

THE SECRET OF HIS PRESENCE

Psalm 91:1-8

Psalm 91 contains a message of great encouragement and blessing to the Christian. It emphasizes the safety of those who put their trust in God. It speaks of the protection which they enjoy continually. Every summer a group of young missionaries meet on the campus of a certain Christian institution to be commissioned for their work, and to each of these groups this psalm is read. By means of these strong promises every new missionary is assured of God's presence and protection in his work on the field to which he is going.

This psalm has been one of the most comforting portions of the Bible, and especially to older people. It is well for us to recognize that trouble is a part of life. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Troubles come upon us from various reasons. Sometimes we bring troubles upon ourselves, and at other times they are caused by situations over which we do not have any control. In coming to grips with trouble, we may gain strength and attain growth and maturity in the experience. Because troubles are real we should deal with them realistically. To try to dodge them is useless, and to try to run from them is fatal.

Not only was this the favorite psalm of General Gordon, but it is one of those to which the majority of us would turn most readily in times of difficulty and trouble. We do not know what the future has in store for us, but its perplexities and perils cannot harm our souls if we are fully trusting in the Lord. Whoever consciously, resolutely and habitually trusts in the Lord will be prepared for the storms and crises of life. One cannot have and enjoy true happiness without trusting in God and committing his life to Him.

There are places on earth into which all but a select few are forbidden to enter. There are places of peculiar privilege and advantage, places where valuable treasures are stored, places of tremendous responsibility and places where secrecy is required, but there is no place in the heavens above or on the earth beneath that can compare with "the secret place of the Most High," and into this important place the faithful and obedient children of God are permitted to enter. The secret place is known only by the Most High and the earnest believer. The psalmist does not speak of making occasional visits to the secret place, but of dwelling there. The word "dwelleth" means to reside or to abide. The Hebrew carries the thought of intimate, undisturbed and unrestrained communion. It includes the habitual consciousness of dwelling in the secret place rather than fleeing into a place of shelter when driven to it by some stress of circumstances. It is far better to dwell in the secret place of the Most High continually than to run into it when night comes, or to flee to it when an emergency arises. Living in close fellowship with God is one of the greatest privileges that can come to a Christian. By failing to use this privilege one deprives himself of much joy and many blessings.

God wants you to dwell in the secret place. There your soul will find repose, for it is shut in from all the clatter of the world and its sin. That is the place where the fragrance of Christ's virtues falls upon your soul. Alone with God, your soul is lost in wonder, love and praise. It is in the secret place that your soul is refreshed. But, sad to say, the hustling, nominal Christian does not know anything about this secret place.

Our relationship with God ought not to be a mere passing experience, but it should be an abiding reality. To dwell in the secret place means to have an unbroken fellowship with the Lord. But a person cannot worship just one hour a week and then expect to abide in His presence. It is one thing to be touched by the shadow of the Almighty, but it is another to abide under that shadow.

As the mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings, so our Heavenly Father has taken us under His protecting care. While we abide there with surrendered hearts and yielded wills, we shall enjoy safety and satisfaction. We shall never be without security regardless of the severity of the storms of life.

The psalmist tells us that Jehovah, the all-sufficient God of Israel, was his refuge. A refuge is a place to which one flees when protection is needed. God was his refuge from the storms of life. He is just that to all of His children in every age. Not only was God his refuge when he was in distress, but He was also his fortress when danger came to him. "Fortress" was a term which indicated a stronghold that was well protected against an invading army. It was a place of shelter and protection when bitter attacks were made. It was such a place of defense that not even a strong enemy could approach it. When God as our fortress we are invulnerable. Since He is ready and able to meet and resist the attacks of all enemies, He deserves our reverence, confidence, affection, obedience, praise and glory. We can always trust Him as our refuge in distress and our fortress in time of danger.

