

PSALM 91

THE ONLY SAFE PLACE



*A short series of studies by
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Psalm 91: The Only Safe Place - Chapter 1

"The Only Safe Place"

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Raymond was reading from Psalm 90, and I want us to turn to Psalm 91. I want us to look at this Psalm in great depth today, because I believe that the Lord has laid it upon my heart to share with you. Psalm 91, we'll read the whole Psalm together. Verse 1: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation".

We all know the little rhyme: 'Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me'. A simple statement that we all know so well, yet behind it is a profound philosophy. You know that the sticks and the stones may touch you, they may cut your flesh, they may do all sorts of pain and bruising to your body - but you know that if people call you names that there's a choice of whether to listen to them or not, whether to let them affect you or penetrate your heart and hurt you. In a way that statement is an expression of how we can be in the very midst of trouble, yet not let that same trouble touch us or harm us. It is the ability to sing in the midst of the waves and the billows: 'It is well with my soul'.

A. Leonard Griffiths entitled a sermon on verse 6 of this Psalm: 'A Gospel for the Middle-aged'. Now we have a lot of middle-aged - I have to watch what I say, but we have a lot of older folk (well, there we go, I've put my foot in it already!). We have a lot of senior people within the assembly here, and folks in their middle-age, and you find that there are many pressures and trials and tribulations that enter into life at that stage - that's why he titled it: 'A Gospel for the Middle-aged'. When crises enter into life, and we all find that, and we also find - and I have found in my short time in pastoral ministry - that many who are vocal in their faith, when the times of trouble enter in they become shattered and disillusioned as to what is happening to them. As the hymn says: 'Will your anchor hold when the storms of life come in, when the clouds unfold their winds of strife'?

I believe that within the word of God, one of the greatest ways that God has of revealing Himself - apart from the word of God - to a world that is dying, and in sin, and lost, is the testimony and the witness of believers when they enter into trouble in life. When they come into suffering: how we cope - or do not cope - within it. The question that is posed to us by the Spirit of God, by the Psalmist here in 91, is: how do you

behave when trouble hits your life? Do you cope? Do you go to pieces or do you go to God? The question that we could ask today is: is there a way of surviving life here in our century? Troubled life, perplexed, stressful, anxious, with all the threats that are on our body and soul, is there a way that God has given us that we might survive without a scratch?

Now the setting of this Psalm is interesting, because we don't really know what it is. One thing we do know is that the Psalmist is describing the ongoing sovereign protection of God's people - that God is ever protecting them in all dangers and terrors which surround them day by day. Literally the Psalm will be fulfilled in the Messianic kingdom, and we see that in Psalms 96 through to 100, it depicts prophetically what will happen upon the earth here when the lion shall lie down with the lamb. But the original setting of the Psalm is unknown, some people think David wrote the Psalm and it's in connection to 2 Samuel 24 - you remember where David took a census of the people, and God had not led him to do such, and because he did it God sent famine to the land - some believe that this Psalm is David talking about how God would relieve the famine. I don't believe that because there's not a note of repentance within the Psalm, and you would imagine that if David was being cursed by God with famine for his sin that there would be an air of repentance within these verses, but there is not. The song is how, as we go through the trouble, God is with us and God will bring us through it.

Some believe that Moses wrote the Psalm, because Psalm 90 - a prayer of Moses that we've already heard this morning - is the Psalm before it. Some believe that Moses is talking about Joshua and Caleb as they went into the promised land - those who, the word of God says, followed the Lord fully - and as a reward for their faith, and their abiding and dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, God let them live amongst the dead, amid their graves. Well, I don't know what the context of the Psalm is, but I know this: that perhaps the very fact that it is undefined and we're not sure what the historic context is, is perhaps a way that the Holy Spirit is able to apply it to your life and mine. In other words, because it's undefined we can apply these dangers to the dangers that we face, these trials to the trials that we have, and we can therefore in turn choose to abide in God, and to trust in God, as these saints did. No matter what befalls us, God is saying: 'I will protect you. I will be with you'.

In other words, it doesn't mean that you will not go through trouble - for man is born into this world, as Job says, as the sparks fly upward man is born unto trouble. But the point of the Psalm is this: that when we go through trouble, God is with us if we abide in Him. The proposition of the Psalm is this: abide in God, verse 1, dwell in God, dwell in the secret place, abide under His shadow, trust in God, live in God, make God your habitation and nothing will harm you - He is the safest place.

I've entitled my message this morning: 'The Only Safe Place To Be'. The old spiritual said: 'Where could I go, where could I go, seeking a refuge for my soul'. Let's hear what the Psalmist tells us, the first thing he tells us is a question, I believe: how do we know God's protection? How can we know God's protection from this Psalm? Now, I want you to look at verses 1 to 4. The first way we know God's protection is verse 1: 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty'. This is the first way to know God's protection: dwelling on God's character - now note that - dwelling on God's character.

Now in verses 1 to 3, if you look at it, God's character is displayed in His names. Look at the first verse: 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High' - in Hebrew, 'Elyon', meaning 'the possessor of the heaven and the earth' - the God who is over all things that are. Then we read on: '[We] shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty' - Hebrew, 'Shaddai', it's not the Almighty great in strength, but the Almighty who is great in grace, the God who is bountiful in all our needs, that we shall not need or shall not want or lack because of El-Shaddai. It's the title of God used in Genesis 17 verse 1 when God called Abraham out of his old land, to separate from it and follow Him - he didn't know where he was going, he didn't know what he was going to

do, he didn't know how God was going to provide - God called him out as the Almighty God, the God who would provide.

In 2 Corinthians 6 and verse 18 that call is given to the church: 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord', and what does He say? 'And I will be a Father to you, and I will be your God - the Lord God Almighty, the God who will provide'. He is the Most High, He is the Almighty, and in verse 2: 'I will say of the LORD' - L-O-R-D, capital 'L', capital 'O', capital 'R', capital 'D'. When you find that, it is the name 'Yahweh', or 'Jehovah', the covenant keeping God, the eternal unchangeable I AM - the One who was, is, and ever shall be. Then finally: 'He is my fortress and my God' - Elohim, in the beginning God, Elohim, the Creator God, created the heavens and the earth.

Do you see what the Psalmist is doing? If you're going to be protected in life, you're going to have to dwell on God's character - the Most High God who is above all things, the Almighty God who is great in grace and will always provide our need, the Lord the eternal God, the covenant keeping God, the Creator God, Elohim. He is the Most High, and isn't it interesting that in a Psalm, in the context of troubles, we are told to focus on a transcendent God - in other words a God that lifts us most high. He lifts us above these problems to a place where harm cannot reach you. For if you're dwelling in God, you're dwelling in the One who is high above all things and high above your troubles. If you're dwelling under His shadow - and remember that Palestine was a land of great heat, where the sun bore down upon the people and burnt them day by day as they worked in the fields, and to be in the shadow was a metaphor for care and protection from all harm. [Psalm] 121: 'The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand' - God's name is what we ought to dwell in.

We've been looking at His attributes in weeks gone by - but, you know, do we dwell in them? Do we rest upon them? You know, God's names are to create faith in us, to create a confidence in Him - and they ought to lead us, as the Psalmist says in verse 1, to dwell, literally to sit down underneath this great God. It's the opposite of Psalm 1, those who sit in the seat of the scornful, this is sitting in God's seat, sitting under God's shadow, dwelling in His presence, and abiding underneath Him. It's a life of communion with God, a life of security, protection in God - literally to be at home in God! Are you at home in God? Are you dwelling in God? Matthew Henry put it like this: 'This is the man who returns to God, who rests in God, who worships within the veil, who loves to be alone with God - and nothing, nothing, comes between this man and God, and God will come between that man and harm'.

Within the word of God there is a city of refuge that we find in Numbers chapter 25. We haven't time to go into it, but the man-slayer, the innocent man-slayer, could run to that place. Once he got into the walls of that city of refuge no-one could touch him, no-one could harm him, he was absolutely safe - but he was only safe if he didn't move within 1000 yards from the circumference of that city. If he moved out of the city he was vulnerable. Now I want you to notice that this Psalm is not a carte blanc protection of all God's children - it is not! It is consequential upon the abiding of the child of God in God. You must abide, otherwise you will not be protected. But isn't it wonderful to know that, if we abide and dwell in the character of God, we can say like the Psalmist: 'Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of man, Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues'. Hebrews 6: 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us'. God is our refuge! Oh that we would lay hold upon the Almighty, Elyon, Shaddai, Jehovah, Elohim! Dwelling on God's character.

