?

[14:32] Some of us find poetry really difficult. We may be more at home in one of Paul's letters or the Gospels. Maybe we've got bad memories of poetry at school. But the psalmist is using imagery we can relate to.

He's wanting us to try to understand what life with God is like. So he calls God a refuge, a shelter. He says we hide under his wings. God doesn't have wings. But we hear that and we know what he means, don't we?

It speaks of tenderness and security. And in this section it's as if he's taken one word, maybe providence or protection and he's turned it into a poem because he wants to capture our imagination.

He wants to help us feel it. He wants to help us trust the one that he's writing about. Now I read recently that this psalm has often been known as the soldier's psalm.

It's very easy to see why, isn't it? We can picture people praying it in the trenches in verse 7 maybe. The psalmist, perhaps that's particularly appropriate, verse 7, he imagines us on a battlefield and people falling all around us while we remain standing.

[16:01] But this is not superstition. Sometimes people treat God's word like that. They take God's word, they say or they tell others, if you trust him then you'll never suffer.

Or if you're suffering, it must be because of a lack of trust or a specific sin. if you really trusted God, he'd cure you.

But that is to twist this psalm. It is to take the comfort that is here and turn it into a kind of curse.

And if words like this have ever been used against you, then you need to know that you are in very good company. because that is just what the devil did to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Turn with me or listen along as we go to Luke chapter 4. Luke chapter 4. Now Jesus is about to begin his public ministry.

[17:14] He's led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days. verse 2. And in verses 3 to 12 it's as if he does battle with the devil.

But unlike Adam, unlike Israel, he passes the test that's put before him. Three times the devil tempts him to turn away from his mission and each time Jesus confronts him with the sword of God's word.

But look at the last temptation in verse 9. And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, He will command his angels concerning you to guard you, and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

friends, Satan is a Bible scholar, did you know that? Satan knows our psalm, he says to Jesus, do something miraculous, do it just for you, prove that you are who you say you are, and a whole bunch of angels will come and rescue you, won't they?

But look at Jesus' response, he quotes God's word right back at him, you shall not put, verse 12, the Lord your God to the test. Now angels did minister to Jesus, and if we'd read Matthew's version of this same incident in chapter 4 of Matthew's gospel, we'd see that.

[19:03] In Luke chapter 22, as Jesus prays on the Mount of Olives, as he gets ready to face death, an angel appears to him and strengthens him.

There's a lot we aren't told about angels, and we need to be very careful that our view is not shaped by kind of fluffy images that we see on Christmas cards, that kind of thing.

When people met angels in the Bible, they were terrified. But Psalm 91 makes clear that you and I are guarded by them.

Do you see that? If you look back at Psalm 91, verse 11, he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. As the writer to the Hebrews tells us in chapter 1, are they, and he's talking about angels, are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

The answer is yes. So what God is telling us through the images in this psalm, through the reference to the angels, is that Christians, believers, are secure.

[20:20] Secure in a capital S, ultimate sense. See, you and I do not know what we've been saved from in this life.

but we do know that because of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have security that not even death can take from us.

You see, I don't think I'm meant to read verse 13 in this psalm and head to Edinburgh Zoo on my way home. That would be a big mistake, wouldn't it?

The psalmist is using these frightening animals to make his point. But there is someone who has crushed the head of the serpent. There is someone who has done that, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has defeated our great enemy, the devil. I think this is so important for us to remember because we're so hardwired to look out for security.

[21:27] We look for it in all sorts of places, don't we? Work, control, my Christian service, going to the gym, eating healthily, but there is no ultimate security outside of Christ.

There is no way apart from him to escape the judgment of God. There is no insurance policy for death. But there is a Saviour who has conquered it and who will walk with you, walk with me, as we go through it.

I'm fascinated by the history of American presidents. Maybe this all goes back to Nigel's lessons, Mr. Anderson's lessons, I don't know.

But what do they promise American presidents when they take the oath of office? They promise to preserve, protect, protect, and defend the constitution of the United States.

