

Under the Shadow

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Preacher: Rev Donald M Macleod

[0 : 0 0] Psalm, Psalm 91, Psalm 91. This evening will be an introduction or reintroduction and we'll begin verses 1 down to verse 2 to see how time goes with us but hopefully with the Lord's help finishing off the first two verses this evening.

I'll read this verse again for us, Psalm 91. 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.

We're beginning this new series. Now we actually made allusions to this series last year and I perhaps didn't tell you the time but I'll tell you now, it's been long enough.

The thinking was, I was copying R.C. Sproul, if you've mostly heard of him, the late theologian, teacher, pastor, but he also had a funny streak to him too.

He was wanting to teach, he's a brand new minister, the same age as I was, as I am. He wanted to teach the congregation about spiritual warfare but he was worried they would think he was a bit too out there for that.

[1 : 1 7] So he mixed in confession of faith one week teaching and the next week spiritual warfare teaching. So that is the plan for the Lord's help for our time together. We'll go back to our confession of faith series by mixing in a journey through Psalm 91.

And this will be a journey, as I were, a manual, a handbook for us at least looking at some of the elements of spiritual warfare. As we look at Psalm 91, we'll sing it this evening as we go through it, as we read through it the next few months together.

We do come to a psalm we all know so well, and a psalm, of course, that the church has clung to for many years. The early Jewish believers, the early church, right from the moment the psalm was penned until ourselves this evening, this is a psalm which speaks of the promises and the safety we find in God.

And there's nothing wrong with singing the psalm and singing in general of God's safety and God's keeping for us. That's fine. And we mean that and we sing that.

He's a refuge for us and so on. But once you start to delve into this psalm in detail, there are some parts of it which are odd. which are odd if we take it just to be some form of physical protection the Lord's offering us.

[2 : 4 1] And then you stop. And you see, this psalm wasn't just valued by the church since the start. It was also used for a very clear purpose.

Not as some magical spell. We don't believe in that. Not as some handbook, as I said. We don't really believe in that either. But this was a psalm that the church has used from the very start to remind ourselves and to retrain ourselves, to reassure ourselves of where our safety is and where we find safety in the midst of spiritual attack.

This is, we could say, and this is at least mentally what I'm calling our series, this is our war report. This is the war report of how we're going to engage in the battle of spiritual warfare, both individually but also as a congregation.

Now, if you want, at the end of our series, we can show that the proof, there is historical evidence, historical proof of a psalm being used in this way. That's not for this evening.

There's plenty of information and plenty of detail on that. There's quite literally whole PhDs written about the use of this psalm for spiritual warfare. I'm happy to send you a link if you've got time to read through 100,000 words on that.

[4 : 06] But the evidence is there. But I hope as we go through this psalm, the psalm itself will show us next wee while together that this is a psalm that we're being given and God's mercy towards us to use when the evil one attacks.

If we're thinking, should I have this psalm, I wonder if our minds go to the one use of this psalm where it's quoted extensively in the New Testament. Of course, it's when our Lord is tempted.

Satan tempts our Lord. Satan tempts Jesus. It's to this psalm, Satan, as it were, takes Jesus.

And we'll cover this in the weeks ahead. Does it not say? Does it not say? Does it not say? And here the arrogance of the evil one is shown in that he takes the Lord to the psalm that is most used for spiritual protection to try and somehow trip Jesus up when he tries to tempt Jesus away from his mission.

We'll see that more in the weeks to come. So as we begin studying, we come to our first two verses this evening. And in Psalm 91, for all we'll see later on, it begins with the very foundation, but also the very solid reality of where all our protection is, all our spiritual warfare.

[5 : 40] It comes from verses one and verse two that he alone is our real protection. Verse one and verse two. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High.

Look at these two verses. We can see it just under two very broad headings. First of all, seeing our posture, where we are in these two verses, and then seeing his position, where our Lord is in these two verses.

First of all, our posture. First of all, then, we dwell. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High. We dwell.

As we face spiritual attack, as we face the enemy battering up against us, first and foremost, we dwell in his shelter. We dwell.

Throughout this psalm, the Hebrew is extremely important. There are some nuances, there are some clear details that we must delve into. It's a great joy for us to do so. Here are the first one we have.

[6 : 42] The very word dwelling here is important for us. This is a term, not just of an occasional visit. No, this is dwell in an ongoing reality. This is the sense that we who live in the shelter of the Most High, we who have a permanent home, and that's important, and we'll see why it's so important in our next point.

But first of all, this means to live permanently, to have set our roots down. We've fully moved in. In other words, those of us who know the Lord, who love the Lord, we have a permanent home in the shelter of the Most High, in his mansion, in his place of safety.

As we engage in spiritual warfare, as we go and share the good news week after week, as we try and witness to family members and friends, the enemy will hate that. The enemy hates it.