In verse 2 and 3 it's beautiful because, if you look at it, it says: 'I will say of the Lord', and then in verse 3 it says, 'Surely he shall deliver thee' - do you see the transition from the Psalmist's experience to your experience? This isn't some guy writing thousands of years ago about an experience that he had and you can't have! He's saying the God that protected me - this great God, the Almighty God, the Most High, the Lord,

the God of heaven and earth who created all things - you can know His protection too. Verse 3: 'He can protect you from the snare of the fowler' - a picture of birds that have been trapped in a snare. He's talking about all the plots of the evil one and this world against the believer - the perilous pestilence, literally the plagues of mischief, specifically dreaded diseases, plagues and epidemics. It's just a metaphor expressive of all types of evil that can befall us - if you're abiding in this God, He will protect you too!

Dwell in God's name, the second thing is this: shelter under God's tenderness. This is beautiful, verse 4: 'He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust' - isn't that beautiful? The picture of a parent bird, or a mother hen, wooing its chicks and putting them in safety underneath her wings. The Psalmist said in 57: 'In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast' - that is sheltering under God's tenderness. Spurgeon said that if an uninspired man had given this designation to God, of being like a mother hen, we would have called it blasphemy, isn't that right? It seems so far removed from what we think of God, but God says this of Himself! 'I am like a mother hen, and I want to woo you in tenderness. I want you to find a shelter under my wings, metaphorically' - God is caring for His own! Symbolically, there may be a reference to the cherubim and the seraphim on top of the Ark of the Covenant in the holiest place of all, the place where God's presence dwells, the secret place of the Most High - that we can abide in the very place of God's presence, underneath the wings of those cherubim!

Verse 4, the word for 'trust' there: 'He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust' - that's a different phrase from the phrase in verse 2 of trust. The phrase in verse 4 means literally 'to hide, to run beneath, to make your refuge in'. Now let me ask you this question: when life becomes bizarre what keeps you? When unpredictable things come upon your path, the troubles that you face, the very thing that you thought would never happen to you, what keeps you? I'll tell you what is the only thing that the word of God says will keep you: your relationship with God! That's it! That is what calms the soul - first of all you need to be saved: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem', the Lord Jesus said, 'thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!'. Salvation! If you're not saved, how can you expect to face the troubles of life? But, child of God, if you're not dwelling on the name of God, the character of God, and if you're not sheltering under the tender wings of God, how can you expect to be safe?

I read an amusing story connected with this verse - maybe you've heard it - about a woman who was meditating on verse 4 here, about these feathers and about the Lord and His wings. She went out to work that morning, and she was walking to work and a gang of fellows came up to her, and she feared the worst. They asked her for any money that she had on her, and she was trying desperately to remember this verse but she couldn't remember it! All she could do was shout: 'Feathers! Feathers! Feathers!' - and they all ran away, probably thinking she was mad! But the truth of this is that that woman grabbed hold and sheltered under God's tenderness. Do you do that?

Picture Elijah, you think of this great man of God - think of him up on Mount Carmel, and you see him battling with the prophets of Baal. The great God of all eternity, and it's His spokesman there - and there that great battle of Carmel, you find great things happening in the spiritual realm. Yet, when you get down the Mount, you find that Elijah runs away from Jezebel, a woman! There he is sitting, weeping, wishing his life would finish, saying: 'I alone am left. Everybody's putting their hands against me. Nobody's encouraging me. I'm the only one holding truth, I'm the only one doing God's will, and I can't take it any more!'. If you came to old Elijah and said: 'Elijah, what did God do for you?', 'Well, He lifted me up and He put me under His wing, and He fed me and He let me sleep upon the downy bed of His tenderness'. Isn't that beautiful?

What about the woman caught in adultery? You ask her her testimony and she says: 'They were after me, they were after my blood! They wanted to sever my flesh with stones of judgement! But I was brought before the Christ of God, and in tenderness He opened his wing and said, 'I don't condemn you, your sins are

forgiven you, go in peace'. The tenderness of God that motivates the Psalmist to say: 'Keep me as the apple of thine eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings. I will abide in thy tabernacle forever, I will trust in the covert of thy wings'. Beautiful, isn't it?

Thirdly and finally, and this was only the first point of the message, there's another two but we'll go on to them maybe next week! First of all there is dwelling in God's character, secondly there is sheltering under God's tenderness, thirdly there is resting in God's strength. Resting in God's strength, verse 4, the second half: 'His truth shall be thy shield and buckler'. A buckler was a little shield, but the sense of the translation is this: something that is surrounding all, protecting all overhead. Now if you think of the farms, and how they're annoyed continually by foxes - hen farms - and the foxes just come along and bite their head off and away they go. If you were looking at the first half of verse 4, and you saw this hen putting her wing over the chicks, her young, and then a big fox comes along and bites her head off - it's not much good, sure it's not? It doesn't matter how tender her wing is! But what God is saying here is: 'What can penetrate My tenderness will not penetrate My strength'. Do you see it? 'Though something may penetrate My tenderness, it will never get to you through My Almighty strength' - and that's why the Psalmist could say in 35:2, he actually implored God: 'Take hold of your shield and buckler, and stand up for my help'. Isn't that what we've been thinking in Ephesians? To stand in the strength of the Lord.

'His truth', if you look at verse 4, 'His truth shall be thy shield and buckler' - His truth is our strength. It is God's word, we ought to rest upon it, we ought to hide underneath it - and our protection always will be in dwelling in God. Now let me ask you, as we close today - we've much more in this Psalm to study and we'll do it in the weeks that lie ahead - but from verses 1 to 4 can I ask you: are you dwelling on the character of God? Do you want protection from this life? Do you want to be shielded from the nervous disorders that everyone is falling around with among the people of God and among this world? Do you want them not to come near your dwelling? The only way is found in verse 9 and verse 1: Make God your habitation, live in God, dwell on the character of God, shelter underneath God's tender wing and rest in the strength of God's word - and if you do that nothing will touch you!

Will you do it? Will you draw near to God and let Him draw near to you? In doing that, though the sticks and stones of trials of life may touch your flesh, they will never penetrate your soul. As the apostle said: 'Though the outward man perish, the inner will be strengthened day by day'.

Let's bow our heads, and as you do so - none of us are exempt from trials and troubles, take comfort from these words as we pray together: Father, we thank Thee that God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. In other words, Lord, if the carpet is pulled from under us we know that God's Spirit cannot be pulled out of us. Though disease eat our flesh, nothing can eat our soul. Though we forget God in senility, God will not forget us for all eternity. Our Father, help us to dwell, abide, and lodge under Thy shadow, beneath Thy wing, and abide under the truth that is a strong shield. Amen.

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Psalm 91: The Only Safe Place - Chapter 2

"Getting Through Life"

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Psalm 91, and let's read the whole Psalm together. As we read it let's think of our title: 'Getting through Life', let's keep that at the forefront of our mind as we read the words that the Psalmist has to say. Verse 1: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation".

In Job chapter 5 and verse 7 we read these words: "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward". One of the greatest problems that we all face is suffering and trouble, and one of the truest statements ever made was that statement by Job. It is a problem that we all face now or, if not now, that we will face at some time. It is inevitable, it is as clear and plain as the law of gravity, that we will face trouble in this lifetime. But what perhaps is not so clear, and even not clear to some believers, is how we will face that problem, how we will face the trouble that we will enter into. The question begs, in the light of Scripture, in the light of this testimony that we are to have of the hope that is within us: how do we, as believers, get through life? How do we get through the trouble? How do we survive the perplexities, the illnesses, the mental and physical and spiritual trials that face us day by day?

Many believers are confused as to how to react to problems. What do we do? What do we seek when we are in problems? Do we seek, and is it right to seek, to be delivered out of our problems? Some go to the extreme lengths of a health and wealth gospel that says that not only are you to be delivered out of your problems, but if you're in problems you're not spiritual - and you've to seek a lifestyle that is rich and perfectly healthy, and if you don't have that you're not pleasing God in your life. They say you should never experience suffering!

Perhaps this confusion of how believers ought to react in the face of trouble explains the way believers, the differing ways, in which we do face problems. Perhaps the way we face trouble indicates something of our value system. Some people unconsciously seem to adhere to a philosophy that life is only going well, life is only full, life is only satisfying, when it's healthy and when it's prosperous. You may not sign the card of doctrinal faith of the health and wealth gospel, but perhaps in the deep subconscious of your mind you do believe that the only life that is worth living is a healthy life and a prosperous life - and, as the saying goes, health is wealth. Now, there is a great danger in that mindset - and we must be very cautious as we come to this subject of suffering.

First of all I want to say that I am not saying that God cannot deliver us out of problems and troubles, and illness and trials - I believe that our God is sovereign, our God is omnipotent, and our God can do anything! God can, and God does, heal - but is it our right to have God deliver us out of our problems? Ought we to ask God to just lift us out of everything that perplexes us and tries us? Yes, He can; yes, He often does - but the big question that, perhaps for many in this gathering today, that is flashing in our minds and in our hearts in fluorescent red lights is: what happens when He doesn't? For perhaps that is the majority of people - not everyone is healed, not everyone is lifted out of a troubling situation. Many people who come to God, and seek God to deliver them, seek God to heal them, are never delivered, are never healed.

