

UNDER GOD'S WINGS

"The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Ruth 2:12.

This is one of those grand and suggestive figures of speech with which the Old Testament abounds, and by which it becomes an inexhaustible mine of "things new and old." This figure of wings as an illustration of protection and loving care on God's part toward His children is often used in the Bible and especially in the earlier books and Psalms.

In his swan song, Moses exclaimed, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." Deuteronomy 32:11-12. David used this figure with great effectiveness. He said, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings, from the wicked that oppress me." Psalm 17:8-9. "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! Therefore, the children of man put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." Psalm 36:7. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Psalm 91:1. "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." Psalm 91:4. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore, in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." Psalm 63:7. Christ used this figure with graphic force. When standing above Jerusalem, He cried, "How oft would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" Luke 13:34.

These passages proclaim the tenderness of God's care, the constancy of God's service, the strength of God's might, and the protectiveness of God's presence. Let us consider:

I. The Characteristics Of The Wings Of God.

1. They are swift.

Few things are more curious than a bird's wings. It is surprising how far a bird can fly with one stroke of the wings. When it has food in prospect, or when it is affrighted, the pulsations of its wings are unimaginable for velocity. How swift were the carrier-pigeons in the time of Anthony and at the siege of Jerusalem! A carrier-pigeon was pitched up at Rouen and came down at Ghent, ninety miles away, in one hour. Swallows have been killed four hundred miles from the Georgia swamps with the undigested rice of those swamps in their craws, thus showing that they had traveled at least four hundred miles in six hours. It is said that, in the ten years of a swallow's life, it flies far enough to have gone around the world eighty-nine times, so great is its velocity. Likewise, the wings of the Almighty are swift wings. They are swift when they drop upon the enemy and when they come to help His children and friends.

2. They are broad.

They cover up all our wants, all our sorrows and all our sufferings. He puts one wing over our cradle and the other over our grave.

3. They are strong.

A sea-fowl's wings are strong enough to enable it to fly from five to seven days without resting. An eagle has strength enough to pick up a child and carry it to the top of the cliff. There are birds whose wings are packed with strength to fly, to lift or to destroy. So the wings of God are strong. They are mighty to save, and mighty to destroy.

4. They are gentle.

You have noticed that when a bird returns from flight how gently it swoops over the nest. The young birds are not afraid of having their lives trampled out by the mother bird; the old whip-poor-will drops into its nest of leaves, the oriole into its casket of bark, and the humming-bird into its hammock of moss, gentle as the light.

And so, the Psalmist says, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." Psalm 91:4. It is difficult to see why men will stay out in the cold to be shot by temptation and to be chilled by the blast, when there is this divine shelter.

II. The Compass Of The Wings Of God.

There are times when we must have help or perish; there are dangers from which none but God can save us. His wings are:

1. Saving in their spread.
When the sinner seeks pardon, or the soul seeks help, it is to be found in God. Outside is danger, inside is protection; outside is wandering, inside is rest; outside is destruction, inside is salvation. Men come to God to find the true object of trust, and to find shelter, deliverance, rest and reward.
2. Restful in their repose.
"The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Ruth 2:12. He is a beneficent, sheltering power to whom the spirit of man, wounded, wearied, and baffled by the ills of life turns for refuge and rest.
3. Supporting in their strength.
His paternal relationship to His people is emphasized by the benign constancy and carefulness with which He fulfills the obligations of that relationship. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." Deuteronomy 32:11-12. These verses imply nurture, culture, development and guidance.
4. Safe in their keeping.
"Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings." Psalm 17:8. Whoever hears His invitation to come under His wings and accepts that invitation will be safe in His keeping. God does shield, shelter and securely keep His own.
5. Precious in their worth.
"How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! Therefore, the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." Psalm 36:7. So precious are His wings that they can keep us from the heat of pride in prosperity, and preserve us from being benumbed with frozen despair in adversity.
6. Protective in their refuge.
"Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until calamities be overpast." Psalm 57:1.
7. Gladdening in their comfort.
"Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." Psalm 63:7. There is no puritanical gloom connected with the Bible conception of religion, and especially as related to this thought of the compass of the wings of God.

III. The Blessings Found Under The Wings Of God.

1. Forgiveness.
Every truly repenting sinner will find forgiveness there.

2. Confidence in one's ability to do worth-while things.
More than nineteen centuries tell the story of how Christianity accepted in the heart quickens the intelligence and awakens to life possibilities before unknown. Look at those first disciples--dull, heavy, unlettered men who became famous orators and glorious in intellect as well as heart when Christ led them to the refuge under the wings of God. Jeremy Taylor, one of the greatest of the English preachers; Richard Arkwright, founder of the great cotton industries; and Turner, the glorious painter, were all barbers and dreamed of nothing more intellectual until the spiritual touch opened their eyes. John Bunyan was a drunken Bedford tinker until his wife led him to Christ. David Livingstone was a weaver; but one morning he was the only boy in the old Scotch kirk, and the discouraged preacher gave all his attention to him, and winning him to Christ, opened Africa to Christianity. Henry M. Stanley was a workhouse boy, and went to Africa with a reputation for untruthfulness and infidelity, but Livingstone won him to Christ and that quickened him into a great man whose name will be immortal. George Whitefield was born in a liquor saloon and was himself a barkeeper till he ran across a little book entitled "Law's Serious Call To The Unconverted." Finding Christ, he no longer wanted to be a barkeeper, but God led him on to a great ministry.
3. Freedom from the power of sin.
He whom comes to God through Jesus Christ and finds refuge under the wings of forgiving love is not only made free from sin, but is assured in his own heart that he has the sympathy of God in every temptation and trial.
4. Divine sympathy in our sorrows.
Human sympathy is the sweetest thing the world has to give, but the sympathy of Jesus Christ is far better. The Christian may have to go through much, but he who with faithful heart, with humility of soul, seeks the protection of the wings of God shall have always by his side the Lord Jesus, and he can look up into His face and say, "If he takes hold of my hand I will go through it all, I can stand it all."
5. Happiness and peace.
Being under His wings brings to us an ever-fresh and flowing river of gladness, a gladness far deeper, far quieter, and far nobler than any in the world about us. What a blessing it is for us to have a source of joy frozen by no winter and dried up by no summer!

Peace in the hour of stress and trial which must come to every human life is the dearest boon the human heart can ever know. It is a boon which neither wealth, position, fame, nor power can bestow upon anyone. There is no peace that is abiding save that which comes from the consciousness of the over-shadowing wings of God through the atoning love of Jesus Christ. The supreme peace of the trusting Christian heart comes from perfect harmony between the soul and God.

"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."