

Psalms Chapter 11 Jesus Our Abiding Home -- Psalm 91

by A.B. Simpson

A.B. Simpson's sermon on Psalm 91 emphasizes God's protective presence and the believer's refuge in Jesus amidst life's challenges.

Scripture: Psalm 90:1, Psalm 91:1

Topics: "God as Our Refuge", "Trusting in God's Promises"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the profound connection between Psalms 90 and 91, illustrating how they reflect the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness and the comfort found in God as their dwelling place. He highlights the names of God, His promises of protection, and the conditions required to experience His blessings, urging believers to dwell in the 'secret place of the Most High' and trust in His faithfulness. Simpson reassures that through Jesus, we find our true home and security, and he encourages the congregation to claim the promises of God, including protection from evil and the assurance of His presence in times of trouble.

Transcript

Like the twenty-second, twenty-third, and twenty-fourth Psalms, more effective in their grouping than even in their individuality, the ninetieth and ninety-first Psalms are fitted into each other with singular effect.

The first was undoubtedly written by Moses, and the second, most probably, by the same author. We know it has been attributed to a much later time by many, but the internal evidences and the imagery employed point strongly to the wilderness.

The ninetieth Psalm was the cry of his lonely heart, as for forty years Israel wandered in the trackless wilderness without a habitation or a home, until from that scene of desolation and death his heart turns to find rest in God, as he cries: "Lord, You have been our dwelling place [home] in all generations."

But even this bright and blessed comfort seems almost lost in the dirge-like strains of the closing verses of the Psalm, as all his thoughts become absorbed in the scenes of depression and mortality that gather around him, so that the song becomes one long, sad wail. "You turn man to destruction." "All our days are passed away in Your wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told."

But in the ninety-first Psalm, his lonely heart has found its home "in the secret place of the most High . . . under the shadow of the Almighty," and beneath the covert of His shadowing wings. There is no doubt that all through this Psalm there is a reference to the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Its holy shrine within the veil and beneath the outspread wings of the cherubim is the secret place of the most High and the shadow of the Almighty where His Spirit dwells in holy fellowship and eternal security and rest.

Whoever was the author of this Psalm, we know who is its great end. We know where the secret place of the Most High and the shadow of the Almighty for us are found, even in the bosom of Jesus our abiding home. And we know also for whom it is intended, even for all who are in Him and longing to abide in Him. There are few of us who cannot claim it as our own Psalm, and record it as our testimony. May the Holy Spirit enlarge it to our thought once more, and make it as never before our living experience!

Let us look first at the names of God here given; secondly, His promises; and thirdly, their conditions.

I. THE NAMES OF GOD

There are four glorious names given to Him in this Psalm.

1. The Most High. This tells of His supremacy as sovereign Lord, above all authority and dominion and every name that is named. High as may be our difficulties, He is higher. Our enemies may be lofty, but He is above them. The place to which He bids us rise may be beyond our reach, but He is able to raise us to the loftiest heights of faith and hope. What can be too hard or too high for the Most High?

2. The Almighty. This is the glorious name He gave to Abraham and repeated to Moses, the Hebrew Shaddai. It tells of the God of infinite power and resources for which nothing is too hard. It is He who formed the worlds out of nothing. It is He who holds those mighty suns in their places, and whirls those countless systems on their orbits, and keeps in motion this mighty universe without disturbance. It is He who has shown His mighty power in the miracles of the Bible, in the destruction of Pharaoh's host and Sennacherib's army, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and in the conversion of the myriads who have passed from sin, white-robed and glorified, into the presence of His glory. It is He who is our Protector and our God.

3. Jehovah. This is the dearest of all names because it links them all with us. It means the covenant God. It means the God who is related to us, the God who is revealed in Jesus as the God of grace and mercy.