So what we do? Do we just say: 'Well, this thing is a farce! This Christianity is counterfeit! Here we have a God who says: 'I'll deliver you, I'll look after you. The pestilence will not come near your door, it'll not touch you. This disease, this war, this famine, whatever it may be, won't come nigh thy dwelling' - and here I am sitting in my dwelling with a disease, with a pestilence - what's wrong? Does it not work? Perhaps we ask the question, rhetorically, of the Psalmist: 'Where is thy God?'

Well, I believe what this Psalm says is simply - the tone right throughout it is: God delivers us in trouble - in trouble, not out of it. The thesis is in verses 1 to 4, that we looked at last week, if you dwell in the secret place of the Most High, if you abide under the shadow of the Almighty, if you put yourself under the wing - verse 4 - of God, under His wings, trusting, and under the shield and buckler of His truth, you can be sure that - even though you go through trouble - God is with you! That is the point: it is to know the presence of God through trouble. It is to know, yes, you will go through trouble, but that particular trouble need not go through you! The proposition that the Psalmist is making is this: dwell in God, trust in God, make God your habitation, make God your daily environment, the actual place that you dwell in - let God dwell in you, by His word in your heart, richly. If you walk in faith like this, it'll not matter what you face: you will be protected! In other words, the central idea is: God is with His trusting people. God is with us! If God is with us, and God is for us, and God is in us, what and who can be against us?

What an affirmation at the beginning of a week. What an affirmation when we know not what the next seven days will hold for us, and when we look back on the last seven days and many unpredictable things happened to us that were out of our mind - not out of the mind of God, but things that we could never conceive of. We know that in an hour our whole lives can be changed, and it's awful! If we have no faith in God we are of all men most miserable! But if we dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and if we concentrate on the great character of our God, and make God our dwelling place, we can know that we are protected - not by being lifted out of our problems, but this is greater, this is far greater than deliverance: this is being in the midst of all hell and knowing that God is with you!

So, I hope you see that we do not seek to be transported to a place where there is no suffering - but we actually go through all this life and this experience, and there is the ability, in the Lord Jesus Christ, to survive to the glory of God whose power and whose love can bring us through. That is how we get through life. The first thing I want to leave with you today, from verse 5 right through to verse 13, is: what we will be protected from. Let's look at this, for this is a mighty list of threats - 'Life's Threats', I've called it - the things that life can bring upon us. Look at them, verse 5 and 6: 'Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday'.

Now that's an amazing verse, verse 5: 'Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror'. Look at those two words for a moment: 'afraid for terror' - now that's illogical, isn't it? That is not reasonable, that does not fit in with our natural responses, that when you're in terror - in other words when you find yourself day-dreaming, walking across the road, and you turn around and you see a juggernaut coming towards you, the terror in you makes

you afraid and the fear takes you off the road as quick as you can. It's natural, it's our natural response mechanisms - but here we have something not natural, but something spiritual. For the Psalmist says: 'You shall not be afraid for the terror' - very strange, isn't it? I'll tell you, it's very strange in a world that is wrecked with fear, in a church that is absolutely saturated in anxiety and fear, and anxiousness and nervousness of every conceivable kind - yet God is saying: 'In the midst of terror I am ordering you not to be afraid'!

Now why, how on earth can that be possible? This is how it is possible: God is with you, why do you need to be afraid? God is there, and there is no terror that can overtake God - and if you're going through this terrible, terrible thing you ought not to be afraid because God is with you! Yes, you're going through this thing - but the implication is that you ought not to be touched by the fear of it. In Isaiah chapter 43 and verse 2 you find that sentiment in these verses, listen to this: 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee'. When you go through, not when you get lifted out you'll not be burnt, not when you get saved by the lifeguard, spiritually speaking, you'll not drown - no! As you actually go through this terrible thing, God will save you in the midst of it.

Are we not told that no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper? That's a wonderful truth, isn't it? It doesn't say that there'll be no weapon used against us - the weapon used against us will be used, and he will do all in his power as the enemy to use it and use it well, but if we're trusting under the wing of God it shall not prosper! That attitude is embodied by the prophet Habakkuk in chapter 3 and verses 17 and 18, and this is wonderful - how you can take this way of life, this way of thinking, and attitude of heart, and actually personify it in a day by day walk! That's what matters, can you actually channel these thoughts, this philosophy of life, into reality? Does it work, can it work in a world like ours? Well, listen to this: 'Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation'. Now, that is illogical, it is nonsensical, in fact to the world it is absolute idiocy and foolishness - but the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men!

Here you have it: it's not deliverance out of, but it's deliverance in the midst of. What am I talking about? I'm talking about Daniel, look at him being lowered into a den of lions - and what did God do? Did God send lightning down from heaven and burn up, did He fry the lions for Daniel? No. Did He open a trap door in the bottom of the den and let them drop out? No, He didn't. He didn't remove the lions, and in fact Daniel had to go through the lions - but what He did remove was their bite! Do you see it? The three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, did God deliver them miraculously in the last microsecond just before they went into the fiery furnace? No, He didn't. God let them - yea, in His sovereignty I would say made them - go through the fiery furnace, but what could it not do? Burn them!

Do you see this? To actually go through something like this, something terrible, yet not be afraid - why? Because you're dwelling under the wing, under the shield of God. Now let's be practical about this, verse 6, for the Psalmist actually outlines specific things that we will or may go through. 'The terror by night', verse 5, 'nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor the destruction that wasteth in noonday'. So, you have two scenarios there: something that comes in the nighttime, and something that comes in the daytime. There is something that walks in darkness, and there is something that wastes at noonday.

Now, look at the walking in darkness, look at that for a moment. Something in darkness, it is shrouded in mystery - do you know what I believe the Spirit of God is saying here? That this thing in the darkness is shrouded in mystery with regards to its cause and regards to its cure. It's coming in the darkness, it's like a

stranger stabbing in the night. You don't know where it's coming from and you can't do anything about it, it has just walked into your life out of darkness and has shrouded you in darkness! What am I talking about? Well, let's be brutally realistic here: men have been studying cancer for decades now, millions upon millions of pounds have been poured into it, and they still don't know what is causing it and they still don't know what to do to cure it. Maybe you're walking through that darkness, isn't it wonderful to know that God is sufficient for cancer? Isn't it? Something shrouded in mystery, something that hits and walks through the richest house, the richest palace, and the poorest shambles in the world - yet God, our God, is able for these things! Foot and mouth [disease] - it's been away from the Sixties, and all of a sudden it just appears out of nowhere. It can be carried in your nostrils, it can be blown across the ocean, no-one knows the cause of it, and farmers today and the government doesn't know the cure of it - yet God is sufficient for these things!

There are things that walk in darkness, but there are things that waste at noonday. Do you know what I believe he's saying here? In noonday you can see things, and there are things that enter into our lives and we know the cause of it, we know where they've come from, we know who has brought them, we know all the reasons about them - we maybe even know the cure - but yet we're still going through them. We can't understand how a certain person could do this certain thing to us, how this thing that we've always protected ourselves against could come. In an Old Testament context it could be famine: you know where it's come from, it's come from a lack of rain; you know the cure, you need rain - but the cure's not coming! It could be war in an Old Testament context: you know where it's coming from, it's coming from hate, but yet there's nothing can be done about it.

Whether it is this walking in darkness, a mysterious thing that has come upon your life, or it is this wasting day by day, moment by moment, at noonday - you know where it's coming from, you know how it can be fixed, but it just won't go away - listen! You can be protected by God in that thing! The puritan preachers, I am led to believe, during the plagues of London, when no-one else was doing it, came out of their hiding place to preach mercy and to preach judgement to the dying. You might say: 'Well, they believed they would be free from this thing, didn't they?' - no they didn't! They didn't believe that, they're not foolish enough to believe that they could walk through the plagues and the dirt and not get all those diseases, just like any human being. They were human beings too! But I'll tell you what they did believe: that the worst thing that could happen them was that they contracted the disease, they died, and they went to glory to be with Christ which is far better.

You see? Do you see that eternal perspective? That is what the Psalmist has! He is not looking at temporal things, he is looking at the eternal - and he's looking that the worst thing that can happen to me can never ever destroy my soul. That is why our Lord said: 'Do not fear him that can kill the body, do not fear the disease that can kill the body, do not fear the men who can kill your body - but fear God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell'. The antithesis of that for a believer is this: we ought not - now, I'm not saying I don't fear anything, I fear everything, that's my problem, but I am ministering to myself as I look into this. This is awesome, this is the faith that a believer can have - why? Because his God is so great that He's not just able outside of a problem, but He's able right in the bowels of a problem!

