

The Greatest Protection Policy

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[0 : 00] Let us turn again to the chapter we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 107. And I want us this morning just to reflect very briefly on this psalm, just to look over, view it as it were, as a whole.

God is a refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, and so on. Now, as we know, life is full of contrasts, and nature itself is full of contrasts.

One day, you can have the sky, kind of a brilliant blue. You can have it so that there is a calmness, there's not a rustle of a leaf.

Everything seems to be just so flat calm. And the next, you can have howling winds. It's the same, you can go down to the shore. Some days, it's quite awesome when you see the water surging and heaving and crashing against the rocks.

And you realize that the force of the water is a greater force than you could ever cope with or deal with. And there are other times you can go down to the exact same spot, and the water is just like a mill pond, it's so calm.

[1 : 18] And this psalm is like that, it is full of contrasts. Because on the one hand, we have, as it were, the creation erupting.

It's like you've got these great earthquakes, you have great floods, volcanoes, hurricanes, tsunamis. And yet, on the other hand, we have the city of God and the river flowing through it. We have this call to be still and to know that God is God. So you see, it's a psalm of great contrasts. Now, as we enter into the unknown, and of course, every day is the unknown, because when we come to New Year, there are some New Years that are very marked, and you're very aware that we've stepped out of one year into another.

And there are other New Years that aren't quite like that. Somehow, it just seems to the old, seems to blend into the new. And you're hardly aware that you've moved from one year into another. But it's good for us to stop, and that's one of the great things about meeting like this this morning, where we begin a new year, asking God to bless us, coming to worship God, because at the end of the day, it's about God.

[2 : 39] We feel our lives are important, and of course, they're important to us. But the most important thing of all is that we glorify God in our lives. That's why we were made.

That's the chief purpose of our existence in this world, to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. And so it's a wonderful privilege that we have of beginning a new year in God's house.

And it's good just to stop and to be reminded and made aware, this is another year. And we tend to think like that. I wonder what this year holds.

Now, we can say that about every day, because we don't know. When we get up in the morning, we have no idea how the day is going to pan out. We have no idea what is going to happen. But particularly when we start a new year, we don't know.

We don't know how it's going to be. We don't know what might come into our lives. We don't know whether this will be the year where we will leave this world. We just don't know. We don't know these things.

[3 : 37] But God knows. The future is His. And that's why it's so important that as we begin a new year and take time to stop and to say, Well, Lord, if I have never put my life into your hand, then I want to do that this very day.

I want to begin a new year with the Lord as my Lord, with the Lord as my guide. I want, Lord, to have a life of security.

A life that is lived in the Lord and to the Lord and for the Lord. Because God alone knows our future. And so it's a great opportunity for us to hand ourselves over to the God who knows the future and how wonderful it would be if God would be your future.

Now, here in this psalm, as we say, we're being reminded that although we live in a beautiful world, it is a world that has been affected by the fall.

It is a beautiful world. And there's many times that we've stopped and we've just said, Well, that's beautiful. Maybe it's a sunset. Maybe if you're particularly looking over on the west side, some of the sunsets in the west side are quite spectacular.

[4 : 57] To see the sinking sun and just the incredible display of the reds. Sometimes when you see the heathers in bloom on a lovely day and just all the purple of them.

And then the greens that are, it talks about the 40 shades of green and it's true. Just when you look at all the different shades and the different colors. And sometimes you look around this world and you say, Lord, you have made a beautiful world.

And yet, it's a world that has been affected by the fall. It is a world that has been marred and ruined. So that the creation, the actual creation is groaning.

And we see that groaning so often. Where we see the volcanic eruptions, the earthquakes. There is so much in the way of devastation. The tsunamis which around about, remember, just two or three years ago at the Christmas time.

These things which are reminding us that this world is in upheaval. And so we find that this psalm is highlighting these very things.

[6 : 03] But we see that in the midst of the terrors, in the midst of the fears, in the midst of the upheaval, in all the fears and phobias of life, that there is one that we can go to, that we can hide in.

