

The Shadow of the Almighty

by Newman Hall

Newman Hall's sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking refuge in God's presence for safety and spiritual fulfillment.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:29, Luke 1:80, Luke 2:40, Romans 7:22, 1 Corinthians 16:13, Ephesians 3:16, Ephesians 6:10, Philippians 4:13, 2 Timothy 2:1, 1 Peter 5:10

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Strength"

Description

Greek Word Studies delves into the meaning of 'krataioo,' emphasizing the passive voice indicating that inner strength comes from God's Spirit, not from man himself. The term refers to being empowered, established, and fortified, with the NT uses highlighting the growth and strengthening in spirit and wisdom. Believers are urged to submit to God's Spirit for spiritual strengthening, tapping into the divine ability within them. The prayer for believers to be strengthened internally through the Spirit is crucial for facing suffering, making moral choices, resisting temptation, and witnessing for Christ.

Transcript

Newman Hall, November 27, 1867

"He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."--Psalm 91:1.

The desert is dreary. The way is long. Heavily burdened, a weary traveler slowly drags onward his wounded feet. Faint by reason of the fiery blaze which smites him from the unclouded sky and the scorching sand, he eagerly looks around for shelter. He pants for even the muddiest pool where he may quench his raging thirst. In such "a weary land," how welcome "the shadow of a great rock," and the clear, cool fountain gushing up within its rugged clefts! But where can such a refuge be found for the soul--weary with wandering, crushed by care, groaning under guilt? Where can its burden be taken off, its sorrows soothed, its mighty thirst assuaged?

A trembling fugitive, long the victim of robbery and violence, has vainly run here and there in quest of a hiding-place from his cruel enemies, who, with threatening gestures and words of hate, are in full pursuit. Now he hears their voices clamoring for his blood, as they press more closely upon his track. Each moment he expects the fatal shot. How joyful, as it suddenly bursts upon him, is the sight of the friendly fortress whose open portal bids him enter, and then shuts impreguably! Beneath the shadow of those

strong towers, he may now rest both from his toils and his terrors!

But where for me, pursued by my relentless enemy, the devil, entangled by doubts, haunted by fears, with many a barbed and poisoned arrow rankling in my conscience--where for me is the privileged retreat which no hostile foot may enter, where all my wounds may be healed, and where, taking up my abode, I may be henceforth both safe and happy?

The problem is solved by the text selected for our meditation: "He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."--Psalm 91:1.

The term here denotes protection. A shadow screens me from the sun, and hides me from my foe. The overshadowing roof of a house shelters its inmates from the storm. And under the shadow of her wings the hen protects her brood. So the glorious attributes of the Most High, the unclouded rays of His perfections, are as a shadow of defense to His people. "How excellent is your loving-kindness, O God! Therefore, the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings. Be merciful unto me, O God, for my soul trusts in You: yes, in the shadow of your wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast." Believing in Jesus, we exult in the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy--"A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest: as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

The privileges of those who abide under the shadow of the Almighty, are described with inimitable force and beauty in this ninety-first Psalm. Here the church possesses a storehouse of varied consolation--a treasury of untold wealth--an unfailing casket of precious jewels--an arsenal, where Faith may find abundant weapons of attack, as well as a shield to quench every fiery dart--a Grand Charter, a Bill of Rights, granted to undeserving rebels, by the Sovereign Grace of the Most High, who bids them honor him by constantly claiming its ratification. What a catalogue of blessings for all who flee for refuge to Christ! Omnipotence is their hiding-place, God their home. He spreads over them His wing. His faithfulness is their buckler. They are secure from night's vague fears, and from day's plain perils; from the plots of malice, and the ravages of plague; from man's destructions, and from the scourge of God. While ten thousand fall around, they are unhurt. Not all the powers of earth or hell can injure a hair of their heads.--For them evil turns to good, and sorrows lead to joys. Angel guards unseen attend them. They are borne up beyond the reach of even slightest injuries. They conquer their worst foes. They trample on the roaring lion and the subtle snake. They are admitted to the presence-chamber of the King, and are allowed familiar communion with Him. All their petitions are granted. Jehovah is with them in trouble, to comfort and deliver. They are exalted to high stations, and clothed with glory and honor. Length of days is secured to them, and at last--the Beatific Vision and the Paradise of God.

The text contains a conditional promise. Let us then consider, first, the character described; and then, the promise annexed.