And in a sense, it is just what Jesus does for his church, preserves, protects, and defends his people through all history, through all the changing scenes of life, through all the ups and downs, through all the disappointments, the frustrations, and the difficulties, and then brings us at last to the heavenly city.

[23:06] That is the security that you can know tonight. We've seen two things so far. We've seen the confession believers make, we've seen the security believers enjoy.

Lastly, and briefly, verses 14 to 16, listen to the vows that believers hear, the vows believers hear. in these final verses there's a change of speaker. The psalm began with a kind of pledge of allegiance from the psalmist, and it ends in a similar way, but this time the one speaking is God

himself.

And he's speaking about those who trust him. Because he or they hold fast to me in love, I will deliver him. I will protect him because he knows my name.

If you look down at the verses, you'll see just the repeated use of I will. One commentator, he highlights a kind of parallel with a wedding ceremony here.

[24 : 17] God is promising, I will deliver, I will protect, I will answer, I will be with him, I will rescue, I will honour, I will satisfy. I will show him my salvation.

All the emphasis, all the weight is on what God will do. Now we need to say, don't we, that that long life, as we've kind of alluded to already, doesn't mean that our days before our resurrection bodies will be long.

As one friend of mine reminded me recently in a text message, we live in a veil of tears, don't we? But our days after our resurrection bodies will never end.

In the gospel we are promised eternal life. And as we wait for those days, times will come when you and I need to call on God, times when we are at the end of ourselves.

And we may not get the reply we hoped for, but he will still be with us in the midst of it. And one day he has promised to bring us, to show us his glory.

[25 : 43] glory. You see, isn't this psalm, isn't it the pattern of Jesus' life too? No one loved the father like him, but he faced trouble as well, didn't he?

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of his cries and his tears and how he was heard because of his reverent submission. But it's even more than that, isn't it?

Having suffered and died, he rose, he reigns, and now he is honoured forever.

And maybe tonight you don't know him, or maybe tonight you never felt so far away from him. But as Jesus says, whoever comes to me, I will never, never drive away.

And so we pray, don't we, rock of ages, rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide, let me hide myself in thee.

[27 : 14] Let's pray. my life is hidden with Christ in God.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the wonderful comfort that this psalm brings to us. We thank you that you promise to be our refuge and our shelter all the days of our life.

We thank you that you promise to be with us in trouble. And as we sit before you this evening, we want to pray especially for any in this church family or any that we love who are struggling, who are under pressure, who feel far from you, who are sick, people that we love, and we just bring them to you now.

We think of them, we picture them in our mind's eye and ask for you to help them, to draw near to them, to comfort them, to be their refuge, and to be our refuge as we look after them, as we help them, as we try to love them as you love them.

We want to thank you, Heavenly Father, for Nigel and for Janice and for this church, for their ministry. We pray that you would refresh them and encourage them while they're on holiday just now.

[29 : 06] We thank you for them. we pray for the elders of this church and for their families and ask your protection over each one of them. We pray for all the children here and others that we know and love and ask that you would protect them.

We recognise that we live in a culture that is very hostile to you. We pray for Christian teachers and we pray for other people involved in trying to teach young people about you.

And as we meet at this point, Heavenly Father, we are also conscious that soon leaders from around the world will gather to meet with one another to discuss the future of our world.

We thank you that this world is in your hands and we thank you that the Lord Jesus reigns and rules over all things and we thank you that one day he will return and we pray that you'd help us to trust him and rest in him tonight.

We thank you for the work of ETS. We thank you for John Angus and for Heather here this evening. We thank you for Ivor Martin.

[30 : 34] Pray for him as he takes on his new role soon of being moderator of the Free Church and ask that you would bless him. Heavenly Father, thank you that you know all our concerns, all our needs.

Thank you that you know us inside out better than we know ourselves. thank you that all the hairs on our heads and all the days of our lives are known to you.

And so we just give ourselves to you afresh tonight. We pray for your help this week in our work, in our relationships, in our daily lives. Help us to take up our cross and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for him. We worship him tonight. And we pray these things in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.