And we read there that God is our refuge and strength. A very present help in trouble. And that word, if you'll see that word present, if you look down at the bottom of your page, it is well, or it could be translated, well proved.

That the Lord is the one who has proved himself over and over again to be a refuge and a strength. And what a wonderful thing it is.

Because here you see, though the earth remove, though there be this trouble, though there be that trouble, though there be the next trouble, God is our refuge and strength.

And that's why it's so important that we have God as our Lord. We live in a day when we're always being advised to take out insurance policies for different things.

[7 : 09] When we buy something, we're being encouraged to take out protection policies in case something goes wrong. You pay a little up so that if something goes wrong, it will be replaced or whatever.

And there's a lot of wisdom in these things. But here is, with all reverence, the greatest protection policy, the greatest insurance policy that any person could ever, ever take out.

And it is free. The Lord is offering this freely to us. This security, this safety, this protection that is found in himself.

Now, maybe you're here today and maybe you're saying to yourself, Well, I'm hearing all that, but you know, as my life is just now, my life is going really well. And I feel very secure, I feel very satisfied, and I find that life is running, it's just going for me.

Well, thank the Lord if that is the case. Thank the Lord if that is the case. Because it is God, remember, who, as the ruler of providence, is doing that and bringing blessings into your life.

[8 : 20] And remember, when you look around and you see people prospering, remember that it is God who ultimately brings people up, or sets people up and brings people down. And the thing is that at the end of the day, everybody's going to have to give an account to God for what they have received in this life.

Everybody has to give an account. What we have done with all that God has given us, every person, all the people whose lives have been filled with good things and yet have ignored God, are going to have to give an account to God of what they have done with all the wealth and all the privileges and all the opportunities and all the abilities that have been given.

Because God is the one who enriches people's lives spiritually and temporally. So we've got to remember that. So I'm saying to anybody in here today, and you might be saying to yourself, well, right now I know this about needing the Lord and all that, but right now I don't feel I need him.

Well, remember, I don't want to be a prophet of doom or anything, but life doesn't always operate on the smooth. Sometimes life changes.

And that is why it is so important to seek the Lord now, because you know the time may come where you do not have the opportunity to seek the Lord. You may not have the inclination to seek

the Lord.

[9 : 48] Today is that opportunity. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. And so we see that we have this, as we said, this picture of the earth, as it were, in upheaval, all these things happening, and yet here is the Lord as being a refuge and a strength.

But then the picture changes, and we see that there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High, and so on.

Now I believe here we very clearly have a picture of the church as the city of God, the church of God. And let us remember this, that the church belongs to God.

It's not man's. The church is not man's invention. The church isn't an idea that people have thought of. The church is God's purpose in this world.

It is God's forming. It is God's development. And God's good for us. And for God's own glory in this world and in the hereafter.

[11 : 03] And so we see the picture given to us of the church. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God. And the church in a sense is like a city.

Now again we've got to remember that in Old Testament times the idea of the city was different to where we are today. The city of course was a place, just in a word, the city was a place of protection.

Great high walls round, watchmen, gates that were shut at night so that nobody could go in or nobody could go out. So it was this idea of protection.

That's one of the things that the city really highlighted. And that's what, in a sense, what we have here, this picture. God is the one who is protecting the church.

Now we've got to remember that. The church is precious to the Lord. Now of course the church has been under attack. And has been under attack since the very dawn of history.

[12 : 06] And always will be. And the church is under attack from powers within itself. Where there are so many errors and so many heresies.

So many things can come in. The church is under attack from outside. Where enemies persecuted and enticed it away. And you just read the history of the church to see that.

The church has often been torn apart. Where there have been controversies and divisions. And people may say, how come? Because the church is always under attack from Satan.

Remember how Jesus said that he was going to build this church. But he said the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Shall not prevail.

But the very idea where Jesus is saying they won't prevail. Indicates that the church is going to be under constant attack. From the gates of hell.

[13 : 05] And that's true. That's what's happening. And while the gates of hell. And that of course is speaking of just as it were. The full frontal force of the demonic and the satanic.

