

Psalm 91 “He Who Dwells... Will Abide”
Psalm 90
Matthew 4

October 29, 2017

Today we begin to walk through Book 4 of the Psalms.

What we call the “book” of Psalms is actually 5 books of psalms.

And it’s important to read them in that context.

After all, God did not give us 150 random songs.

He gave us these 150 songs in 5 distinct collections.

Book 1 consists of Psalms 1-41.

Book 2 consists of Psalms 42-72.

(And at the end of Book 2, we have the curious note,
“the prayers of David, son of Jesse, are ended.”

Books 1 and 2, therefore, are songs of the kingdom.

While there are all sorts of challenges and struggles

the presupposition of books 1 and 2

is that there *is* a Davidic king on the throne.)

In Book 3 all of that changes.

Book 3 consists of Psalms 73-89.

And Book 3 is all about the devastation of the Kingdom of David.

Book 3 dares to ask the question, *is God faithful to his promises?*

Because Book 3 ends in Psalm 89 with Jerusalem plundered,

the temple destroyed,

and the Davidic king in exile.

The LORD has rejected his covenant with David –

he has handed his anointed over to their enemies.

And so Psalm 89 ends with an unanswered question.

“Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,
which by your faithfulness you swore to David?” (89:49)

Yes, the Psalmist then *asks* God to remember his servants and his anointed –
but book 3 of the Psalter ends with an unanswered question.

Book 4 of the Psalter will begin to answer it.

Book 4 will declare over and over again that the LORD is King!

Psalm 92 says “you, O LORD, are on high forever” (v8)

Psalm 93 says “The LORD reigns” (v1)

Psalm 94 speaks of God as the Great King to whom earthly rulers must submit.

Psalm 95 says “the LORD... is a great King above all gods.” (v3)

Psalm 96 says “the LORD reigns” (v10)

Psalm 97 says “the LORD reigns” (v1)

Psalm 98 says “make a joyful noise before the king, the LORD!” (v6)

Psalm 99 says “the LORD reigns” (v1)

There is great joy in book 4 of the Psalter.
But as we go through these songs
we will see that this is not a naïve rejoicing.

Psalm 90 is titled “A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God.”
That may mean that Moses wrote it.
At the very least, it means that we are to sing it in the voice of Moses.

But it’s placement here at the beginning of Book 4 of the Psalter
gives us very clear direction for how we are to read and sing this song!

Psalm 90, verse 3 says, “You return man to dust” –
Psalm 90 has lots of echoes of the book of Genesis –
from the creation of the earth and the world in verse 2,
to the creation of man from the dust in verse 3,
or the flood in verse 5 that sweeps them away.

Because in the destruction of the temple,
in the devastation of Jerusalem and the exile of the LORD’s anointed,
creation has been undone.

It is possible that Psalm 90 was written *by* Moses.
There is nothing in the song that Moses could not have written.
But by placing this song at the beginning of Book 4,
Psalm 90 takes on a whole new meaning.
Jeremiah had said that the days were coming when God would bring about a new Exodus.
And so it is fitting that the first song of Book 4 –
the first song in response to the devastation and destruction of Psalm 89 –
is “a prayer of Moses, the man of God.”

I’ve already preached on Psalm 90 – so I won’t do it again right now –
I will simply point out that Psalm 90 is, as Joseph Addison Alexander said 150 years ago,
“the heart or centre of the whole collection.” (in Robertson, 150).
If Books 1 and 2 focus on the establishment of the Messianic kingdom,
and Book 3 speaks of the disruption and defeat of the Messianic kingdom,
then Book 4 reminds us that the LORD himself is our dwelling place.
The LORD is King – even when things may not look like it!

Sing Psalm 90
Read Matthew 4

So... Satan quotes Psalm 91 to Jesus.
“He will command his angels concerning you...
On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

Satan is trying to get Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple
in order to prove that he is the Son of God.

In that moment, I don't think that Jesus was particularly tempted to throw himself off the temple.
I suspect that the stronger temptation was the temptation to *laugh!*

After all, what is the next line in Psalm 91?

“You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.”

I suspect that Jesus was seriously tempted to respond,

“No, you old serpent,
I will prove that I am the Son of God by doing *precisely* what Psalm 91 says
and trampling you underfoot!!”

But our Lord Jesus understood that the course of wisdom was not to mock Satan *this time* –
and so he replied in the words of Deuteronomy 6:16,

“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”

So there are two things that I want you to see from Psalm 91.

First, Jesus is the one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High.
He is the one who tramples the serpent underfoot.

But second, as Paul says in Romans 16:20,

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under *your* feet.”

