

THE SECRET PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Psalm 91:1.

This Psalm was a favorite of Theodore Beza, one of the noblest of the French Reformers. It came to him as a message from the most High at a critical time in his life, and was ever after his stay and strength. Though blessed in having a pious mother, Theodore grew up as a gay and frivolous young man. A serious illness, however, turned his thoughts into another channel, and one bright Sunday morning during his convalescence he walked out by the banks of the River Seine to Charenton, where the only Huguenot church in the vicinity of Paris was then permitted. He entered the building, and the congregation began to sing the opening stanzas of this Psalm in the beautiful French metrical version of Marot. The words and the music powerfully affected him who had hitherto been accustomed only to the doleful singing of Latin chants. He received Christ as his Saviour and solemnly dedicated himself to the service of his Lord. Shortly thereafter he left Paris and united with a church in Geneva, in which he rose to be the successor of John Calvin. Beza lived all his days in danger. Many a time there was but a step between him and death. But every time that he encountered a new trial he turned to this Psalm, and claimed one of its promises as his own. He lived to be an old man, and on his deathbed he declared that almost every word of this Psalm had been fulfilled in his experience including the next to the last promise: "With long life will I satisfy him."

This Psalm is one of the fairest flowers in the garden of Old Testament poetry, and it is so full of choice blooms of thought and language. It reflects in varying shades the rays of the white light of truth. It is fragrant with a calm and steadfast trust in God. The beauty of its language fitly corresponds to the grandeur of the thoughts which it conveys. To me this verse is one of the most beautiful expressions in all the Bible; beautiful because it is poetic, but more than that for the reason that it holds up before us one of the greatest privileges that can come to the children of God, namely, to dwell in the secret place of the most High and to abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Psalm ninety-one 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 chapter 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 chapter is 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 for 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. Because troubles are real we should come to grips with them and deal with them realistically. To try to dodge them is useless, and to try to run from them is fatal. Consciously, resolutely and habitually trust in the Lord and you will be prepared for the storms and crises of life.

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.

We get a clearer meaning of this pregnant phrase, "the secret place of the most High,"

through examining different verses where the word here translated "secret place" occurs. "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence" (Psalm 31:20). "They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones" (Psalm 83:3). From these and similar verses we learn that the word is usually connected with the idea of a fugitive hiding from his pursuers. It calls our attention to the picture of a man running away from his enemies. Weary and panting, he does not know where to hide, and in his despair he flees to some friend and seeks protection, and his friend hides him in a secret place. The fugitive places his life in the hands of his friend, who has the power of life and death over him. So, then, the man who dwells in "the secret place of the most High" is one who ventures his all upon God. With a simple but unwavering faith he gives himself and his all into the keeping of God. Thereafter he is one of God's hidden ones.

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.

You know the difference between the cursory reading of a friend's letter and the reading of it so as to enter into the very thoughts, and feelings, and ideas of that friend -- between reading it to get merely the information that it contains, and reading it so as to catch the very spirit of your friend. You know the difference between talking to a friend and having communion with him.

You know the difference between possessing a friend's respect and enjoying a friend's love. There are some whom you respect and esteem, but who have no place in your warm and ardent affection; and they may respect and esteem you, but you have no enjoyment of their love. When you meet you are polite, respectful, courteous to each other, but that is all. There are others towards whom you feel a fond attachment, a union of heart, tendrils of affection laying hold of each other's being, with a grasp tender and loving, but firm and inseparable. Apply this to the love of God. There are some, and we fear professing Christians, too, whose feelings towards God are those of respectful and polite reserve. They know nothing of living in the love of God. They never approach God nearer than that of a respectful and polite subject to his sovereign.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High," implies that to dwell means a fixed, settled, habitual mode of life. It must be so with our conduct in reference to God's Word, God's friendship, God's love, and God's purpose. We must dwell in them, live in them, abide in them. To dwell in the secret place means to have an unbroken fellowship with the Lord. Communion with Him will be the richest, sweetest exercise of our souls. His love will be the source of our purest enjoyments, and His purpose the one business of life.

I. In "The Secret Place" There Is Peace.

In John 16:33 we read, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome

the world." We are told that a certain insect has the power to surround itself with a film of air, encompassed in which it drops into the midst of muddy, stagnant pools, and remains unhurt. And the believer in Christ may be thus surrounded by the atmosphere of God, and while he is in the midst of the turmoils of the world he may be filled to overflowing with the peace of God because God is with him.

Brother Lawrence, the cook, said that "for more than sixty years he never lost the sense of the presence of God, but was ~~was~~ conscious of it while performing the duties of his humble office as when partaking of the Lord's Supper." What peace he must have had!

Those were comforting words of our Lord when He said: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

When we are in the secret place, where God has given us the privilege of going, we should not be disturbed if troubles are about us and enemies rise up to do us harm.