And the kingdom of darkness. Assaulting the church. And it has done so throughout the centuries. It will not ultimately prevail. So when we see controversy.

And when we see difficulties. Within the church. It is sad. But it is what is going to happen. Because the enemy does not want the church to flourish and grow.

The enemy hates seeing a church of love and peace. And a church that is progressing. And the enemy will come in. And will try and destroy. And that is why believers.

Wherever they meet together. Must be praying for the advancement. And the growth. And the protection of the church. Because it is under constant attack.

[14 : 05] But as we see the great encouragement is. That the powers of darkness will not ultimately prevail. And again the city gave the idea of a place of great company.

Of an awful lot of people. When you go to a city. That's what you're struck by. The amount of people. And how international. Suppose you go to the likes of London. You're always struck about how international a place like London is.

There seem to be people from all kinds of cultures. And all kinds of backgrounds. You hear people speaking different languages. It's not just different accents.

But different languages. There are different skin colors. You're aware of this incredible international community.

And again that is a picture of the church. That you will find that the church is made up. Of people from all the nations of the world. And there's this great togetherness in Christ Jesus.

[15:10] This is the one link. The one bond. The one thing that brings people together. That is why straight away a believer can feel a oneness.

With another believer from any other part of the world. Because of this common bond. In the head of the church. The Lord Jesus Christ.

It's a wonderful thing. And so there is this sense of belonging. Of an identity. One with another. That is why really Christians should never be really altogether lonely in this world.

Now I know that there are Christians. Old Christians. Who may today feel very lonely. As they're on their own. But you know one of the wonderful things is this.

That within the Christian church. The Lord. Even supposing there is a Christian today. All on his own or her own. You know one of the things the Lord will often do.

[16:10] Is he will put a burden on another Christian's heart. Either to pray for that particular Christian. Or to go and visit that particular Christian.

Or to phone them. Or to do something. And very often you will find yourself praying for somebody. You don't know why. But all of a sudden this person has come before your mind.

And you find you've got to start praying for them. And that's the Lord. Caring for his own fellowship. And he's putting this burden upon you to pray for somebody else.

You see there's this wonderful bonding. This wonderful link. This togetherness. In the city of God. And again the city spoke of rest. Now again.

It's very different probably to the idea that we have today. When we think of a city. We think of a place that is vibrant. There's a beat. Very often as you would say in the very streets of the city.

[17:06] You feel this vibrance. There's this movement. There's massive humanity moving. But in Old Testament times. The wilderness.

Was a place of struggle. The place of loneliness. The place of fear. And everybody was wanting to get to the city. They strayed in deserts pathless way.

No city found to rest. That's what they wanted. That is again one of the great pictures that the Bible gives us. That when we come in to the fellowship of the Lord.

We come to our rest. And as so true. There is always a struggle within a soul. Until they find that rest.

In the Lord. Our souls will always struggle. There will always be that lack of peace. That unrest in the soul.

[18:06] Until it finds rest in the Lord. Have you found that rest? If you're here today and you're still out with the kingdom.

Let me assure you. You haven't got the peace. That the believer has. Even although life. Might be going really well for you.

You're still lacking. A spiritual peace. A peace. That Jesus won. A peace. That Jesus gives.

Because it's himself he gives. It's not something that Jesus takes from somewhere else. And says. Here's peace that I've got. I've prepared it before.

You know sometimes. If you see these cooking programs. And they're busy cooking something.

And then they say. Well here's one that I've prepared before. And they put it out like that. Now we're not to think. That that's how Jesus has his peace.

[19:02] As a peace that is prepared for his people. And then he takes it. And says. Well here is my peace. And I'm going to give that to you. No. It's in the giving of himself. It's as Jesus comes into your heart.

Communicated by the Holy Spirit. He is that peace. And he himself comes. Into your heart. And fills your heart.

And that is his peace. But we see that the church here. That while there is this river running through it. And again that is a wonderful thing.

This river that. That refreshes this river. That brings all that we need. All the spiritual benefits. And again let me say this. If today.