Though cancer may eat your flesh, it cannot eat your soul. Though Alzheimer's may make you forget, God will never forget you. Isn't that where it's at? Isn't it? Not running around healing everybody, that's not where it's at - that is a consumer Christianity. Do you know what that does? It robs some of the richest blessings from the theology of suffering that you find in the word of God. These men are thieves of God's blessings!

In verse 7 he says: '[Because of this] a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee'. You know, it doesn't say 'a thousand', because it's not a number that's there really in the Hebrew, it's an expression for infinity - but the translators just put down 'a thousand' to give us a concept of what he's talking about. It's really a myriad, a large number that no-one can number, will fall at

your side. What does he mean? One commentator put it like this: 'Those that preserve their purity in times of general corruption, may trust God with their safety in times of general desolation'. What does that mean? If you're not just running to God when you get into trouble, but running to God everyday, when the trouble comes you may go through the fires, the awful fires of purification, but God will be with you. Isn't that amazing?

Like Noah, it says in the book of Genesis that Noah was perfect in his generation, do you know what that means? Literally in the Hebrew 'he was without blemish', in other words when all the rest of humanity was corrupting themselves with one another, this man Noah found grace in the eyes of God because he wouldn't be blemished by it - and when the flood came, who was in the Ark? No wonder Martin Luther - and remember he had all of the Roman Catholic Church, and all its hordes of hell against him, and he had the majority of Europe at his back ready for his blood - yet he could write: 'Though they kill, God's truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever'. Do we really live like that? Do we really live in the light of eternity? Do we really live as the hymn writer says:

'Our God His chosen people saves,
Amongst the dead, amidst the graves'?

Do we believe that? That though millions around us are falling by our side, like the rebellion of Korah. Remember he kindled strange fire unto the Lord? You remember he was trying to take over from Aaron and from Moses? The Lord opened the ground and swallowed them into the very depths of hell, and then a crowd followed - they didn't see the foolishness of their ways, and walked in their ways the very next day. It says that that great company, from the periphery of that company, started to fall with the plague one by one by one. Imagine if you were in the middle, and all you could see was the heads falling one by one by one! Then Aaron and Moses came before the Lord, and they bowed to the ground and cried - and the plague stopped! Now you imagine, for one moment, that you are standing there and there's dead before you, and living behind you. That would fairly bring it home, wouldn't it? 'A thousand may fall at your side, but it shall not come nigh thee'.

Imagine the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, and Egypt behind them, they're going through the middle and they get to the shore. It seems that the chariots - remember they weren't in chariots - are gaining ground on them and they fear for their lives. Let's put this into reality: they fear for their children and their grandchildren. There they are, and God closes the clefts of the sea and drowns them! 'A thousand shall fall at thy side, but this will not come nigh thee', verse 8, 'only with your eyes you'll see it'. You mightn't see deliverance out of it, but God promises, my friend, if you trust Him you can see deliverance in it. The righteous are saved from disaster, they are made to be only spectators, they're made to see their deliverance in the midst of a situation. Your own safety, your own complete security, the perfect justice of God in the very midst of a terrible situation, that enables you not to fear.

Then in verse 9 to 12 the Psalmist reflects as if to make sure that in the midst of all these promises of how God will protect you right in the middle of trouble, just in case you forget that there is a condition. That condition of all these promises is verse 1 to 4, and he reminds us in verse 9: 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation'. Now I'm not talking about eternal salvation here, don't get this into your head. I am talking about your heart, day by day, not being touched by fear, not being touched by anxiety and the stresses and strains and nervous complaints of life - that's what I'm talking about. Let me say from the word of God that if you are not dwelling under the shadow of the Almighty, if you are not under His wings, if you're not making the Most High God our refuge your habitation, don't think you'll be protected in trouble - don't think it!

This is how the Christian stands firm. This is how, when the world goes to pieces, the Christian can stand - and just as we've been studying in Ephesians chapter 6, when all the smoke and the blood and the stench of battle drops, he is left standing. I'll finish with verse 10, there is much more to go on with but we'll take it into next week again. He says: 'There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling'. 'No evil befall thee' - does that not say that it won't touch you? Does that not say that you'll not go through these things? No, it doesn't. If you look down at verse 15: 'He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble'. The inference is 'I will deliver him in trouble' - so you're in the trouble, but the evil thing shall not touch you.

What the Psalmist is talking about here is not safety in a safe world. You hear some Christians, and you would think that they were walking around in this little cocoon of safety and nothing could touch them, nothing could come near them, and everywhere they move they just push all troubles and trials away from their presence. It's not like that! 'As you go through the waters I will be with you', that's the sense of the Psalm. Not safety in a safe world, but what it does mean - it's not no afflictions, but no evil! No evil shall befall thee! If afflictions touch the flesh, evil touches the spirit.

Isn't this wonderful? The miracle of it all is: it's at your very door. 'No evil...shall come nigh thy dwelling'. As we close let's, for one moment, make this very practical. This is something that is real for 21st century living. It is real for your dwelling, your home - yes, home! When you go home now, and you get the Sunday dinner, and all the facade of your Christianity falls, and you go into real life with the children, and you go into real life with the pressures of family members, and all the trials and illnesses that you face - when you go home right now, this promise, this protection of God can be with you in your home! Isn't that wonderful? In your workplace, in your environment - see where they're all swearing, the dirty jokes, all the things that you have to put up with, all the double-dealing, the ducking and diving, all the pushing of the rules to the furthest extreme - in the midst of that, and you're suffering, perhaps, because you're taking your stand for God, God can be with you in that! Don't look for Him to lift you out! It is greater glory for Him if you stay in it and stand in it!

It's official, it's personal, and it's constant - He shall give thee protection over thee in all thy ways. Let's bow our heads, and there are no exceptions here today to trouble, problems. If we are not facing them red hot now, we will some time. So it's not a question of whether it will happen, but how we will face it when it does happen. Will you trust Him? I'm not asking you not to cry, the Psalmist isn't asking you not to be heartbroken - he's not asking for those things. He's not asking for the stiff upper stoic lip, that's not what he's saying. He's saying this: 'Trust Me in it, and the damage that comes to people that don't trust in Me will not come to you. You'll have pain, you'll have heartache, you'll have hurt - but I will see you through. I will be there with you, if you put Me as your habitation'. Do you know what that word 'habitation' means? 'To lodge in' - an overnight stay, in other words just resting in God. Now, please, while we're in the quietness step into faith with God and take Him as your habitation.

Father, we pray that You will help all of us to trust You. Lord, it is so hard - the terrors are terrible, but yet it is possible to not be afraid if we're resting under Thy shadow, and under Thy wing. Lord, none of us could claim to have totally attained any of this, but we long to know more for one reason - not that we get an easy ride, for we know that we will go through the waters, we will go through the fire - but what we long for is that in the very worst of our times, that Thy great name may be glorified, that people may look at our broken lives and say: 'God has brought him or her through'. So help us Lord, Amen.

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Psalm 91: The Only Safe Place - Chapter 3
"God's Guardians And Guarantees"

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Let us turn to Psalm 91. Psalm 91, and this is our third study - it may be, hopefully, our final study in this Psalm as we look at it together. Let's take time to read the Psalm, Psalm 91: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord", of Jehovah, "He is my refuge and my fortress: my God", Elohim, "in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation".

We looked in our first study at the safest place to be in all the world. Last week we looked at some more verses of this Psalm, and we looked at how you survive, how you get through life, with all that life throws at you. This week we're going to look at 'God's Guardians With Their Guarantees', the guardians of God with their guarantees.

It's true, isn't it, that travelling from theory to reality is a long journey. Travelling from theory to reality is a long journey. As one preacher put it, it is a 16 inch journey from your head to your heart, actually appropriating the truths of God into your everyday life - that when you face the problems that we've been talking about in recent days, you face them and that theory becomes your practice. That's what we've been studying in the book of Ephesians for the past year and a half or so, and we've seen in the first three chapters of Ephesians the theory, the doctrine, then the second half is the practice: how this doctrine affects your life.

As we look at this Psalm it's exactly the same, it's a long journey travelling from theory to the reality of how you face these problems in life. That was illustrated to me after I preached the last two weeks, and discussing these truths with some people - even in the foyer after the meeting - they were saying to me, and I was concurring with them and agreeing with them, it's so hard, isn't it? It's alright standing up here pontificating about the theory, but it's a different thing when you're in the reality, actually appropriating these truths and living by them. It's a different thing when you're faced, staring eyeball to eyeball, with these troubles. We might be able to say that, in that instance, talk is cheap! It's alright preaching on Psalm 91, but what do you do when that trouble is facing you? Do you really remember these things? I mean, let's be practical: do these eternal truths really kick in and do they come to your aid? Does God shelter you under His wing? Do you find that God brings you His protection and His peace when you are faced with the trouble? Does it work?