4. God. This, His absolute name, denotes His eternal Deity and infinite perfection. But the best of it is, He is my God. He is not an abstract God, far away, but He gives Himself to me, and permits me to call Him my very own, to possess Him, to use Him, to say He is mine. Oh, have we known His mighty name? He condescends to give to us these glorious names. He might have hidden Himself away in inscrutable, inaccessible majesty, but He has deigned to come down to meet us, to tell us about Himself, to reveal Himself by names that we can understand. Let us meet Him; let us respond to His love; let us "say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust."

II. HIS PROMISES

1. Protection from the wiles of temptation. "Surely he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler." We need first to be guarded from spiritual evil, and this is promised here even in its most subtle forms. The fowler is our great enemy, the devil, seeking to catch us like unwary little birds by his deceptive snares. But from these, the man who meets the conditions of this Psalm shall be guarded.

God will not allow us to be deceived. He is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us faultless. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able." Blessed promise! How much we need it! How insidious are the deceptions of the foe! How weak and foolish all our wisdom! But how secure are those whose life is hid with Christ!

2. Protection from physical ills. "From the noisome pestilence." This undoubtedly denotes disease of every kind, for here the severest of all forms is mentioned -- "the noisome pestilence." And if we are promised exemption from this, it must include all lesser forms. This must, of course, be preceded by the other promise. We must be saved first from spiritual evil. But if we are, we shall be kept from physical evil. Both these promises are preceded by the most emphatic word in the Psalm, "surely." It is God's great Amen. It must have a very marked meaning. God foresaw all the professors, editors, and theologians who were going to write against the literal meaning of this blessed promise, and so He put this down and underscored it for all the ages, that no trembling soul need ever doubt or fear to take the Lord as a Sanctifier and Healer, and to expect to be kept in perfect peace and safety while humbly trusting in Him. Let us put our amen to God's yes, and trust Him with all our heart for all our need.

3. His overshadowing presence. "He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings shall you trust." Undoubtedly this refers in some sense to the mother bird as she broods over her little ones, covering them with her strong pinions and nestling them under her soft feathers. What a beautiful figure it is of God's tenderness! Not only the strong wings, but the soft, downy feathers. Oh, that we may claim all that the figure means; and while He stretches out His mighty wings, let us nestle close to His bosom. There is a double sense here: "He shall cover," but you shall trust. We are to meet His love as it comes to us. There is something in human hearts that needs caressing and comforting, and God is full of it. We need to nestle on His bosom, to be cherished and fondled. God loves to do it. "He will rejoice over you with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over you with singing."

But there is another meaning in the figure, It refers undoubtedly to the cherubim in the holy of holies, those beautiful wings of gold that were spread out above the ark, between which shone the Shekinah glory representing the face of God, the smile of heaven. This is "the secret place of the most High." These are the wings that cover us. The figure is even more complete when we include all that it contained, for still lower down beneath those wings was the covering lid of the ark, the mercy seat sprinkled with the blood which covered the sins of the people, and hid them from the eye that looked down from above. So that we are covered first by the blood, and then by the wings of God, while His countenance, full of light and love, beams down upon us from between the cherub wings.

4. He promises us victorious faith. "His truth shall be your shield and buckler." The shield is the uniform type of faith in the Scriptures. The shield was made very large in ancient times and covered all the person, warding off the darts that came in front. So it represents that perfect trust that covers all our person from every attack of the enemy. This is God's glorious gift. Christ is our shield, Christ is our faith.

But what about the buckler? Why, this shield might be lost; the hand that held it might let go; the blow of the enemy might strike it down; or the hand of the foe might wrest it from the bravest soldier and leave him unprotected. But the buckler could not be torn away. It was fastened on the arm, buckled to the wrist; it was part of the soldier. The buckler tells us of a faith we cannot lose. It is the faith of God, the Spirit of Christ within us, the Author and Finisher of our faith, establishing us immovably and making us "more than conquerors through him that loved us." This is the promise. This is our privilege. Let us claim it.