You feel empty as a Christian. And you're saying to yourself. You know I'm really struggling. I don't know what's happened. Remember how whatever it is that's wrong.

[19:59] The fault is not with the Lord. The fault is not with the resources that the Lord has. Because all the resources are available to you.

This river that flows. This river that flows. This divine fountain as it were. That has been opened for sin and uncleanness.

All the refreshing. All the cleansing. All the renewal. All the satisfaction. That fresh flowing water can bring.

Is found in Jesus. And so we need to go to him. We need to be serious in our asking. In our seeking. That we may come on to know.

What is available to us. But we find here that. Even although there is this great blessing. It would appear that. And we just move very briefly here.

[21 : 01] That the nations rage. It's almost the idea. That this city is under siege. And in a sense. In a sense. That's where the church is.

The church is under siege from the world. The church is at the center. Of God's purpose and plan. In this world. And yet in a sense.

The church is under siege. From the world. But the Lord is showing us. Here. Something quite extraordinary. That even although the enemies.

Are raging and roaring. And we see the picture of anger. And destructive forces. All that the Lord does. Is he utters his voice.

And the earth melts. Isn't that extraordinary? He hears the world. Raging and roaring. Against the church. And the Lord utters his voice.

[22 : 00] And the earth melts. The same voice. The same word. That brought this world into being. And God said. Let there be.

And there was. The same word. Will come and say. Take away. Destroy. Remove.

Break down. And it will happen. The word of God. Is all powerful. And so there's this great comfort. Given to us in verse 7. While the nations. In verse 6. Rage. The kingdoms. Utters. He utters his voice. The earth melts. The Lord of hosts. Is with us.

The God of Jacob. Is our refuge. The God of Jacob. That's a covenant. Keeping God. And you know. That's what we need to do. Is to stop.

[22 : 55] And to think. See in verse 8. It says. Come. Behold. The works of the Lord. Now that word. Behold. Generally has the idea. Of inward beholding. It's got.

It's talking about. The eye of faith. Look with the eye of faith. At the works of the Lord. And you know. That's very important for us. As we go through life.

Because God is at work. We should always be looking at God's word. And God's work. Because God is working in his providence.

And we learn a lot about God. Even as we look at his providence. And as we were saying the other night. On Thursday night. How God's providence. And God's word. Will always.

Eventually. They will merge together. There might be times. When they're going. It appears. They're going in opposite directions. And maybe you're here today. And you're trusting. And resting in God's promise.

[23 : 51] It's as if. You are holding to God's promise. And yet it seems that God's providence. Is going in the very opposite direction. But one day.

Providence. And the word. Will come together. Because his word cannot change. His word cannot change. And you go through the Bible. And you will see examples.

For instance. Joseph. God gave Joseph promises. When he was a young boy. That there would be greatness. In his life. That even his family.

Would bow down to him. And year. After year. After year. Joseph was languishing. In a prison. In the depths of Egypt. And his family.

Back in Canaan. What. Chance. Would you say. That God's promise. Could be fulfilled. In the experience of Joseph.

[24 : 46] And yet it all changed. And the day came. Where Joseph's family. All bowed down before him. Just as God had revealed to him. All these years earlier.

The word. And the promise. Came together. And so it will. In your experience as well. And that's what we're encouraged to do. Is to come.

To behold. The works. Of God. Of how he has brought desolation. On the earth. And so on. See. All things.

Are in his hand. And of God. Before us. Who can be against us. Because that's what we're reminded of. In verse 7. The Lord of hosts. Is with us. The God of Jacob.

Is our fortress. And you know. Maybe as you look out today. On this world. That we're looking at. A world of. Increasing uncertainty. You look out.

[25 : 40] And this world. Is becoming crazier. Day by day. And you're looking at it. And you're saying. Financially. Economically. Morally. Politically.

Financially. Socially. It's collapsing. It's going into turmoil. What's going to happen? God is our refuge. And strength. The Lord of hosts.

Is with us. The God of Jacob. Is our refuge. And just as remember. Elisha. Prayed. That the young man. Who was with him.