You might say: 'Well, I don't want to wait until I'm in a problem to find out whether this works or not. I want to know it works. I want some kind of guarantee, some kind of assurance, that this will work. I don't want to realise it doesn't work when it's too late!'. How do we answer that? Because that's a fair assumption that people will take when they hear these truths and go away and say: 'Well, it's alright for him, he's not experiencing what I'm experiencing. When you're in it, it's a different matter altogether!'.

Francis Schaffer, who you might term as a Christian theologian - or perhaps more correctly a Christian philosopher, in his last few months of life was lecturing in a Christian Bible College. He was asked the question by some of these highbrow students: 'Why are you a Christian?'. Why are you a Christian? They were all sitting with pen and paper waiting for a great philosophical or theological explanation, an apologetic renunciation of everything else, and a defence of Christendom. Do you know what he said? 'I am a Christian because it is the truth'. Now, isn't that it? I am a Christian because it is the truth. The person I heard telling this story was in the gathering, as he heard it he said it just enthused him. It was like an electric bolt to his head, he felt: 'That's it! It's the truth! Let's go and tell them! It's the truth, let's go into the world, we've got the truth!'.

Therefore there are two things we need to lay down as we look at this Psalm. First of all: that our duty is not to grapple with the truth, our duty is to state the truth. We have to preach the truth, and the truth is the word of God. No matter how hard the truth is, no matter in the reception of the truth how uncomfortable it becomes to us as human beings, and how difficult we find it is to live up to the truth, it does not absolve us of preaching the truth.

Now, that's the first thing: we must preach it. The second thing is our - your - responsibility of when you hear the truth, bringing your life into line with the truth. Now, I am not under the false assumption that many of us, including myself when I read this Psalm, find a lot of the truths very difficult to implement into my life and put into practice. Therefore I feel, perhaps, that we need a bit of a push - and I think the Psalmist believed that, that we need a bit of an assurance, we need a bit of a guarantee from God. 'How can I know', perhaps the Psalmist is saying in his heart, 'that this will work? How can I know that when I'm faced with trouble, faced with disease, faced with problems, faced with tribulation, faced with enemies, that You are actually going to do this? How can I know?'.

Therefore He gives us His guardians, and He gives us His guarantees. The thesis of this Psalm, the main point of Psalm 91 and the verses that we will look at today in the short time that we have left, is this: God has provided protectors, and God has provided His promises that assure us of His protection. How can I know? God has provided us protectors! How can I know? God has promised you that He will provide protectors and that He will protect you.

So let's look at this, let's look at how does God protect us. Now in verses 9 to 12 we saw last week that God reinforces, and as if - in case we forget - in verse 9, in case we forget that there is a condition on these promises in this Psalm, which is verses 1 to 4: you've got to dwell in the secret place of the Most High, you've got to abide under the shadow of the Almighty. In case, as you're going through the rest of the verses about all the diseases that you're protected from, and everything that could happen to you that's not going to happen to you because you're in God - in case you forget that there's a condition, in verse 9 he says: 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation' - 'I'm reminding you that this isn't unconditional. You have got to abide under the shadow of the Almighty, you have got to dwell in the secret place. You have got to make the Lord who has been my refuge, your refuge, your habitation - the Most High. When you make Him your habitation, the one who is Most High takes you out of everything, above everything, because He is Most High'.

Therefore we need not forget that this is the requirement that is before us, the conditions. But if we fulfil those conditions and abide in God, we will have God's protectors, God's divine protectors. Look at these verses, verse 11: 'He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways'. In verse 10 he says: 'There shall no evil befall thee', and we saw last week that that is not safety in a safe world. In other words God is not going to change this world just for you, you're in the world, you've got to go through the world - but the Lord has said to us: 'When you go through the waters, I will be with you. When you go through the fire, I will be with you in the fire'.

Daniel was in the lion's den, He took away the bite, but he still had to go into the lion's den. Now how can that be so? Are we just left up to our positive thinking when we're in the midst of trouble, that we know that it's not no afflictions, but it's no evil touching us? How can we know that the evil will not come nigh our dwelling? How can we know that in the real realm that we are living in, with all the problems, that we will have real protection at our very back door?

There's an interesting story that's told by C.H. Spurgeon. In 1854 he was just called to the neighbourhood of the Metropolitan Tabernacle that he served in for so many years, there in London. He had only laboured in that area for one year when the area was visited by Asiatic Cholera. He writes in his diaries that day-by-day he was burying folk, every single day, with this sickness. He notes that he became wearied himself, he says actually: 'I became sick of heart, because not only were my congregation falling, but my own friends fell one by one'. Eventually, as he was burying day-by-day, he began to feel that he was sickening a little bit like them, and he felt that he was coming down with the same sickness. Into the bargain he felt burdened with such a heavy burden to bear in ministering to these folk who were bereaved. He felt, he says, that he was sinking down underneath this. One day he recounts that, returning mournfully from one of those said funerals, curiosity led him to read a paper in a shoemaker's window on the Dover Road. Do you know what the newspaper said? Verse 9 and 10! 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling'. He said: 'Immediately relief and faith was applied to my heart, and I felt I was girt with immortality! I felt that God had just come down with His word and put a cloak of armour around me, that nothing could touch me' - that is what this word ought to do for you! It ought to gird you with immortality! It ought to make you realise that no matter what touches me, nothing can touch me out of the will of God if I put myself under the shadow of God! Nothing can harm me: 'I am immortal', as the puritan says, 'until God says I must go'.

How can we be sure? It's through God's protectors as angels, that we've read about in verse 11 - He gives His angels charge over us. Hebrews 1 and verse 14 says: 'Are they', angels, 'not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?'. Angels are our servants - that's remarkable, isn't it? When you go into the Old Testament Scriptures, and you look at what angels did there and the records of them, you find that many times they appear as warriors. One of the most prominent occurrences of that is in Joshua 5 and verse 13, by Jericho. There Joshua is and the Captain of the Lord of Hosts stands before him with his sword unsheathed - an angel! Indeed, I believe, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Angel of the Lord Himself - but yet there is a picture of an angelic being as a warrior, as an armour of God.

We read in Job that these angels witnessed the creation of the world: 'When the morning stars', angels, 'sang together, and all the sons of God', angels, 'shouted for joy?'. Warriors, beings that were present at the very beginning of all creation. As we go into the New Testament we find that they appear when the supernatural world breaks into the natural world. When there are cataclysmic events, spiritually speaking, taking place in humanity and in our world, angels appear - and the natural makes way for the supernatural. You can see that by the Gospels, the fact that angels appeared at the Lord's first coming, and as you go into the book of Revelation you find that angels will appear again at His second coming. You look through the Gospels at His birth, there are the angels declaring the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. You go to His resurrection, you find them there - an angel in the tomb, an angel rolling away the stone. Before His death in Gethsemane, as He

peers into that cup that He must drink, as all of that agony was finished, then an angel came and strengthened Him. In Acts we read at His ascension that there were two men clad in garments of white, white apparel, beside the Lord as He ascended into glory.

These are the beings that we're talking about. We haven't even touched, we're only dipping our toe into the shallow water of what these angels are really like. There are other beings, cherubim and seraphim, that are reserved specifically for God alone. But these angels are great, awesome beings, ministering spirits - and the miraculous thing about it is this: they're there for us! The Lord said in Matthew 18 and verse 10: 'Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven'. I know specifically He was speaking, perhaps, of children - but I believe when the Lord speaks of 'little ones' He was speaking of His ones. Our angels, your angels, continually behold the face of our Father in glory. Guardian angels who are, the word of God says, an expression of the love of God to His little ones.

You read in 1 Corinthians 11, with regard to headship and head covering, that the angels look down at decorum within the assembly. These are great beings! They're looking down at this very moment at how we are conducting ourselves in the church of God which we are! In Revelation we find that they are the mediators of God's judgement, they are the ones that announce and declare the judgement of God. We find them in Acts acting on behalf of the Apostles, making God's will known to men. It's amazing that there are creatures such as this, but we don't worship them. We must say that: we don't worship them. They are great beings, but we do not worship them - and in fact Paul rebuked worshipping angels, because some of the Gnostics, a sect of Christianity, a heretical sect in the early days, were starting to worship angels. He had to declare that Christ was made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they!

Now the mistake that I don't want you to make going away from this meeting this morning is to do what a lot of Christians do, and that is getting obsessed with angels. You miss the point when you get obsessed with angels! They are our guardians, they are powerful beings, but what does this Psalm say they are? They are the figure of God's protection of your life! If you see the angels and don't see God's protection you're missing the whole point! You see, what God is wanting us to do through this Psalm is to look by the angels, to recognise that Christ has ordained these angels to guard us. They are not our focus, His protection of us is our focus, they are only the means of it! We're not to be angel-spotting, and 'I've seen an angel', and 'An angel talked to me about this, and that, and the other'!