I. THE CHARACTER DESCRIBED--"He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High." The tabernacle-worship suggested eloquent imagery to the devout mind of the psalmist. "In the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me." The Holy of Holies was secret. None entered it but the high Priest, and he only once a year. Behold him on the great day of atonement. Having sacrificed at the brazen altar in the open court, he leaves the crowd of worshipers, and humbly drawing aside the curtain which conceals the entrance, he stands within the Holy Place. The veil closes behind him, and he is alone. With reverential step he passes the golden altar of incense, and the table of show-bread, and the seven-branched

candlestick, towards the second veil which conceals the Holiest of all. With trembling hand he lifts its folds. And now he is in front of the Mercy Seat, and bows before Him who "dwells between the Cherubim." Shut out from all else, he feels surrounded, pervaded by the Divinity. He is in "the secret place of the Most High." Jewish type is Christian fact. The nearness of approach to God thus symbolized, is the privilege, not of one believer, but of all; not once a year, but continually; not with trembling, but in full assurance of faith; we may "come with boldness to the throne of grace."

As Omnipresent, God "is not far from every one of us." Yet it is possible to be infinitely distant from Him. Two men may dwell in the same house, and sit at the same table, and yet be far asunder by uncongenial tastes and hostile feelings; while other two, divided by half the globe, may be inseparably close by mental harmony and the bonds of love. Though in God "we live, and move, and have our being," yet while impenitent, we are spiritually afar off. Our sins have separated us. We are alienated from Him by wicked works. We desire not the knowledge of his ways. We practically bid Him depart from us. But He entreats us--"Return unto me, and I will return unto you." He has rendered such return possible. The great gulf of separation is bridged over by the mediation of Christ. As the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place "not without blood," even so Jesus by his own blood entered within the veil, and opened the path for all on whom that blood is sprinkled. So let us approach the Mercy Seat.

We have provoked You, O Lord, to anger. We have wickedly avoided your presence. We have loved to keep far away. But we are weary with our self-caused exile. This banishment is darkness, despair, death. O, suffer us to return! Let our past rebellion be forgiven! Let the enmity of our heart cease! Our only plea is the name of Jesus. Because He died to bring near those who were afar off; because You have Yourself commanded us to come--have mercy upon us sinners, and let us enter your "Secret Place."

While we thus draw near, He whose throne is the Mercy Seat, watches with love every advancing step. The Prodigal is still a long way off when the father goes to meet him, saying, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet--for this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found."

Our sins are at once forgiven. Christ's spotless robe is thrown around us. We see not wrath darkening, but love illumining the countenance of Him whom we dreaded but now trust, whom we hated but now love. Rebellion is changed to homage, aversion to delight. Hallowed communion results. Our soul thirsts for God. We pour out our hearts before Him. There is not a joy or grief, a hope or fear, which we may not utter in the ear of One, the vastness of whose concerns hinders not his attention to the minutest needs of each individual worshiper; who "pities those who fear Him," even "as a father pities his children," and who is "touched with a feeling of our infirmities."

Let us never forget that He is "Most High." To Him is ascribed "Glory in the highest." With what reverence should we approach Him! And let me adore His condescension. "Though the Lord be high, yet has He respect unto the lowly." As the Most High," He is able to do "abundantly above all that we can ask or think." He is on high, and can see all things. He is on high, and can do all things. Out of the depths of our misery we may look up to the heights of His Majesty. He is our Friend, but a Friend seated on the throne of universal empire. He is our Father, but our Father in heaven. The secret place of the "Most High," must be also the shadow of "the Almighty."

This communion of the soul with God is "secret." True religion cannot be understood, its joys cannot be known, by those who do not experience it. The wise virgins could not give of their oil to others; the foolish

must buy for themselves. So the High Priest was concealed from the multitudes who stood only in the outer court. "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them his covenant." The life of the Christian is concealed, it is "hidden with Christ in God." The "Secret Place" cannot be seen but by entering it.

Yet why should it be unknown to any? The true Holy of Holies is open to all. None need fear to lift the veil for themselves. It is presumption to stay afar off when God calls us near. Obedience is the best humility. If we are the very chief of sinners, we may be sure of a kind reception. Let us then remain no longer ignorant of this glorious mystery, but enter and examine for ourselves "The Secret Place of the Most High." The "Secret Place of the Most High" is the soul's true home. We are exiles and wanderers, until we dwell there. Other places invite, only to betray. Self-righteousness says, "Dwell in me and be safe." But no structure composed of our good actions can afford shelter from the storm; let pride rear them ever so high, they serve but to attract the lightning's stroke. The world says, "Dwell in me and be happy." But earthly vanities are an impertinence to the soul that seeks salvation--even the rational enjoyments of life are not enough to fill the void. But in the "Secret Place of the Most High," the believer finds both safety and happiness.