Not for this evening, and not to give him any more time he deserves, but even the preparation of this series, the enemy has been quite present. He hates it. He hates anything we do that benefits and extends the gospel.

We keep saying it, but we'll see it in the congregation in the year to come. As we seek to engage more and more, we will see pushback, we will see spiritual attacks, and we'll see them personally as a congregation, no doubt about it.

[8 : 06] When we find ourselves face to face with these attacks, we dwell. We live, brothers and sisters, in and underneath his shelter, that shelter that won't break or bend with even the most ferocious of attacks of the enemy.

We'll see the shelter more later on, but look into ourselves first. But it's not just some kind of overnight shelter, no, we have a constant home here. We have, as it were, the key for the door of his mansion where we've been given a secure, eternal home.

In other words, when the enemy attacks, and those of you who have engaged in spiritual warfare or know this, when you've realised you're under a spiritual attack, I certainly hope the first thing you do is you go to prayer, and we'll see this in future weeks, but you go to prayer, because what else do you do?

And in prayer, what else are you doing but you're using that key and you're placing yourself back home, back at the foot of the throne of grace, back in the courts of heaven where you have full access and full invite, where your name is there, your place is there, and in prayer, you dwell.

And spiritually, you dwell. Your place is already there for you. Our place is there with our Saviour. He has prepared it for us. We dwell. And as we dwell, we dwell in the home of the very one who cast Satan down from the heights of glory he once occupied down to the depths where Satan now is.

[9 : 47] That is the one we dwell with. Who's stamped on the very head and neck of the serpent. The one who, as we read in Colossians, who has triumphed and put to open shame all the rulers and authorities and spiritual realms over us.

Brothers and sisters, we dwell in our home not as invited guests, but we dwell in that home as sons and daughters.

as Satan attacks, and perhaps this is your experience at times it's certainly been mine, as Satan attacks and he gives us the thoughts and leads us to think perhaps we have no home there.

Perhaps our assurance is under attack and you get the thoughts, the attacks, however it appears, however he works in your situation. He's crafty enough to deal with us all individually. He tells you you haven't got a home there.

Your home isn't with the Lord's people. Your home isn't with the Lord. Your name isn't as it were carved onto his hands. Your name isn't as it were above your room in his mansion.

[10 : 58] Your name isn't there. Your place isn't there. Take him back to the Word and take yourself back to the Word and read again in verse 1 that you dwell in the shelter of the Most High.

We dwell in the shelter then we see we abide in his shadow. Here's where the Hebrew is so beautiful. So that dwelling first, we dwell in the shelter that's our permanent home.

Then we abide in his shadow. The difference is subtle but the difference is important. So dwelling is long living.

Dwelling is where you dwell at home. When you abide the term there is an overnight place of safety. So imagine with me if you will you're making your way home and as you're making your way home you recognise that darkness is closing in and the storm of the evil one is rising around you and you're praying for safety and there you abide.

it's that immediate shelter that immediate safety the Lord gives you. In other words there's two levels to our safety. We always have the safety of our home and glory our home with the Lord that's always ours no matter what happens but immediately in our walk and our journey in life the second we pray for safety we find ourselves abiding in his shadow covered by his shadow quite literally in the overnight lodging of his shadow take the most literal translation there possible he who lives in the shelter of the most high will also brackets also find overnight lodging in the shadow of the almighty the Lord when out of nowhere the devil attacks when out of nowhere you feel him try and jam his arrows in and when you cry out in prayer to the Lord brothers and sisters if you experience it you know you will find that place of shelter and security it still hurts it's still grim it's still dark it's still miserable but you're safe and the wind still batters outside and the evil one is still there trying to get in but you're in prayer and he keeps you safe as your soul darkens and as the fiery arrows rain down you are in that place of shelter we'll see that more in a second we dwell we abide what else do we do this time in verse 2 we find ourselves in prayer

[13 : 51] I will say to the Lord my refuge and my fortress and God my God and who I trust that's a prayer of course briefly not because it's not important but briefly because this is a whole evening for us later on but just now because we have it here this has to be the first and the most powerful way we confront the evil one we never confront the evil one on our own it was Martin Luther in his writings he'd write about when a devil attacked him he would shout back at the devil now Martin Luther was many things but he did further write that when he said that he didn't mean literally about times he admitted he did quite literally shout back at the devil and tell the devil to go home and put the devil in his place now theologically it's not wise mentally spiritually it's not wise and we're not