That his eyes. Would be opened. When that city. Was under siege. And the young man. Was saying to Elisha. Look at all the enemies. Around us. We've had it. God said.

Elisha said. Lord. Open the young man's eyes. And that's in a sense. Almost what this psalm is saying. Come. Behold. Get your spiritual eyes opened.

[26 : 35] To see. That while all around us. Might be raging. And collapsing. The Lord is still on the throne. And there are more with us. Than against us.

There are more. For us. Than against us. And of God. Before you. Who. Can be. Against you. But at the end of the day.

As we said earlier on. It's not ultimately. About us. And that's what the Lord. Finishes in a sense with. Is calling us all. Not just the believer.

But even the world. Even his enemies. To be still. And to know. That I am God. And there's this great promise. That I will be exalted.

Among the heathen. I will be exalted. In the earth. And that. When that psalm. Was written. The cause of the Lord. Was so small.

[27 : 32] Just as it were. In the very center. Of the earth. The center. Of this world. And as the years. Have gone on. This great. Gospel.

Has spread. Throughout all the kingdoms. And the nations. Of the world. And truly. The Lord. Is being exalted. Amongst. And in. All the nations. Of this world.

And this great cry. Or great call. From the psalm. Be still. We really need to. In this. Frenzied world. That we live in.

And you know. That's one of the great things. About. You know. The likes of Christmas day. And New Year's day. Is you can say to yourself. You know. I've got a day to stop. It's kind of.

One of these days. Where. Kind of. The world stops. I know. That there are some people. Who still have to work on it. But by and large. There are days that stop. We need these days. To stop.

[28 : 28] To be still. But it's not just. To be still. Into sort of. Into dreaminess. And emptiness. But above all. To be still. And to know God. And to know.

That God. Is God. And that is what you and I. Need above all. Today. As we journey out. Into the future. Is to know this God.

As our God. That this God. Who is a refuge and strength. Will be my God. And that my life. May exalt God.

Is that your. Is that your desire today? Lord. Help me. Here we are. 2008. May my life.

Exalt God. That's what I want. Because ultimately. That's what it's about. That's what's going to be. Involved. In the judgment day.

[29 : 26] Did we. Exalt God. Is that what we. Is that what we. Try to do with our life. Or did we want to. Exalt ourselves. No.

It's not about me. It's not about you. It's ultimately. About God. And the eternity. Will show us. The reality of that.

That's what we've got to know. And got to learn. Well may the Lord. Bless us. This new year. You know that word. When we say happy new year. And that's what I say to you. In fact.

When I say to you. A happy new year. I mean that with all my heart. But you know the word. Happy. Has it. It can be translated. Blessed. It's not a wonderful thing.

When you're saying to somebody. Happy new year. You're really saying to them. A blessed. New year. And there's nothing greater. That we could. Pray for one another.

[30 : 22] And that's what I pray for you. That you will have. A blessed new year. Where God's blessing. May rest in you. And on you. Not only this year.

But every day. And every year. Of your life. Let us pray. Lord our God. We thank thee again. For the word. And we pray. That this word.

May indeed. Enrich our lives. So that we may come. To know. Our Lord. More and more. Oh. We pray. That. We might. Know this God.

That's what we're. Told in the word. Be still. And know. That I am God. Help us. Then Lord. To follow thee. Have mercy upon us. Guide us. And keep us.
And bless. All whom we love. We pray for those. Who are sick. We pray Lord. For those. Who are struggling. With bad news. At this time of year.
[31 : 17] We pray Lord. For those. Who are so anxious. About their own health. And the health of others. We pray Lord. For those. Who. Are. Experiencing.
Darkness of mind. Lord. We ask thee. That thou would. Heal. And help. And be with all such. Be with those. Who are laid aside. We remember those.
Who were so much. Part of the congregation. Who are still. Part of it. But are no longer. Able to come out. Lord. We commit them. Into thy care. And keeping.
Be with each one. We pray. And do us good. Take away from us. Our sin. For Jesus sake. Amen.
Amen. We'll conclude singing. In the 91st Psalm.
Psalm number 91.