5. Deliverance from fear. "You shall not be afraid of the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flies by day; nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness; nor for the destruction that wastes at noon day." Fear is the worst of our calamities, and it brings many a calamity. But God can save us from fear and keep us from all alarm. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." "Whoso hearkens unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." In God's hands our future is safe, and He will let no evil harm us. Knowing that, we can be calm and free from care.

Fear also includes care, worry, and anxiety of every kind. To be saved from this is indeed a haven of rest. No one is truly saved from these cares until he enters into and abides in "the secret place of the most High." This is the difference between the consecrated and the ordinary Christian; the latter is oppressed with a thousand cares and fears; the former can "be careful for nothing," and have the peace of God which passes understanding to garrison his heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

The things mentioned here are very serious and terrible evils. The calamities in whose face the saint can look in the light of the Psalm without an alarm are no imaginary things: the terror, the pestilence, the arrow, the destruction. It is a time of awful pestilence and widespread desolation, but he is calm and trustful and can sing: "Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." Beloved, are you there? Is your future horizon without a cloud because it is covered by the light of His promise and His presence?

6. Safety amid all danger. "A thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you behold and see the reward of the wicked." Not only are we free from fear, but we are saved from harm. The man or woman who is in the Master's will cannot perish until his work is accomplished. How often God has carried His chosen ones through battles and oceans, tempests and wild beasts!

Look at the story of Jeremiah amid the last day of Jerusalem; of Arnot and Livingstone among the savages of Africa; of Paton among the murderous heathen of the New Hebrides ; of the Covenanters in their conventicles in Scotland; and of many another whom God has guarded amid a thousand deaths. Let us believe in our almighty God and fear not to step wherever He bids us, for we are far safer in the midst of dangers in His will than surrounded by every human precaution, but disobedient to Him.

7. Security from all real evil. "There shall no evil befall you, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling." Literally in the Hebrew this means "any stroke." It denotes the judgment of God's displeasure; or a calamity such as often overtakes the wicked. The meaning is, that nothing shall overtake the trusting and abiding child of God which has real evil in it, or any element of the divine displeasure, or of actual harm. Troubles undoubtedly will come to him, but the evil will be taken out of them. The devil's sting will not reach him. "That wicked one touches him not," and God's displeasure will never visit him, for He has sworn "I would not be wroth with you, nor rebuke you."

Sorrow, indeed, is hard to bear when it comes with God's anger and with Satan's hate unguarded by heavenly love. But when we are conscious that the Master comes between us and everything that touches us, and that every trial that meets us is brought to us by our blessed Redeemer, and shorn of its evil by His love, then nothing can injure us or even discourage us; but up through every cloud we can look into His face and say: "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," and "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," and "Who is he that will harm you, if you be followers of that which is good?"

8. Angelic guardianship. "He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone."

The ministry of angels is too plainly revealed in the Old and New Testaments to need any demonstration, but it has not ceased. The vision of Jacob represents the angels as ascending and descending upon the son of man, and all through the Christian age they are busy still for God's redeemed. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Were we to visit heaven today, we should find it, perhaps, emptied of angels, and all their myriads busy on this earth with God's redeemed ones.

The annals of Christian biography have some very wonderful instances of angelic appearances, and we can scarcely doubt that they sometimes have become visible even since the apostolic age.

Not a single angel, but a camp of angels is represented as round about those who fear the Lord. Could we see the spiritual realm, we should behold armies of mighty beings all around us, and in the loneliest and most perilous places we should never fear. Sometimes we can almost hear the flutter of their wings and feel the touch of their interposing hands. They are never absent from us.

The devil forgot to quote this rightly when he repeated it to Christ in the wilderness. He left out this clause, "In all your ways." His idea was that the angels would appear on some great occasion when Christ fell from the pinnacle of the temple, but the truth was the angels were just as near in the wilderness as they could have been in Jerusalem, and their presence even at that moment was between Christ and the arch-fiend.