Martin Luther he did that and he could do that I'm sure but even in his writings he'll often say with spiritual warfare that our home our rock is our prayer and just in case you think your minister is going off the deep end I'm in good company Calvin I'll keep buying on a bit Calvin but when you actually read Calvin's letters you see a different man to what we might think he was and he advises his friends and family on spiritual matters if we ask him questions he answers them Calvin is a man who was constantly battered by the devil spiritual attack in so many ways spurred and followed him when you read John Knox's his works there's eight copies there in the manse and you'd be surprised when you go through them how often he mentions quite explicitly the ways the devil was on at him and changed plans and try to disrupt things it's real it's real for these men we look up to it's real for us but again and again the constant thing is prayer for all these men for all of our great learning and our theology which he had he never graduated beyond the fact when evil one attacks our first port of call is prayer and what do we say in our prayers when evil one attacks we trust in the promises of the Lord so now we see here

I will say I will say to the Lord my refuge and my fortress my God in whom I trust the second the evil one appears the second he attacks we look upwards not to ourselves not to the evil one we take our eyes away from ourselves away from him look up to the one who has conquered the grave the one who has conquered the evil one and we cry out that he alone is our refuge and our fortress he alone is the one in whom we trust we can't outwit the devil we can't just get on with our day and hope he leaves us alone he certainly will not we drop to our knees physically or in our minds at least in the posh we adopt mentally we drop to our knees before the Lord and we say to the Lord I can't do this but you already have be with me rescue me whatever your prayer might look like so that's our position when spiritual attacks rise against us we first of all we find shelter we abide we find a home we pray what is as it were the Lord's posture then towards us back to verse 1 as we dwell he is what to us well he is a shelter to us he who dwells in the shelter of the most high he is the shelter of his people and perhaps the word shelter we read that and we might think and we might be tempted to think it's a shack some buffy no that's not the word here the word here is a strong fortress that's the same word almost used in verse 2 the Lord's a fortress he's a shelter he is a place of sure security in the days of trouble quite beautifully if we do a literal translation of the Hebrew here it says the one who dwells in the concealing of the most high the one who dwells he who dwells in the concealing place of the most high we're not just sheltered kept safe we're concealed how?

because we're covered in what? in the finished work of our saviour he who defeated evil who defeated Satan who as we read in Colossians because of his work as he was nailed to the cross he disarmed the rulers and authorities that's spiritual powers and put them to open shame by triumphing over them because of our saviour who triumphed over evil over Satan we have one in whom we are completely concealed the devil can't touch us he can shake us he can rattle us he can get to us he can fire the arrows in he can distress us and distract us but he can never as Christians dear brother sister he can never destroy us simple as that he shelters us not again the name we use here of God is the name we had before he is most high he is most high as the devil attacks us the devil feels strong and powerful feels as if he has the ultimate spiritual advantage over us if you felt that you know the feeling you feel almost at times a tangible darkness as the evil one encroaches on you and you feel as if you have nothing and nowhere to go and nothing to do and you feel his power and his small words authority you think what do we do what do we do we pray to the one who is most high who is over and above all created authorities yes there is rulers and principalities there is demonic structures that are so beyond our understanding and so beyond our power but we pray to one who is the most high who is not just over and above them who isn't comparable to them because they are created and he is not when the distress and distraction caves in on us we come to one who is not just above that but who is completely outside of that and who gives us sure and certain protection and shelter so he shelters us then what do we see he overshadows us he will abide in the shadow of the almighty this is the second image of god's position in relation to us when the evil one attacks we cry to him we find our hope in him we find our shelter our concealment in him but with that he also overshadows us and the image here is even more beautiful so the enemy's attacks are coming in and the arrows are hitting us as it were the image here then is we're overshadowed by him how are we in his shadow well he stands in front of us doesn't he as the arrows come as they attack us he as aware stands in front of us and he overshadows us he is in front of us he we're in his darkness but we're in his shadow and quite beautifully in his shadow is where darkness cannot come near us as we run to god like a child running to a father and that's what we are as we run to god like a child who is scared we run behind our father looking for protection looking in fear of our lives and our father stands before us and here he is as described as the almighty we saw

it before El Shaddai one of all power all glory all strength who as it were has full control over the armies of heaven we are covered by the shadow of El Shaddai who stands before us protecting us he shelters he goes before us he overshadows us and quite simply finally we see here he protects us note again the prayer of a psalmist in verse two I will say to the lord my refuge and my fortress my god in whom I trust really refuge and fortress summarizes verse one for us that is in summary what god is the imagery is clear it's simple it doesn't need for us to delve into it more than we have here he is our refuge in time of need but also our fortress he is not passive we are he is not yes we're fully dressed in the armour of god but we go forward from his place of safety his place of security he's a refuge to us in safety but also a fortress we're not passive because with him we move forward and attack we do it in his strength as we begin delving more into this psalm the constant theme has to be that everything we do as christians and every time we engage in warfare and we must engage in spiritual warfare we must because it will face us we do it in his power and from a position as it were behind his walls and as we find ourselves attacked with the full power of the evil one we have behind us around us and in front of us and over us if you like the full protection and overshadowing of our god in whom we trust who hears us who cares for us who shelters us who overshadows us and all this is true of us before we even begin the battle the one thing as we come to the conclusion we'll say is the battle is not a fair one it's not a fair one at all because we know we've already won so our saviour has won again I read verse 15 of