The very law which was against him, is now on his side, and the sword of justice, no less than the olive-branch of Mercy, is the emblem of his security. Here is a fountain of enjoyment, pure, perennial, possessing ever its power to refresh. If he is not always happy, it is because he does not always drink of those waters. But there they flow, gushing forth from the depths of Divine Love, sparkling in the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, and inviting the thirsty to drink abundantly. They impart a "peace which passes all understanding; a joy which is unspeakable and full of glory."

Here then the sinner can repose. He has found at length what can satisfy. Obeying the invitation, "Come unto me," he has verified the promise, "I will give you rest." He rests from the accusations of a guilty conscience--for he hears the voice from the Mercy Seat, "Your sins are forgiven you." He rests from the anxious questionings of doubt--for instead of any longer asking at every turn "What is truth?" he has proved that Jesus is "The Way, the Truth, and the Life." He rests from the disquiet of an aimless life--for he is now happy in the settled service of God; like a ship which was rolling and drifting rudderless, at the mercy of changing tides, but which now, with sails well set and steady bows, is making a straight course for the port where "an abundant entrance" awaits her. He rests from the ever-disappointed search after happiness--for here, though still surrounded by sorrows and foes, his mind, "stayed on God," is "kept in perfect peace." Therefore, he is determined here to dwell.

It is a permanent abode. He does not leave it as an inn; no, it is his home. Its employments, pleasures, society, do not weary him. When the first novelty wears off, he seeks no change of scene. He is ever discovering some fresh object of interest and delight. That holy spot is increasingly endeared to him. His best affections entwine around it. It becomes blended with his being. If ever tempted to remove from it, he is unhappy until he returns--like the dove which Noah first sent forth from the ark, and which soon fluttered at the window, having found "no rest for the sole of her foot." He can be happy only at home. "Return unto your rest, O my soul!" Without the enjoyment of God's favor, nothing can yield him satisfaction; but with God's favor, nothing can cause him to despair. Come poverty, sickness, bereavement, desertion, death, anything--only let it find him in the "Secret Place of the Most High." "There are many who say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift You up the light of your countenance upon me. Whom have I in heaven but You, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside You!"

What a contrast is presented by the case of those whose religion is only fitful! If dangers threaten, they seem anxious to take refuge in Christ; but this anxiety ceases with the immediate occasion. In a tempest at sea, some will pray who yesterday were scoffing, and tomorrow will scoff again. On what was feared would prove his death-bed, many a wicked man has called upon God, but on recovery has become more irreligious than ever. Alas! multitudes associate piety only with peril, devotion only with death. But the Christian does not value the "Secret Place" merely because of the shelter it affords from the raging storm. Invaluable in adversity, it is invaluable in prosperity too. In fact, prosperity elsewhere, is for him a contradiction. Severed from God, all conceivable delights are unable to gladden. Exiled from this home, bodily health and worldly riches only mock the sickness and poverty of the soul; friendship loses its chief value, and love its sweetest charm. Where is the luster of the diamond, the beauty of the rose, the glory of the landscape, when the dark curtain of night is drawn over all? But the light of God's countenance, like the sun uprising and breaking forth from amid dark clouds, bathes all objects in beauty. This it is which puts gladness into the heart, more than in the time when their corn and wine increase. What wonder that the Christian wishes ever to dwell where this light shines?

Behold yonder stately palace. Its lofty walls and massive towers assure safety to all who dwell in it. Hostile foot never trod its regal pavements. Pestilence never crept along its spacious corridors. No earthquake ever shook its strong foundations. No thunderbolt ever pierced its swelling domes. Within are all manner of delights--happy work, healthy recreations, plentiful enjoyments, couches of repose. How cheerful the light that bathes it, how lovely the flowers that perfume it, how ravishing the prospects that surround it! How exhilarating its atmosphere, how transporting its music, how elevating, refining, consoling, gladdening its society! Above all, how glorious, yet how gracious the Prince, who is ever promoting the happiness of the guests with whom his hospitality has thronged his royal abode!