Yes, Jesus is the firstborn Son of God –
and the firstborn Seed of the Woman.

It is only *because* he crushes the serpent under *his* feet –
but because he has joined you to himself,
because he has made you *fellow heirs* with him,
therefore, you also join in trampling underfoot the lion and the serpent!

So let's look at how Psalm 91 teaches us this!

1. If You Would Abide, You Must Dwell (v1-2)

I want you to think for a moment about verse 1:

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.*

At first, that sounds so comforting – so reassuring (and it should!).

But then if you think about it, it sounds like it's just stating the obvious.

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.”

If you dwell somewhere, then that's where you live – that's where you *abide*.
He who dwells in South Bend
will abide in the shadow of South Bend.
He who dwells with his mother
will abide in the shadow of his mother.

That's just a truism.

So what's the point?

Well, to put it simply,
if you want to abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
if you want God to be your refuge and your fortress,
then you need to *dwell* in the shelter of the Most High!

Our problem is that we go wandering off in search of our own pleasure and happiness,
and we find ourselves dwelling in a far land, far from the shelter of the Most High.

Have you ever found yourself living in exile?
Alienated from others – distant from God?
Far from shelter and refuge?

What does it mean to *dwell* in the shelter of the Most High?

The shelter is the “secret place” –
the hiding place – the place of refuge that the bad guys don't know about!

In the light of Book 3 of the Psalms –

in the light of the destruction of the temple – and the devastation of Jerusalem –
you can easily hear the people saying,
“I wish I knew where that shelter was!”

And as I look around at you – and I only know pieces of your stories –

I can hear many of you saying,
“I wish I knew where that shelter was!”
“Can I go hide in the place the bad guys don't know about?!”

Where is the shelter of the Most High?
And how can I find it?!

To see this, we need to listen to the ways in which the voice shifts in Psalm 91.

Verse 2 abruptly changes voice.

Verse 1 was third person:

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty”
but verse 2 shifts to the first person:

² I will say^[a] to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.”

And then, to give you whiplash, verse 3 switches to the second person singular!
“For he will deliver *you*...”

There is a first-person singular voice driving this song.

You hear it in verse 2 and again in verse 9 –
and in both instances, it is a voice that says to the LORD, “My refuge.”
Who is this?

Who is the first person singular?

In one sense, it is simply the poet.
But as we have often seen in the Psalms,
the first-person singular voice has regularly been the voice of David
(or the Davidic king).

It’s more ambiguous here
because in the context of Book 4 of the Psalter,
there *is no Davidic King!*
So whose voice is this?

Is it the voice of Moses carried over from Psalm 90?
Is it the voice of the Messiah pointing us to the future?

It is the voice of the One who trust in God –
the one who has made the Most High his dwelling place!

Think back to Psalms 1 and 2.

Psalm 1 speaks of the Blessed Man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
but who meditates on God’s law day and night –
and who becomes a tree planted by streams of water.

Psalm 2 shows us that this Blessed Man is in fact the Lord Jesus Christ –
the Anointed King who rules the nations with a rod of iron –
and concludes “blessed is the one who trusts *in him!*”

Psalms 1 and 2 open the whole Psalter with this paradigm that teaches us how to read the Psalms.
The blessed man is the Lord’s Anointed – the Messiah –
in whom *we are blessed*.

Psalms 90-91 now open Book 4 with a further development of this theme.

Psalm 90 said, “Lord, you have been *our* dwelling place in all generations.”

Psalm 90 highlighted the corporate nature of God’s blessing upon Israel.

Psalm 91 then focuses all of that corporate blessing upon the One.

And now that One then speaks that same blessing upon *you*.

Think about it!
When Satan uses Psalm 91 to tempt Jesus,
it is the most awful perversion of the scriptures!
Psalm 91 is what Jesus sings to us!

Satan is trying to usurp the place of Jesus!

So instead, I want you to listen to Jesus as he sings to you of God's salvation!

The singular voice says to *you* in verses 3-8, that the Most High will deliver you.
Verses 3-8 describe seven perils that the LORD will deliver you from.

2. He Will Deliver You: The Seven Perils (v3-8)

- a. The Fowler's Snare and the Deadly Pestilence (v3)**
- b. The Terror of the Night and the Arrow That Flies by Day (v5)**
- c. The Pestilence that Stalks in Darkness and the Destruction that Wastes at Noonday (v6)**
- d. The Thousand/Ten Thousand That Fall in Battle (v7)**

In these verses we hear the language of plague and pestilence –
disease that stalks in darkness and wastes at noonday.