What does God want us to do through this Psalm? What have we been saying? He wants us to see past the temporal, past the disease, past the cancer, past the disability, past the problems in work, past distress in the home from children or parents, or husband or wife - He wants us to see past, and to see that God is able! If we fail to see past, and get taken up with all the angels and their wee wings that we think they have, we're missing the point.

Do you see it? Are you starting to get an eternal perspective? It's not 'Have you seen an angel?', but 'Have you seen God's protecting power in your life?'. Let me give you an illustration of this, and I'm going to take my time - we'll be into next week by the looks of things, again. Second Kings and chapter 6, if you want to turn to it, 2 Kings chapter 6 verses 16 and 17. Elisha's servant is seeing the armies round about the city, and it's making him afraid, and Elisha knows that his servant is afraid. His servant turns round to him, and does this capitulate what your expression is, and the voice of your heart when you face problems? 'What will we do? What are we going to do? Look at all these armies, everything's against me, everything's coming in around me. I'm getting that feeling, psychologically, of claustrophobia. I don't know where to go, I don't know what to do. What will we do?'. 'And Elisha answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And

the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha'.

Now, what did he need to see? Did he need to see angels? No! He needed to see that they that are with us are more than they that are with them. That's what you need to see. Do you see everything that's against you? They that are with you are more than they that are with them! Is that not true my friend? That is that faith injected from the word of God into your heart, to realise that God is for you! And if God is for you nothing can be against you! To realise that the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivers them!

Verse 11: '[They are] given charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways' - in all thy ways. I think that's beautiful, you know. Nothing is too small, in your minor problems, in your major problems, in everything in life there is a genuine guarantee that if you trust in God - don't try and prove God: 'Lord, I want to see an angel today to know that You're protecting me', for if you do that and if you're dabbling in the supernatural in the sense of trying to prove God and see things and hear things, there is a great danger that you commit the sin that the devil committed as he tempted the Lord Jesus when he quoted this same verse. Because he said: 'You throw Yourself off the temple, and He says' - Psalm 91, and the devil quoted the verse - 'He shall give His angels charge over thee' - and he left out these words 'to keep thee in all thy ways' - 'They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone'. If the Lord, you know, was throwing Himself off the temple for the devil, He wouldn't have been keeping Himself in the way of God, would He? That's why the devil left it out. But what was the verse that the Lord quoted to him? 'Thou shalt not test...' - do you want to see angels? Do you want Me to jump off the temple? Don't test God!

What do we do? We don't test Him, we trust Him! It says: 'They shall bear thee up' - do you know what that picture is? I think it's the picture of a mother holding up a sick child in her arms. As the Psalmist said: 'When I said, My foot slippeth' - 'I'm going down, Lord. Lord, I'm going, I can't hold myself, I'm getting bogged down with all these problems' - when I say that: 'Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up!' 'Thou shalt not dash thy foot against a stone' - I mean, that's not a big deal, is it? Tripping over a kerb stone and cracking your toe - the Lord is saying: 'Even those small things, I will look after you in'.

Its official: 'He shall give His angels charge over thee'. It's personal: 'over thee'. It is constant: 'in all thy ways'. To tread, look at verse 13, tread upon the lion and the cobra - all evil, a general metaphor for protection from deadly attacks, poisonous venom of a serpent's fangs. The cobra which can't hear its charmers, nobody can tame it, but God can tame it! Is that not a picture of Satan, who is called in the word of God a roaring lion, an old serpent, a red dragon. What the word of God is saying is: even the fiercest, the strongest, enemy of God and man can be trampled!

What must it have been, as I finish, what must it have been for the Romans? Paul writes them a letter, and we can't really enter into the problems that they were facing day-by-day: the persecution, all the tribulation that they were facing. Paul writes them a letter, and in chapter 16 he sends all the greetings to the folk within the church, and then in verse 20 at the very end - you can see them, I can imagine them sitting at the edge of their seat waiting: 'What does Paul have to say to me finally?'. He says: 'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly'. What must that have been!

If you dwell in God, my friend, you will have protection from Satan's traps, you will have inoculation from sin's diseases, you will have deliverance from fear in the night and anxiety by day, you will have the prospect of the punishment of your enemies - you don't need to worry about retribution, for God is the Judge of all. You will have a holy domestic home if you dwell in God. You will have the 'supernatural secret service' at your elbow. You will have victory over every enemy, and you will have complete protection in whatever befalls you.

Can I ask you, this is the truth now - this isn't experience speaking, this is the truth: what is there to worry about? What is there to worry about? May it penetrate your heart and soul today.

Let us bow our heads, in these closing moments ask yourself: 'Have I let, or can I let, the word of God transfuse into my heart?'. My friend, if you do let it, it will make all the difference. Father, we thank Thee for the word of God, and for the help it is to us. Lord we pray that, as we have now known the truth, that through knowledge of the truth that the truth may make us free. If we let it, and let the Holy Ghost of God work in our hearts, and weave this truth around our souls, we shall be free indeed. Bless us now we pray, and bring us back under the Gospel [this evening] and save souls, we pray in the Saviour's name. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - April 2001

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Psalm 91: The Only Safe Place - Chapter 4

"A God Of His Word"

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Psalm 91: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation".

Let's bow for a word of prayer together: Father, we thank Thee for the word of the Living God. We thank Thee that it strengthens us, it comforts us, it encourages us, it feeds us and gives us all that we need. To this end we come in need, emptied that Thou shouldst fill us. We come hungry, thirsty, for we know that them that hunger and thirst after righteousness, they shall be filled. Minister to us by Thy Spirit, we pray, and let us hear Thy voice. In the Saviour's name, Amen.

I've entitled my message this morning: 'A God of His Word'. We often hear what it is to be a man of your word and, here in this Psalm in verses 14 to 16 that we will concentrate on today, we find that our God is a God of His word. What else could we want in trouble? What else could we ask for in trial and in tribulation than to have the promise of God? Not only His promise, but His promise specifically of protection as we go through problems.

In the last three verses of this Psalm, if you look down at it - 14, 15 and 16 - you have six promises. A six-fold promise of God. One of the problems that we have as the church, and as individual believers trying to live in a modern, contemporary age, is that it is a great temptation to imbibe and to let infiltrate upon our hearts the sceptic mind that we find within our age. We often hear it said that it is hard to trust anybody today, it's hard to take any man or woman's word for any matter. We have a tendency inbuilt within us to look at the small print, to question everything, to [ask] within ourselves is something to good to be true - 'There must be something more, this cannot be real'.

If it's hard to trust our individual brothers and sisters in humanity, we must say that it is even harder to trust God at times - for God's word cannot audibly be heard, God cannot be seen in order that we grab hold of Him and put our trust in Him. The stakes are even greater when we are asked not only to trust God in the matter of a financial deal, or a business agreement, but we are asked to trust One we cannot see and cannot hear, upon peril of our lives. We are asked to stake our lives upon the word of God. That is a hard thing to do, but although it is hard the real question is this: is God a God of His word? Is God a God who can be

trusted? Do we run into the danger of questioning God, and questioning God's word, like Satan did in the garden? Eve and Adam fell into his trap when he said: 'Yea, hath God said? Has God really said this? Or if it seems that God has said this, is that exactly what God means? Can you really take that at face value?'

Indeed we find specifically, in regard to this Psalm, that Satan as he tempted the Lord Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew chapter 4 did exactly that - he diluted the word of God, he left part of the word of God - from these very verses - out in order that the Lord Jesus Christ, if He could possibly do it, (obviously the devil had a shot at Him) but that the Lord in some way could listen to the word of God, misinterpret the word of God, and act incorrectly upon the word of God, and fall because He was not trusting fully in the full word of God. Of course that is not possible for our Lord to do such a thing, but even as Satan tried to do it to our Saviour he will try to do it to us. He will try to make us selective in the application of the word of God. He will try, when troubles come upon us, to ask the question, to doubt God: whether He is a God of His word; whether He will come through for us; whether He will answer our prayers; whether His grace is sufficient for our need; whether He is strong enough to hold us up; whether He will go with us through the fire, through the water; when we go through the valley of the shadow of death, whether He will be with us, His rod and His staff to comfort us.

So the question I ask today is this: are we selective with God's promises when it comes to trouble? Or are we convinced, absolutely convinced, that the authority of the word of God, the medicine of Scripture, is enough for all our needs? To establish that faith within us the Holy Spirit gives us a six-fold promise of protection in verses 14 to 16 - He is promising His protection. Again, we must go over it, He is promising it if - if! - we make God our dwelling place, if we exercise trust and faith in Him who is our refuge and our strength. If we put our faith in His word He will protect us because He is a God of His word, because He honours His promises of protection.