Outside the palace, propped up against one of its buttresses, is a miserable shed composed of mud and straw. A frightened traveler, looking all around for shelter from the gathering tempest, rushes into it as the best refuge he can find. It trembles with the thunder's crash. The biting blast penetrates its many chinks. The rain soaks through its fragile roof. Though the traveler is glad of its imperfect shelter, yet but for the storm he would have passed without noticing it. Far less would he have entered it. He was too intent on other objects, too eager to get forward on his way. Its whole appearance would have been repulsive in fair weather. And this, he says, to himself, "this is the grand palace I have sometimes heard of! Surely I was right in regarding as enthusiasts those who could so clothe with imaginary splendors this vile shed!" Foolish traveler! The palace of which he speaks he does not even see! Crouching and shivering, he is impatient to be gone, though he dares not sally forth until the clouds disperse. Then he gladly leaves the hut far behind, saying, "Aha! it is well enough in a storm, but I should be very sorry to dwell there!"

How different the guest in the palace! He is there when the tempest is lowering, and he remains there when the tempest is past. Forsake it because the danger is over? It would be to forsake all his wealth, all his comforts, all his joys! Forsake it? It is his habitation, his home, his heaven on earth. Forsake it? Rather does he say, "If I forsake you, let my right hand forget her cunning; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not you above my chief joy. Here is my rest forever, here will I dwell! "He dwells in the Secret Place of the Most High," and therefore "he abides under the Shadow of the Almighty."

II. THE PROMISE ANNEXED--"He shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." The promise is conditional. But the condition may seem at first sight identical with the promise. Is not the "Secret Place of the Most High," equivalent to "the Shadow of the Almighty?" and is not dwelling in the former, the same thing as abiding under the latter? Yet even in this apparent tautology the great truth is involved, that

whatever spiritual blessings we earnestly desire, we assuredly obtain. "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." Desire to have, and you shall have; try to find, and you shall find; put forth your hand to open the door, and it shall be opened. To ask is in fact to receive, for God has already offered the gifts. He who rightly seeks forgiveness, is forgiven. He who longs for communion With God, already in some measure enjoys it. "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."

As a ragged, mud-stained traveler, toiling along the road, I see before me the palace of the Great King. Dare I venture near the gateway and seek an audience? Will not the guards laugh at my request, or punish my presumption? Such fears are groundless. The doors stand wide open by day and by night. I have only to enter. No sentry challenges me. No passport is demanded. Not a solitary guard is to be found. I may penetrate to the presence chamber, and, all tattered and filthy as I am, may advance straight up to the Prince, who gives audience to multitudes in the same condition with myself. Instead of being rebuked, I am even commended. At once I am recognized as an invited guest. The only censure hinted is that I did not come before. My presence, instead of causing indignation among the courtiers, gives them evident pleasure. They rejoice that another has come to share in their distinctions and delights; while the King whom they worship hails me as his friend, embraces me as his child, and feasts me at his own royal table. O, the fullness and freeness of the Gospel invitation! "If we have not, it is because we ask not." "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. Eat, O friends; drink abundantly, O beloved!" The door is always open, and he who enters, with the desire to dwell in that Secret Place, shall abide beneath that Shadow.

Though at first sight the condition seems identical with the promise, and though all who comply with the former, by that very act possess the latter, yet the words express a separate idea, a most glorious privilege; namely, that whoever draws near to God is at once placed beneath the protection of Omnipotence. If I come through Jesus unto the Mercy Seat, I not only obtain pardon, but the infinite resources of Deity will henceforth be employed to "help "me in every "time of need." The High Priest prayed under the shadow of the wings of the golden cherubim, which were extended over the Ark of the Covenant. The sinner, when he draws near to the true Mercy Seat, finds himself beneath "the shadow of the Almighty." Infinite Power spreads itself out over infinite Love. "And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain. And upon all the glory shall be a defense." That defense is Omnipotence. The overshadowing Presence above the Mercy Seat, guarantees the fulfillment of all the promises that are stored up within the ark, "written with the finger of God." "Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

Consider then, O my soul, how safe you are, how fearless you should be! Evil may threaten you through the body, but He who made it is surely able to preserve it; you are beneath His shadow, and he is Almighty! Injury may threaten from outward circumstances; but he who is in every place, controlling every event, can guard you from all harm, and make seeming evil conduce to your real good. You are beneath His shadow, and he is Almighty! Wicked men may devise mischief against you, but God who holds all hearts in His hand, can frustrate or overrule their malice. Are you not beneath the shadow of Him who is Almighty? Satan is ever plotting your destruction, but he who is with us is mightier than all who are against us. He can "destroy the works of the devil;" he is Almighty!