We also hear the language of warfare –

“the arrow that flies by day” –

and the faithfulness of God that is our shield and buckler.

We also hear of the snares and traps of the enemy –

all of which comes together in the thousand falling at your right side,
ten thousand falling at your right hand.

³ *For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.*

⁴ *He will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.*

⁵ *You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,*

⁶ *nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.*

⁷ *A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.*

⁸ *You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.*

But it will not come near *you* (singular).

You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.

In the cold, grim light of Book 3 –
amidst the ruins of Jerusalem and the exile of God’s people –
the fact is:

there *is no king* in Jerusalem.

What do you mean “it will not come near you”?!!!!

My mother died of diabetes when she was 63.
Your cousin fought in Afghanistan – and has never been “okay” since.

Your sister was shot in a drive-by shooting –
and your friend is dying of cancer,
leaving behind three small children!

What do you mean, “it will not come near you”??!!

We just finished the book of Exodus.
The plagues of Egypt did not come near God’s people.
They took refuge under the shadow of God’s wings.

The LORD himself fought for his people and delivered them at the Red Sea.

That’s why I keep bringing up Moses.
Moses plays a larger role in the 17 songs in Book 4
than in all the other 133 Psalms put together.
We’re talking about a New Exodus – like Jeremiah promised!

And for that matter,
we’re talking about a bigger, badder enemy than Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar.

After all, who *is* the “fowler” who sets his snares for you?
Who is the enemy – the destruction that wastes at noonday.

Jerome tells us:
“You see, then, that the devil is the hunter, eager to lure our souls unto perdition.
The devil is master of many snares, deceptions of all kinds.
Avarice is one of his pitfalls, disparagement is his noose, fornication is his bait...
once we begin to play with sin, then our soul is in trouble
and is like a boat tossed about by the waves.” (Jerome, 171)

Why did the Tempter choose Psalm 91 to quote?
Because Psalm 91 gets at the heart of his warfare against the LORD’s anointed.
If he could get Jesus to stumble here –
if Jesus failed to take refuge in the LORD *here* –
then Satan wins.

And now that Satan has failed with Jesus,
he continues to try to trip you up.

But Jesus continues to encourage you!

3. I Will Deliver Him: How God Saves His People (v9-16)

a. Because You Have Made the LORD Your Dwelling Place (v9-10)

⁹ *Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—
the Most High, who is my refuge^[b]—
¹⁰ no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
no plague come near your tent.*

Psalm 90 had opened with the words,

“LORD, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.” (Psalm 90:1)

And now Jesus says to you:

Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place –
the Most High, who is my refuge –
no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

Jesus has brought the new Exodus.

The plagues of Egypt will not strike you down.

What were the plagues of Egypt all about?

This was God’s final judgment that came early on Egypt.

For that matter, what was the destruction of Jerusalem?

The prophets had made it clear that the destruction of Jerusalem
was the eschatological – last-days – wrath of God
poured out upon his own people.

“No evil shall be allowed to befall you.”

It may sound like it is saying “nothing bad will ever happen to you” –
but that’s *not* the point here.

Later in book 4, we will come to Psalm 103 –
“who heals all your diseases.”

How can we say that “no evil shall be allowed to befall you”?

Paul says it best:

“For those who love God
all things work together for good,
for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28)

Not just some things – or most things –
but *all things*.

The reason why we say that *no evil shall befall you*
is because of the cross.

In one sense, the cross is the most evil thing that ever happened!
The Jews and the Romans conspired together against an innocent man,
and crucified the Lord of Glory!!
How can we say that no evil shall befall you –
when such great evil befell Jesus?!

But what did God do with the cross?
The cross was the instrument that Jesus used to destroy Satan –
to overthrow the powers of sin and death!
The cross was *intended* for evil –
but God turned that evil to the greatest good –
as he will also do *for you*.

For those who love God – for those who are called according to his purpose –
the cross becomes an instrument that God uses to conform us to the likeness of his Son.

As Charles Spurgeon once said,
“It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord...
Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form.
Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honor,
death is his gain.” (quoted in Wright, 82).

Why can we say this?
Because Jesus has passed through suffering and death to glory.
Therefore, we also may see in the cross – in our suffering – in our afflictions –
the only path to glory!

Yes, Jesus said, in this world you will have affliction.
But take heart, I have overcome the world!

But notice *how* God saves his people.
He saves them *because* they trust in him.
And he saves them by commanding his angels:

b. He Will Command His Angels (v11-12)

¹¹ *For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.*

¹² *On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.*

We don't often think about what angels are doing.
And there's a good reason for that!
Scripture doesn't spend much time talking about what angels are doing.