"Always are they with us, and upon their hands shall they bear you up." This is much more beautiful than the ordinary translation. Not "in their hands" as if they were carrying us; but "upon their hands" as if we were walking upon a pavement of angelic wings, or, rather, soaring in the heavenly places, up-borne by their mighty pinions. Oh, let us realize our heavenly escort, and go forth without fear to do our Master's work and will.

9. Victory over Satan. "You shall tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under feet." These are figures of Satanic powers in their strength and malignity; but to the one who abides in Christ, they are all conquered foes, and it is our privilege to tread them beneath our feet and treat them as vanquished enemies.

Our Savior has given us the same promise in the New Testament. "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." We shall not be exempt from temptation, but we may keep temptation beneath our feet and not allow it to come even within touch of our heart. "He that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not." This is our privilege in Christ, Let us fully claim it.

There is a suggestive thought in connection with "the young lion." The right time to tread upon the lion is while he is young; meet the evil before it grows to importance; claim victory over the first assaults of temptation. Do not let the devil get headway even for a moment, and then shall we have no old lions to contend with. This is the secret of victory in the great conflicts, to be always on guard in the little skirmishes, and immediately triumph over the breath of temptation.

Beloved, shall we take our victory over the enemy? It is our privilege. Our Lord has triumphed, and in Him we are already raised up "far above all principality and power." Let us keep them beneath our feet. Let us stand in Him triumphant, waving evermore the banner of victory as we cry, "Thanks be to God, which gives us the victory [always causes us to triumph in] through our Lord Jesus Christ."

10. "I will set him on high." This may mean earthly honor; certainly it means spiritual exaltation. It is the same promise which Isaiah so eloquently expresses: "He shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks." It is to dwell in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; it is to have the lofty and heavenly life. And by and by it shall reach the still higher sense of everlasting glory.

11. Answered prayer. "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him." This is the privilege of those who dwell in the secret place. "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." God wants us to have our prayers answered. It is as much for His glory as it is for our blessing. He tells us that He has chosen and ordained us for this, that whatsoever we ask in the name of Jesus, we may receive. We may abide so near Him that we shall only ask what He wants to give, and therefore we shall never ask in vain if we catch His thought before we offer our petition.

12. His presence in trouble. "I will be with him in trouble. The tense changes, and the Lord is with us before we have time to recognize the trouble. He comes with the trouble. There is not an instant's interval until He is there. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Never is His presence so consciously realized as when circumstances are trying, and all around is dark and sad. Then, like the stars that come out under the pall of night, His face shines with a luster that we never know in more prosperous times; and if He is with us, we are so conscious of His presence that the trouble is scarcely realized. It is possible to be so enwrapped with God that we shall not see when heat comes. We shall scarcely be conscious of the dark cloud around until it is left behind us. There is nothing that more gloriously characterizes the consecrated child of God than His Spirit in times of trouble. Any one can be cheerful and happy amid prosperity, but to rejoice in the midst of suffering; to be strengthened unto all longsuffering with joyfulness; to meet poverty, disappointment, desertion, difficulty, with patience, fortitude, and cheerfulness -- this is possible only to a soul that is filled with the grace and presence of Jesus.

13. Deliverance from trouble. God wants us first to know His presence in trouble, so sustaining us that we are enabled to triumph even before the trouble is removed. But then when He has taught us this lesson, He loves to remove the trouble and to show us His providence as well as His grace. And so, when we have learned to bear our trials with patience and victory, we usually find that they are taken away and that our path is made smooth again. The discipline has done its work, and it is not necessary that it should continue.

14. "I will . . . honor him." God does love to honor a soul that lives wholly for Him. He honors such men with great usefulness, with wide influence among their fellow-men, by His signal blessing upon their work; by the seal of His Holy Spirit; and, by and by, by the crowns and kingdoms which He shall have to bestow, not only upon those who have served Him much, but those who have loved Him truly.