But the greatest perils arise from within. And is not His holiness stronger than our corruptions? Can He not curb the appetites of the flesh, control the lusts of the spirit, and fulfill His promise to "subdue our iniquities?" "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" As He said to Abraham, He says to us, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be perfect." If we would live "as ever in our great Task-master's eye," and strive

to be "perfect even as our Father who is in heaven is perfect," this is our encouragement, that He is "the Almighty God," ever at hand to strengthen and defend us. We are beneath "the Shadow of the Almighty."

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." What strong consolation! Other helpers are finite; they may be sincere, yet there is a limit to their support. But my Father is Almighty! He who is from everlasting; who spoke and it was done, who commanded and it stood fast; who does His pleasure in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth--He overshadows me! The hand that spread forth the heavens, and flung the stars abroad; that piles the mountains, and curbs the sea, and pours the sunbeams, and darts the lightning, is stretched out for my defense! Once, when a rebel, I dreaded this power as executing the sentence threatened; now, being reconciled, I, rejoice in it, as accomplishing the salvation promised. Helpless, frightened, condemned, ruined, I flee to Jesus; and then, wrapped round with Omnipotence, I rejoice and exult, for this Power is my friend, and assures me that whatever God has spoken, He is able abundantly to perform. They whose home is the Most High must be safe, for they abide beneath the shadow of THE ALMIGHTY!

True religion is personal. It is not enough to acknowledge the Lord of the universe, the Savior of mankind, unless we bow to Him as Lord over us, unless we cry unto Him, "Save us!" Knowledge of a hiding-place beneath the shadow of the Almighty will leave us unsheltered in the storm, unless we "say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust." Have you done this? Some people imagine that religion consists in admiring the strong fortress which guards God's people. They examine the foundations of the towers, test the solidity of the walls, measure the height of the battlements, and discourse on the beauty of the gates. They emphatically repudiate the pretensions of any rival refuge, and yet are themselves outside! The doorway is too low, pride will not stoop; too narrow, worldliness will not unload; too strait, indolence will not "labor to enter in." Alas! multitudes perish within sight of salvation, and go down into hell, having been "not far from the kingdom of heaven."

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe." Yes, we must run into it, if we would be protected by it. Let us, then, most solemnly inquire whether we have fled to Jesus as our only Refuge. Let us never be satisfied with theological knowledge and the form of godliness. In vain we hear, unless we taste that the Lord is gracious; in vain we see Him around us, unless we feel Him within us; in vain we admire the works of His hand, unless we lean on that hand; in vain we know there is a fountain of life, unless we drink of it; in vain we name Christ's name, unless we bear Christ's cross. Help us, O Giver of all grace! However the world may deride or hate us--however contrary may be the choice of those around us--in spite of all the suggestions of unbelief within us--whatever may be the cost in the surrender of evil indulgences, in the breaking of long-confirmed habits of sin--help each one of us to "say of the Lord, He is my refuge, and my Fortress, my God, in Him will I trust." Whatever refuges others may seek, I choose this. I look unto You to help me! I hide in your Mercy, for it is offered to all sinners, and such am I. I hide in your Justice, for Jesus has satisfied its claims. I hide in your Power, for this is but the instrument of your Love, and Love is but another name for Yourself. Other lords beside You have had dominion over me, but now I desire to be yours, yours only, yours forever. With the disciple of old, though like him long doubting, I would say, "My Lord, and my God!" Henceforth let me "live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

A voice from heaven replies, "Be it unto you even as you will."

I may therefore, without presumption, say of the Lord, "He is my Refuge and my Fortress." Within Him I dwell as in a stronghold. I am "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation;" kept, as in a

garrisoned castle, where angels watch, and the royal standard of heaven floats, and which all the attributes of God preserve inviolate. "We have a strong city; Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Thus secure, I may rise to the full assurance of faith. Not only has God become all this to me, but I may say so. On suitable occasions by words, at all times by spirit and conduct, let us to our brethren and companions, yes to the whole world, "say of the Lord, he is my Refuge and my Fortress, my God, in Him will I trust."

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