Jehovah will deliver from imminent danger the person who dwells "in the secret place of the Most High." He protects His own from danger and delivers them. He keeps them from being ensnared by Satan. Verse three says, "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

A fowler is one who catches wild birds in a net or trap. In various ages it has been common for people to get snares for birds. With some this has been the main source of meat supply. It requires skill on the part of the fowler to catch birds. He has to be careful how he sets his nets or his traps. He very cleverly devises his nets. He sometimes sets them during the night, when the birds cannot see him. The fowler studies the habits of his intended prey. If he wants to catch birds, he must know what kind of food they like and how to catch them. His snares or traps have to be baited astutely.

Satan ensnares people in his net, just as a fowler ensnares birds. The godly person is thought of as a bird and Satan as the fowler. Many of Satan's temptations are subtle and insidious. His schemes are devised in a most clever fashion. But, if we will trust God, He will deliver us from the devil's snare that he has set for us. We do not have to become the prey of the fowler. Many times God does not let His children get into the devil's snare. In many cases He keeps His children from the snare of the fowler by giving them great spiritual strength. In other cases He permits Satan to get them involved in his snare or net, and then by means of losses, crosses, troubles and griefs He breaks the net and sets His people free.

It is quite probable that "the noisome pestilence" referred to a current epidemic of wide proportions. When such contagious pestilences strike they cannot be hidden but are spoken of everywhere. The psalmist declares that God will deliver His own from the ruinous and deadly contagion of sin.

God is pictured as being like the mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wings to protect them, in that He takes His children under His protecting care. Anyone who has ever seen a mother hen gather her chicks under her wings when a hawk appears in the sky can appreciate the force of this figure. Her feathers give protection, warmth, comfort and repose.

Sometimes God protects His own by covering them so that their enemy cannot find them. He has taken them under His protecting care, and no danger or harm can befall them as long as they abide there with surrendered hearts and yielded wills. God is a

strong defense and His faithfulness guarantees the protection of His own. God protects His children from physical harm as long as they are in the center of His will. No evil can reach those who are under the outstretched wings of His power and love. Under His wings they are concealed, protected, refreshed, nourished and cherished. This thought is expressed beautifully in the words of the song:

UNDER HIS WINGS

"Under His wings I am safely abiding;
Tho' the night deepens and tempests are wild,
Still I can trust Him; I know He will keep me;
He has redeemed me, and I am His child.

Under His wings, what a refuge in sorrow;
How the heart yearningly turns to His rest!
Often when earth has no balm for my healing,
There I find comfort, and there I am blest.

Under His wings, O what precious enjoyment!
There will I hide till life's trials are o'er;
Sheltered, protected, no evil can harm me;
Resting in Jesus I'm safe evermore.

Under His wings, under His wings,
Who from His love can sever?
Under His wings my soul shall abide,
Safely abide forever."

Although pestilence was prevalent and disaster was near by, destruction and death did not come to those who were sheltered by the wings of the Almighty. God protects His own again and again. Christians experience miraculous deliverances from danger and death. God is delighted to protect and to deliver His own from evil.

We need to understand that these promises of shelter and security do not mean that external calamities will never be visited upon God's children. We are not God's pets with exemption from all of the hard experiences of life. They come to us as well as to all others. The difference between us and others, who do not know the Lord, is that we have resources of the soul to meet these experiences. Our protection is not in escaping these common adversities, but in changing their character. If Christians were promised immunity from all adversities and perils, our faith would be cheapened. We are to meet our trials and by faith overcome them. The psalmist was voicing the assurance that in the hard and trying situations we may discover the resources of the grace, strength and love of God, and thereby overcome the misfortunes and disasters of life.

We are a generation of activists who want to see things done and who believe we can do most of these things ourselves. When we make the Lord our refuge and the Most High our habitation, then evil does not have power over us and no plague can come near our dwellings. God will have His guardian angels to bear His children up much as nurses carry little children. What wonderful tenderness and strength! Their hands are often between us and an assaulting array of circumstances. Moreover, they bring God's messages to us.

Missionaries frequently relate how in a time of pestilence, when some dread disease has been claiming its victims on all sides, the dwelling of these humble Christians have been immune so far as the plague was concerned. So remarkable has this immunity been in some cases that the heathen have been bound to confess the power of the God of the Christian. God's providential watchcare is always over those who trust in him. He will protect those who are in His divinely appointed course.