II. In "The Secret Place" There is Purity.

If our environment were better, our lives would be purer. It is very easy to be pure and to do right when we are in the company of some people; they seem to draw out the best that is in us. How much more the presence of God would do for us if we were only conscious of it all the time! Men and women whose hearts are pure see God in the most common walks of life. In "the secret place" we get our minds filled with God's thoughts about things, God's ideas concerning things, and God's principles relating to things.

III. In "The Secret Place" There Is Power.

The greatest need of every born-again church member today is power from God. The early Christians were aware of the lack of spiritual power. Christ reminded them that it was only through power from on high that they would be able to introduce lost sinners to the Saviour and to render acceptable service for Him. It must be quite evident to anyone who reflects on it that the life of the average Christian today is weak. To make it more pointed and personal let me ask you two questions: Do you have the victory over sin that you should have? Are you living a triumphant Christian life? When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, cleanses us from our sins, empowers us for spiritual tasks and guides us in service, we are able to do the work which our Lord has assigned to us and to bear the fruit which He wants us to produce.

When one dwells in "the secret place of the most High," he is animated with holy impulses, sympathies, tastes and dispositions. In that position he gets his best and strongest affections energized with the love of God. By its high, holy and potent influence he is preserved from the love of the base and inferior things. In that position his energies, sympathies, interests, intentions and pursuits are all enlisted and engaged in cooperating with God in bringing about the accomplishment of His will.

IV. In "The Secret Place" There Is Protection.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." The child of God who dwells, or has a home, in "the secret place of the most High" shall settle down to rest "under the shadow of the Almighty." As the hen gathers her chicks under her wings, so our Heavenly Father takes us under His protecting care. No harm can befall us as we abide there with surrendered hearts and yielded wills. There we shall enjoy safety and satisfaction. We shall never be without security regardless of the severity of the storms of life.

God does shelter and protect His people, and He makes them invulnerable until their work is done, and His purpose is fulfilled in their lives. Any sufferings of the saints must ever be a mystery. Any sufferings the saints have to endure could never affect them unless permitted by God for their good or His glory. Consequently, sufferings which their Heavenly Father allows can do them no real harm. On the other hand, any persecution or evil wicken men may devise against them, which is not for their good, or which are opposed to the will of God, cannot possibly touch them. From all heat which is not necessary to the ripening of character, or to the fulfilment of His gracious purpose in their lives, He will certainly shelter them.

The history of Christianity abounds with accounts of what the world calls "charmed lives" They were good and great men who strove to do the will of God, as seeing Him who is invisible; whom nothing could destroy till their work was done. They were in God's hands, and invulnerable till His purpose was fulfilled. Nothing lends greater dignity and strength to human character, or renders God's people more truly courageous, than such a confidence. What can fill the soul with greater repose, when things seem opposed to what men regard as their best interests, than an unfaltering faith in God doing only what is right and good, or an unshaken conviction that we are in the hands of Him, Who will allow nothing but what is best for us?

It is reported that a great general once said, as the bullets were falling like hailstones around him, "I know that the bullet is not yet cast which can strike me." If a general fighting in a battle for his country could feel so assured, how much more truly should the people of God who live continually in His presence! If only we sought more regularly to meet with God in the secret place of the most High, we should soon find our confidence restored and our love kindled afresh. Then everything would be changed. The things which disturb us now so much would lose their power over us, and we should fully know the truth of Newton's assurance:

"Though many foes beset your road,
And feeble is your arm,
Your life is hdd with Christ in God,
Beyond the reach of harm."

Those who dwell in the secret place are invincible. The consequences of security begets a feeling of unconquerable courage. So sure are they of God's protection that they do not fear. Why should the child of God fear? He sees the lightning turned aside that it may not strike him; he sees the floods rolled back that they may not overwhelm him; pestilence and disease are robbed of their power to harm him; while the arrows of his most bitter foe fall short and do not reach him. His whole life is hedged about with the divine presence. Therefore, his faith becomes invincible and his spirit unconquerable.

"In the secret of His presence how my soul delights to hide;
Oh! how precious are the lessons which I learn at Jesus side!
Earthly cares can never vex me, neither trials lay me low,
For when Satan comes to tempt me, to the 'secret place' I go.

When my soul is faint and thirsty, 'neath the shadow of His wings
There is cool and pleasant shelter and refreshing crystal springs.
And my Saviour rests beside me as we hold communion sweet;
If I tried, I could not utter what He says when thus we meet.

Only this I know, I tell Him all my doubts, my griefs and fears.
Oh! how patiently He listens, and my drooping soul He cheers.
Do you think He ne'er reproves me? What a false friend He would be
If He never, never told me of the sins which He must see.

Would you like to know the sweetness of the secret of the Lord?
God and hide beneath His shadow; this shall then be your reward;
And whene'er you leave the silence of that happy meeting place