Thomas Brooks, the great puritan, said: 'Men, many times, eat their words, but God will never eat His'. What else could be better? Let's face it: what else could we ask for in the midst of danger, in the midst of fear, in the midst of terrifying opposition from supernatural and natural means, what else could give us an assurance but the word of God Himself? John Flavel said: 'It is better to be as low as hell with a promise, than in paradise without one'. Do you believe that? Do you believe that? That God's promise means everything! Do you believe that God's promises are virtually His obligations that He imposes upon Himself? When He says in these three verses, six times, 'I will, I will, I will, I will, I will, I will', that He has limited Himself? Do you believe that? I believe it! I believe that God limits Himself to His word, because He chooses to do so!

If this is so, and I believe it is, we must ask the question that Martin Luther, the reformer, asked when he said: 'What greater rebellion, what greater impiety or insult to God can there be than not to believe His promises?'. So, what are these promises that we have before us today? Look at verses 14, 15 and 16 - and as you look at them you will see that God Himself is speaking, it is no longer the Psalmist. There is often confusion in verse 14 where we read: 'Because he hath set his love upon me', that 'he' is God and 'me' is me, but that is wrong - 'he' is the Christian and 'me' should be a capital 'M', God. It is God saying: 'Because this man has put his trust and faith in Me, and set his love upon Me, I will deliver him'.

So, how then can we be sure of God's protection? The first 'I will' - and I'm going to take you down the six 'I will's' in these three verses, God willing. First: 'I will deliver him', verse 14 - why? Consequence, condition: 'Because he has set his love upon me, I will deliver him' - do you know what that is? That is the intervening action of a sovereign God in our lives. Imagine: God steps out of eternity into time, and steps into my life to intervene with regards to the things that are going on. He will deliver us in that way, do you believe that? Yes! Why? Because God has said it! But there is a condition, and the condition is that you set your love upon Him - and that is a blessing that God only gives to them that love Him. It is not carte blanc for every Christian, every child of God, that when they face trouble, when they go through trouble, when they find

disease, when they find divorce, when all these things come upon them and they haven't asked for any of it, there is no guarantee that they will be alright - only if they trust God!

If you turn to Romans and chapter 8 for a moment, we find a verse that is quoted so much that it loses its meaning - and that is our problem. Romans 8 and verse 28: 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose'. To them that love Him! I sometimes meet unbelievers and they talk about the love of God surrounding them as they go through sickness and trial, they talk about an assurance that they have outside of Christ! It's impossible!

'O, to be without a Saviour!
How can it, can it be?
Like a ship without a rudder,
In the wild and stormy sea'.

You need Christ! You need to love Christ, you need to live in Christ - and it is only those who love Him, and who are called by Him for His purposes, that He can work all things together for their good. The word 'love', the word in the Psalm, it says: 'He has set his love upon me' - do you know what it literally means? A deep longing for God! A clinging to God, the deepest affection imaginable - it is a love, literally, that expresses a deep confidence and dependence on God. In other words, if you love God it will drive you to God, and if you're driven to God you'll be protected by God!

Isn't that what verse 9 means when it says: 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation'? Isn't that what verse 1 means? 'He that dwells' - literally 'he that lodges for a night, he that stays in God just like he stays in his home'. What do you do in your home? You go away [from here], you take off your fancy dresses and fancy suits, you put your slippers on and you go in and you rest. There is a bathroom and you go to it for cleansing, you go to it to take away the waste that life brings upon you. You go to the kitchen and you're fed there, as one said: 'You cannot starve a man who is feeding upon God's promises' - if you're in the kitchen of God, feeding upon His word, feeding upon the Living Bread, drinking from the blood of the Saviour, if you are there you will never starve! You rise the stairs, and put your head upon your bed, and sleep the sleep of the righteous. In the attic of God there is a source of treasure, a storehouse of everything that we need, in the grace of God that is according to the riches of Christ Jesus. There is a garden that we can go into for refreshing communion like Adam did, like Enoch did - and we are at home in God! Christian, are you at home in God? That is an awesome question: do you feed upon God? Do you rest in God? Do you go to God for cleansing? Do you go to God for communion? Do you go to God for everything that you need in this life? For that is what the Psalmist is speaking of: setting your love upon God, praying to God, seeking God, the deepest affection to live within God - a deep confidence that drives us into God!

Is that not what the Lord Jesus said when He said: 'If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him - we will live with him!' James said: 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation', or testing, 'for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him'. He says again: 'Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?'.

The first 'I will' is: 'I will deliver him, because he has set his love upon Me'. The second 'I will', look at verse 14: 'I will set him on high' - promise. What is the requirement? 'Because he hath known my name'. Now, there is security: 'I will set him on high'. Turn to Psalm 59 for a moment, and verse 1, very quickly - Psalm 59 and verse 1. Now, if you have a half decent Bible - and what I mean by that is not that the Bible isn't decent, but translation of the Bible and, indeed, a good copy with a margin in it - you will find in verse 1 of

Psalm 59 it says this in the margin: 'Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: set me on high from them that rise up against me'. God setting you on high! Isaiah says of the righteous that the righteous 'dwell on high, their place is a place of defence, the place where they live shall be the munition of the rocks: bread shall be given to them; his waters shall be sure'.

Now, what do you need when you're in trouble? What do you need when the enemies and diseases, and everything under the sun comes in upon you? You need the Most High God to lift you up and to lift you above your circumstances. What a blessing to know that great Pauline truth that we are in Christ, in Christ! We are blessed with all blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and what does Philippians say about our Lord Jesus Christ? 'God has highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name' - and that means this: if you are in Christ you are set high.

I remember reading on one occasion about what eagles do when they're flying, soaring in the sky, and the crows come down upon them and peck their wings and pester them in mid-flight - do you know what they do? They soar higher to an altitude that the crows cannot reach! That is what God does for us when we dwell underneath His wing. We are enabled by His grace to 'Be still and know that I am God, and I will be exalted among the heathen, and I will be exalted in the earth'. This is not a health and wealth gospel, sure it isn't? You'd wonder how some men get things - in fact, they don't get it in the word of God - but how they come to such conclusions: that everyone ought to be healed, that everyone ought to be rich, that everyone ought to be successful - otherwise 'there is sin', or they 'don't have enough faith'. But is that true faith? Is that really faith? In the light of this Psalm surely faith is not to believe for a miracle, but faith is to trust God when the miracles don't come! Is faith not Job? 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust him'!

Where does that faith come from? Where does that 'being set on high', the consequence, come from? 'Because he hath known my name' - the cause of it, he has known My name. As the Psalmist said: 'And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee'. Galatians, Paul said: 'But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?'. If this is the God that you have, why would you run back to the world? Why would you run to the gurus of psychology? Why would you run to the New Age movement? Why would you run anywhere except to God?

If you look at verse 1, we studied and what did we see? We saw exactly this: that the person that knows the name of God, the person that dwells in the name of God, is the person that He will set on high. What were the names of God there? Verse 1: 'Most High' - Elyon, the possessor of heaven and earth, over all the earth. 'The Almighty' - El-Shaddai - not 'great in strength', but here it means 'great in grace' - all-bountiful in the supply of all of our needs and our desires. Verse 2: 'Lord' - Jehovah, the covenant God, the eternal God, the unchanging, immutable God. Then finally 'God' - Elohim, the Creator of all the earth - there it is! If you've known His name, He will set you on high.

The Most High, what a place to dwell! Above all the storms of life, where nothing or no-one can harm you or reach you. Under the shadow of His wing, from the torment of the rays of the Mediterranean sun. Under His wing, underneath this shelter from the devil and all of his hordes of hell, to be under his wing and to know that the Lord is thy keeper - the Lord is thy shield upon thy right hand. He is saying that God's name should create faith in Him.

Thirdly - first: 'I will deliver him because he has set his love upon Me', second: 'I will deliver him on high because he hath known My name' - thirdly: 'I will answer him'. Cause? 'He calls on Me'. He shall answer - isn't that wonderful? What a promise! The Psalmist said: 'I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid'. Isaiah said: 'It came to pass, that before they call I will answer'!

The Lord Jesus Christ personified that, didn't He? It never ceases to amaze me how the God-man, God manifest in flesh - great is the mystery of it - in all His omnipotence, all-powerfulness, Almighty God, but as He knelt in Gethsemane - and I don't really particularly know, or want to try to express what He saw there, but I'll tell you this: He was near unto death. Hebrews says that 'in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, was heard' - that is our Saviour, my friend. He was delivered, He was set on high, He was answered by God - why? Because He called upon Him! That is what prayer is, it is an exercise of faith and dependence on God in the midst of trial - and ought we not to do so if our Lord did it?

