

VOC Oct. 2015

Shelter in God's Shadow

Psalm 91: 1

Are you afraid of the dark? It can strike fear into people, especially in this who are on the run and who may be hounded by enemies. At night it is dark. You may not be able to see a thing. You may not know which defence mechanism (if you have any!) to activate or where to take shelter. That's why disasters, calamities are more feared when its dark than during the day.

Christians take refuge in knowing that God is a God of light and in him there is no darkness at all. That's what it says in 1 John 1:5. We note that it doesn't say God is a light but that He is light! Light is simply a part of his nature just as love is (1 John 4:8).

As God is light so is his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder, for he too is "True God of True God." as an early confession of the church has it. While he was on earth he proclaimed this truth, " I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

There are many passages in Scripture that testify to the protection offered to those who put their trust in the Lord and seek his presence. The one that I'd like us to concentrate on today is Psalm 91 and in particular the first verse of that song.

Though this is one of those psalms of which we are not sure as to its author it might well have been Moses that "man of God" who also

wrote Psalm 90. It's a Psalm which is a wonderful testimony to the great care and protection the Lord God offers to his faithful children.

Says the psalmist, "He who dwells in the shelter or, as we can also read, "*in the secret place*") of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." More than one commentator has pointed out that people generally seek out a great variety of hiding places, depending which are available to them and in what circumstances they find themselves.

We're living at a time when thousands if not millions of refugees are looking for safe havens. Many of those refugees seek to escape the terror that threatened them in their homeland. They try and make their way to Europe in overcrowded boats and they will go through barbed wire in order to get to some place safe.

But then again there are those who reside in a free country where they enjoy a rich measure of safety, who are also looking for shelter. I'm thinking of those who are hounded and oppressed by their sins. I'm thinking as well of Christians who more and more are confronted by blasphemous opposition even in countries that have a rich Christian heritage. They decry the murder of thousands of unborn infants, and the dismissal of God-given laws.

In Psalm 91 however the author "contrasts the security of those who trust in God with the vanity of all other confidences by which we are apt to delude ourselves." ¹

¹ John Calvin's words in his commentary on Psalm 91:1.

What does it mean to “*dwell in the shelter of the Most High*” but to lodge very close to the Lord God. So that sheltered by his Almighty power not only will fearful danger not come near but that inner peace may be enjoyed.

I can't help but think of the experiences of Corrie Ten Boom who wrote her well-known book The Hiding Place. That title refers to both the physical hiding place in the Netherlands where Corrie's family hid a number of Jews from the Nazis but also to that godly confession found in another Psalm, 119:114 in which the psalmist, speaking of God says, says, “*You, are my hiding place and my shield.*”

That “hiding place” is truly a secret place. It is not known to unbelievers, but it is scoffed at by them. Yet it is well-known to those who treasure God and his Word.

Now it is so that a hiding place one such as the Dutch underground helped to cleverly build in the Ten Boom household may provide a certain refuge for quite some time. But then, some infiltrator, someone intent on harming those hiding there will find it out and give the occupants away.

But those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High God have his assurance that they will stay, they will “*abide*” in the shadow of the Almighty.

But then they must seek *permanent refuge* there. They can't just be occasional visitors taking up temporary residence because that appears to be a convenient thing to do. If we desire the Lord to abide

with us, as the hymn says, we must stay and abide with him. The Lord God wants to be not just our *consolation* but our *habitation*.

The writer went on to say that this “*shadow of the Almighty*” would preserve him not only from nightly terror and ghostly harm. The arrows of war and even of pestilence, death and destruction would not come near. Guarded by this God who throughout the psalm is called “The Most High” those seeking shelter with him would always be safe.

Another bible expositor says that the author may have been thinking of the mercy seat which was found on the ark of the covenant in the most holy place of the tabernacle and temple. On it the blood of the covenant was sprinkled for the forgiveness of sins of all of God’s people. When God’s people made their way through the desert in which many enemies lurked was it not the pillar of cloud by day and that of fire at night which accompanied and protected them?

Others see the psalmist pointing here to the Lord Jesus Christ. For non one can think of permanent safety, security, outside of the deliverance from sin and death and hell, that is found with Christ. It is He who is the shelter, the fortress of all who put their trust in him. In that well-known Psalm 23. the author looks to his Saviour and with confidence exclaims, “*And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*”

But then to enjoy this great protection we need to realize the dangers that threaten us. We need to be convinced of the power of the evil one and the deception that can arise in our own hearts and minds.

We may think of this shadow of our text to be not unlike the shadow cast by some great rock which shelters some weary traveller. The prophet Isaiah speaks about such a shelter. In chapter 32 v. 2 . There he mentions the shade of “ *a great rock*” right after he mentions the king who reigns in righteousness and who would be like a “*stream of water in a dry place.*” Both *shade* and *stream* are images of comfort and of shelter offered in the King who is none other but King Jesus.

So then dear listeners, yearn for, eagerly desire this “shelter of the Most High.” Elsewhere the bible says, “ *Seek the Lord that he may be found, call on him while he is near*” (Isaiah 55: 6) .

There have been times when people were quite quick to go back to church when physical dangers, wars and other calamities threatened. By when the danger passed, like it did at the time of the Cuban missile crisis a half-century ago, the churches emptied out again. People’s ‘hour-of-prayer’ can indeed be short lived!

May you and I and all those who hear God’s appeal to come to him surrender to this Most High God. Yes may our nation, return to Him.

For the day will come when the dark night of God’s judgement will prevail on all of mankind. Yet those, and only those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High will then face a most beautiful dawn of perpetual light. For having found refuge in abiding in God’s shadow they will be embraced by him who today is “ *My Lord, My refuge and my fortress*” . He is My God, and I must trust in Him.

Amen and thank you so much for listening.

The “secret place” is found in Ps. 18:11; Ps. 81:7; “ secret” in Ps. 61:4; Isaiah 32: 2. “ Shadow” as in Psalm 17:8; 36:7; “ Most High” and