15. Length of days. "With long life will I satisfy him." This does not necessarily mean that we shall live for a century, but it means that we shall be satisfied. The Lord will fulfill our heart's desires if we abide in Him, and enable us to say before our journey is ended, "Not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you." But its highest sense is to be fulfilled in the days of eternity. Oh, we are yet but babes in the great cycles of existence! But as a drop to the ocean is this life compared with the

ages to come, through which we are to live in His glory and grow into higher, nobler conditions of blessing and power. For He has saved us and raised us up "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

16. To see the salvation of God. "And show him my salvation." Now this, of course, means the great salvation of the Gospel, the unfolding of God's plan in all its beauty and glory, to know in its breadth and length and depth and height, the love of Christ which passes knowledge. But it is not merely to know salvation as an abstract thing, but it is to know the Savior. Standing in his trembling age in yonder temple, old Simeon holds in his arms a little Babe; and as he drops his tears on the smiling face of Jesus, he cries, "My eyes have seen your salvation." Ah, he must have learned the ninety-first Psalm by heart. And by and by we shall see Christ in all His beauty and glory, and reach the climax of the ninety-first Psalm, and of all other Psalms and songs and experiences.

"Christ to trust and Christ to know

Constitute our bliss below;

Christ to see and Christ to love

Constitute our bliss above."

III. THE CONDITIONS

1. That he dwell "in the secret place of the most High" and "abide under the shadow of the Almighty." The meaning of this is all explained in the fifteenth chapter of John, which is the New Testament counterpart of the ninety-first Psalm. It is to know Jesus in His indwelling, and to live in unbroken fellowship with Him. The Hebrew is very beautiful. The two clauses are parallel. It is not "he that dwells," etc., "shall abide." It is "He that dwells and he that abides." They are coordinate clauses, both describing the same person. There is a little difference in the verb in each case: the one signifies to dwell by day; the other, to lodge by night. Together they express a continual abiding in Jesus, both day and night, that union and communion with Him that are unbroken and perpetual. This is the habit of the consecrated life. This is the secret of holiness, peace, power, victory, and every physical blessing. Let us hear Him say today, "Abide in me, and I in you . . . for without me you can do nothing."

2. We must confess Him as our Keeper. "I will say of the Lord." It is not enough to think it, to feel it, to resolve it; we must say it. "Oh how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for them that fear You; which You have wrought for them that trust in you before the sons of men!" We must not be ashamed to confess our deliverance and commit ourselves to His promises, and risk our whole future upon His faithfulness. We must confess Him in order to be saved; so we must receive and keep our sanctification, our healing, and the answers to our prayers by acknowledging God, even before we see His working.

3. We must trust Him. "In him will I trust." We must claim His promise and lean upon it, and steadily rest without doubt or fear, meeting every temptation and questioning with the victorious answer, I will trust.

4. We must give ourselves utterly to Him, and be His, and His alone. "Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him." God seems to be so deeply stirred by the devotion of the heart to Him, that there is nothing that He will not do. He seems to rise up in holy gladness and say, "Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I bless him above all blessing."

God loves a single and devoted heart. O beloved, He is calling you to choose Him. To every one of you the test will come; but as it comes, it will show in the depths of your being whether you love Him with all your heart, or know whether you have so set your love upon Him that all else shall go, before you let go His love or disobey His will. Christ's heart is longing for devotion, and to the man or woman who will give it, there is nothing which He will withhold.

5. We must take our victory by putting our foot upon the lion and the adder and trampling our foes in victorious faith. God has the victory for us, but we must take it by putting our feet upon the necks of our foes, and claim His power to make good our bold aggressive stand. He is not going to annihilate the devil and stop our temptations, but He is going to give us victory if we will take it.

Oh, may He enable us thus to abide in Him, thus to trust Him, thus to confess Him, thus to set our heart upon Him, and thus to triumph in Him over all our foes; and so to know in all its meaning this glorious Psalm, which the Master Himself so grandly fulfilled, and then left as the heritage of His children until the wilderness of trial shall be past and the closing echoes shall be fulfilled in the song we shall sing before the throne, "Salvation to our God which sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

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