But here Psalm 91 tells us that God commands his angels concerning his people.
This is one of the passages where we get the idea of guardian angels.
But plainly it is not that everyone has their own guardian *angel* (singular).
Rather, the picture is of many angels guarding *you* (singular).

(I know – most of us probably *need* a whole company of angels to protect us!)

But God says that these angelic hosts are so good
that because of their protection,
you won't even stub your toe.

Again, those of us with sprained knees and broken feet start to wonder...

But again Paul helps us in Romans 8 –
“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing
with the glory that is to be revealed to us...” (v18)
Sure, there's some suffering here and now.

But that suffering cannot be considered “evil” in the final sense –
namely, that suffering does not result in our destruction.
Rather, the suffering of the present age is designed to conform us to the likeness of Jesus.
Jesus – the one whose heel was crushed –
Jesus – the one who trampled the head of the serpent...

And so we say with Paul,
“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (v37)

i. And You Will Trample the Lion and the Serpent (v13)

¹³ *You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.*

In one sense, we can see God's provision for his people in the natural world.
Think of Daniel in the lion's den –
or Paul shaking off the viper into the fire.

But at the same time, the lion and the serpent are both used as images of the devil.

As Augustine says, “But what is said to Christ?
'And you shall trample down the lion and the serpent.'
The lion because of his open danger,
the serpent because of his concealed deception.
The serpent drove Adam out of paradise;
the very same one, as a lion, persecuted the church,
as Peter says, 'Your adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion
seeking whom he may devour.'” (Augustine, 175)

And especially, with the image of *treading* on the adder – trampling the serpent underfoot – that would cause anyone to think of God’s promise to Eve, that her seed would crush the head of the serpent.

And yes, Jesus begins this.

But in Christ, this promise also comes to us.

As we saw earlier, from Roman 16:20,

Paul applies the promise

that the Seed of the Woman will crush the head of the serpent to us!

How is it that *we* crush the head of the serpent?

We crush the head of the serpent every time we mortify sin.

Every time we *put sin to death*.

Sanctification includes two parts:

First, putting to death the deeds of the flesh (the mortification of sin),

And second, walking in newness of life (as we live in new obedience).

Our problem is that we too often love our sin – we love the old ways.

As one early father put it,

“God indeed holds the sword, and he wishes to strike sin;

we, on the contrary, defend our sins because we love them.

Thus, we who should be the accusers of our sins become their defenders.

Truly, dearly beloved, God does not want to kill the sinner, but his sin.

Like a good doctor he wants to strike the disease, not the person who is ill.

But what is worse, we often despise the doctor and love our sickness:

we love our sin and despise God.

Sin, indeed, is like this, a dragon, a viper...” (Caesarius of Arles, 175)

And so at the end of the Psalm, God himself speaks concerning *you*:

c. I Will Rescue Him and Show Him My Salvation (v14-16)

¹⁴ “*Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;*

I will protect him, because he knows my name.

¹⁵ *When he calls to me, I will answer him;*

I will be with him in trouble;

I will rescue him and honor him.

¹⁶ *With long life I will satisfy him*

and show him my salvation.”

Yes, this was true first of Jesus.

Jesus is the one who called out, “into thy hands, I commit my spirit” –

The Father was *with* the Son in his distress.
And God raised him up – that he might show him his salvation.

But Psalm 91 is not just talking about Jesus.
Psalm 91 is also talking about *you*.

God will be with *you* in trouble.
God will rescue you and honor you.
With long life – with eternal life – God will satisfy you
and show you his salvation.

But *you* must respond.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place...
no evil shall be allowed to befall you.
Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him.

If you go dwell in the house of sin and death,
you will not abide in the shadow of the Almighty!
If you make your dwelling place in the tents of sin,
then evil *will* befall you!
If you abandon Jesus and follow other gods – or no god! –
then you *will not be saved*.

Psalm 91 plainly and clearly says that *you* must put your trust in the LORD.
You must take action and *make* your dwelling place with God.
If you just sit around and wait for God to do something –
“Well, I guess the Holy Spirit isn’t prompting me to do anything...”

Uh, no!

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion!
(That’s Psalm 95 – just a couple songs down the road...)

Jesus has spoken.

God is calling you to hold fast to him in love.

What are some things in your life that are getting in the way of holding fast to God?
Where are you spending your time and energy?

Social media?

Computer games?

Sports?

It’s not that these things are evil in themselves.

But if they are getting in the way of your holding fast to Jesus,
then you are dwelling in *them* rather than *him*.