[25 : 33] Colossians how do we know we've won well the debt is cancelled against us how this is set aside nailing it to the cross he disarmed we're fighting enemies who have been disarmed yes they will rail and attack and keep on going but they're disarmed they are as we're on a chain and the chain sometimes feels a bit too long for our liking for honest a bit too much give towards us but we win the win is guaranteed but still we battle and battle until the end and we're commanded nonetheless to fight and as you face the attacks as we face together the attacks of the evil one and if you haven't yet perhaps experienced this and if you do and I'm pretty sure we all will in some capacity already have maybe don't don't undervalue it it was

Hudson Taylor who he didn't deny it but he heard friends godly friends christian friends talk about spiritual warfare and he thought they were just a bit too now he didn't say out there whatever word he used in his own diary but a bit too close to the wind perhaps a bit too close to the wind and strange things until one weekend he found himself plunged into the darkest of spiritual warfare fighting as it were he said for himself for his life and for his soul it felt like and then he realised it wasn't a joke it was real now the lord allows us each one of us to have different views of the battlefield and some of us will fight in different ways and others and not one of us will have the same experience perhaps but don't for a second think it's not real and I hope you don't then if you start to feel it turn to this psalm and read psalm verses 1 and verse 2 read back in colossians 2 verses 14 and 15 and remind yourself that whatever he says or does against you it hurts it's unpleasant it's dark but we have a saviour who has been hung on that cross for us who through his finished work our debt is cancelled our sin is gone our wrath is gone but also more than that who by his death his victory his resurrection he disarmed he destroyed he firmly put his foot on the head of the serpent the serpent won't recover still writhing and railing against him but it won't recover it's a death below and despite the rulers and authorities the legions of evil against us they don't win because we've already won in Jesus

I offer Lord my God will say he is my refuge still he is my fortress and my God and in him trust I will so kind of on our study just to say honestly it is a difficult study in some places and some parts of it we'll have to work hard together to see the meaning of it we tread we're brothers and sisters I've tread before this is not new teaching maybe new perhaps some of us but it's teaching what the church has held on to the last several thousand years and it's teaching which encourages us in our fight against the evil one but it's not a word of prayer Lord we thank you for this gift once more this gift of time together around your word this gift as being here this evening not just as friends but also more importantly as brothers and sisters around a living word telling us about you our living God as we're reminded this evening as we begin this study looking at the horror of the depths of the evil ones attack but also with that the beauty and the glory of our victory in our

Lord Jesus Christ Lord we bring these two things before you and we give you praise for it we confess our times we feel hopeless and helpless as the evil one attacks as for some he brings back sins of old as for others he brings back guilt and shame of old as for others he brings in doubts and worries for others he puts forward heresies and different ideas for others he leaves hopeless depressed in spirit for others he seems to misdirect and to give false ideas and false hopes and for others he deals with us in different ways Lord you know the full extent of his various attacks his various angles of attack Lord we ask every time we feel his attacks we would bring these things to the throne as we praise your name first and foremost in these times of prayer help us also to remember that we are being attacked by an enemy who will one day be thrown into hell that hell will be prepared for him hell will be open to receive him and he'll be cast into it for all eternity in that hell

Lord until that day comes help us to serve you faithfully to serve you well help us even the rest of this evening help us as a meeting as a Kirk session as elders help our thoughts and our ideas and our plans our discussions to be seasoned not just with gospel love but to be seasoned also with wisdom as we faithfully and humbly with servant hearts seek to serve your people here give us wisdom what we say and what we do help us to come to this conclusion of our time of worship to go home in safety relying only on the finished work of our saviour in his name and for his sake we ask these many things Amen we can close with Psalm 91 verses 9 down to verse 13 of the Psalm Psalm 91 verses 9 down to verse 13 because the Lord who constantly my refuge is alone even the most high is made by thee thy habitation no plague shall near thy dwelling come no ill shall thee befall for thee to keep in all thy ways his angels charge he shall

[32 : 14] Psalm 91 verses 9 down to verse 13 to God's praise because the Lord can't stand in thy refuge is alone in the most high is made by thee thy habitation salvation no plague shall near thy dwelling come no well shall thee befall for it to keep in all thy ways his angels charge thee shall in that hand shall bear thee up still with the me upon lest thou at end time should start thy fruit against against stone upon

God God shall tread and on the lion stone thy feet on dragon's trample shall and on the lion sea in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with you now and forever more Amen