Fourthly: 'I will be with him in trouble', verse 15. 'I will be with him in trouble' - you have intervening action of God in our lives, you have God's divine security in His very name, you have answered prayer when you call upon Him, and now He will be with you in trouble, which is companionship in your need! Someone there! You're looking for someone there, aren't you? The widow left without their soul-mate, an orphan by death or divorce, a single person hoping that one day that right person will come along their path, and all of these scenarios - people going through these experiences, and they need a companion - well, here is a companion: God Almighty, Elohim, El-Shaddai, Elyon, Jehovah says: 'I will be with thee!' 'Yea, though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, fear no evil: for I am with thee'. 'Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness'. 'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine!'

'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee' - He's not going to send another - 'I will be there...through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee'. Then we have the Christ of God, as He farewells His disciples, and says: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel, and lo I am with you always'. He will be with you in trouble.

Fifthly: 'I will deliver him, and honour him'. That is vindication, isn't it? Honour, Samuel says: 'For them that honour me, I will honour'. The Lord Jesus said: 'If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour'. Peter says: 'Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God'. Do you know that is saying? The resurrection that we will commemorate next Lord's Day is God's 'Amen' to all of His promises - full stop! Guarantee! Absolute assurance that God is sure, God is a Man of His word, and the resurrection is our assurance for everything - absolutely everything!

We all know that God never promised an easy time, but one thing He did promise - believer - was a safe arrival in Glory, to be there - and praise the Lord He'll get us there! He'll get us there in Glory, and when we see His face we shall be like Him, and that work that He began us, that He's continuing now, He will bring to completion. Now, if you believe that, what is there to fear?

Sixthly, and finally He says: 'I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation'. Do you know what that is? It is personal fulfilment, and satisfaction, and enjoyment, of salvation! You'd think you couldn't enjoy salvation to look at some people, isn't that right? But this is personal, individual satisfaction, joy, fulfilment, everything that you could need - by losing your life you find it in Christ! Verse 16, in the Old Testament long life was a specific promise for Old Testament saints. You would know that from the law in Exodus: 'Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee'. The prophets took that as a literal promise that if they stayed in the land, and they honoured God's promises, that He would bless them with long life within the land. That is a literal promise that will be fulfilled, as you see from Isaiah 65, in the future Messianic kingdom when:

'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun,
Doth its successive journeys run'.

But here, as we apply it to us, I believe we can do it in this way: it literally means 'length of days'. Proverbs says: 'By humility and fear of the Lord, are riches and honour and life'. I want to apply it to you today not concerning the quantity of life that you have, but the quality. Bonar says: 'They do err who measure life by years. He liveth long, who liveth well. All other life is short and vain', isn't that right? Would you rather live a short burst of glory for Christ, would you? A short burst of satisfaction, a short burst of a taste of heaven on earth before you even get there, to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ so that He may be glorified in you in your afflictions. If you do that, my friend, and seek God with all your heart for your satisfaction, He says: 'I will show you my salvation'. Literally: 'I will make him see it' - 'Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore...and all flesh shall see the salvation of God'.

Do you remember Simeon? I mean, imagine what it would've been like for him: waiting all of his life to see the salvation of God, to see Christ coming. I imagine that he probably started to doubt, and thought: 'Is He ever going to come? The promise that I believe God has given me, is He ever going to bring the fulfilment of it?'. But one day, we read in Luke chapter 2, he said: 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation'.

We've finished this Psalm, but do you see how the promises of God go right from the initial saving of your soul, right through the Christian experience, to be enjoyed in salvation? It covers all the intervening needs that you could have, that could raise their ugly head in your life down here - but please don't miss this! Only if! 'If you love me', God says, 'if you know My name, if you call upon Me'. Calvin said: 'We cannot rely on God's promises without obeying God's commandments'. If you obey these commandments today, my friend - if you're not saved and you put your faith and trust in God - you can be sure that no matter what you go through, God will go through it with you. You will be invincible in God, nothing will touch you unless God permits it. When you are in the midst of trouble, you will always have the knowledge that you can rest and shelter in God in the midst of it!

To know that He protects you from all things natural and supernatural, if you shelter in His character, in His tenderness, in His strength, and believe His pledge. What a blessing it will be, I hope, to hear the Lord speak to us the words spoken by Boaz to Ruth on that last day: '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'. May God bless His word to our hearts.

Let us bow our heads - this series was a four part series and you can get the tapes, if those would help you, in the Upper Room. Father, we thank Thee that Thou art there, and we believe that Thou art there and we believe that Thou art able because Thou hast said: 'I will be with thee, I will deliver thee, I will set thee on high, I will answer thee'. Lord, help us to believe, in the Saviour's name. Amen.

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*Appendix A:****"Where Is God?"***

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Turn with me to the 42nd Psalm, Psalm 42, and we've been singing about this Psalm already - and the verse on the front of your bulletin is from this Psalm also - and this is the Psalm that we're going to be thinking about for a few moments this morning. Psalm 42 and beginning to read at verse 1: "As the deer panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat", or my food, "day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God".

Let's come before the Lord and ask His help, and bow before Him in a word of prayer. Let us pray: Our Father, we thank Thee for Thy word. We thank Thee that Thy word is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our pathway - and our Father, we need Thy help as we come to it now. We do not want the words of men to be heard but, Lord, we long for the word of God to thunder forth in this place - and yet with the thundering of it, that the still small voice of the Holy Spirit may whisper to those who need to hear it. For we ask these things, taking the power of God for our own, in Jesus name. Amen.

Elie Wiesel wrote a book, the title of his book was 'La Nuit' (that's French - now I'm not much good at French), but translated it just simply means: 'The Night'. It was his autobiography of his experience in Auschwitz. And the story takes place in Buna, the camp that was allotted to Auschwitz, and it tells of a young Jewish man - in fact two, three young Jewish men who were hanged alongside of one another. They were hanged by SS officers in front of thousands of inmates, who were obliged to file past them - one by one - and stare fully into their faces as they hung there upon the ropes. The two adult men were dead, but the child right in the middle of them was so light that he remained still alive. And Elie writes in his book these words, and I quote: 'For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. We had to look at him full in the face, he was still alive when I passed in front of him - his tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed. Behind me I heard a man asking 'Where is God now?', and I heard a voice within me answer him 'Where is He? Here He is! He is hanging here on the gallows'. That night the soup tasted of corpses'.

This man's experience in what we could term - it would be an inaccurate term - but we could term it the nearest thing, perhaps that this earth has ever experienced, near to hell on earth. When he looked at it, when he saw the suffering, when he saw the anguish, when he saw the pain that fellow man could inflict on their

fellow human beings, he was forced within himself to ask the question: 'Where is God? Where is He?'. I wonder have you ever asked that question? Perhaps a situation in your own personal life, perhaps a situation of someone that you know about who is in a terrible turmoil, who is in terrible illness, sickness - whatever it is - and you look at them, and you look perhaps on the television screen and you see the things that are going on in our planet - children that are like skeletons - and you cry out within yourself, you maybe wouldn't say it in church, you maybe wouldn't talk to your fellow Christians about it, but you ask yourself: 'Where is God? Where is He when this is going on? Is God dead? Is God really there? Is there a God at all?'. I wonder have you ever asked the famous question - three letter word that is probably the question that's asked by children all the time, but if we're honest with ourselves, as big children, we ask the question every day of our lives at times: 'Why? Why?'. Something inside us builds up until our emotions and our soul, our very inner being, cry out to man and to God, and ask: 'Why is this allowed to happen? Why is God letting this happen? Why is God even doing this? Where is God among all of it?'

Some would say that humanity is futile. Humanity is futile, all of this life on earth is totally worthless and pointless. The contemporary artist Francis Bacon believed that women and men were futile wretches, there was no point to any of it. He writes: 'Man now realises that he is an accident, that he is completely a futile being, that he has to play the game without reason' - there's no point to it at all. The French thinker Jean-Paul Sartre believed that because, as far as he was concerned, God did not exist 'life was no ultimate attitude at all'. Samuel Beckett conveyed that attitude, and conveyed that philosophy of life in his play 'Breath'. Do you know what the play was? The play consisted of 30 seconds, there were no actors, there were no conversations. The whole of the script was a simple sigh of human life, from a baby's cry to a man's last breath before he died. That was his summary of life. This attitude to life, this attitude that it is pointless, that there is no God in it, that God - if He even is there - is looking on as a spectator, laughing, He doesn't care about us - this philosophy of life is taking over our society today, and it can even lead, ultimately, to suicide. The writer Ernest Hemingway believed that, quote: 'Life is a rough track leading from nowhere to nowhere' - and, on the 2nd July 1961, Hemingway shot himself with a shotgun and he blew away his entire cranial skull. No point to it at all. And perhaps if we could see, with a supernatural telescope, into the heart of Ernest Hemingway we could perhaps see a question - an indelible question - forged upon his heart with a dagger: 'Where is God? Where is God in the midst of my pain? Where is God in the midst of my heartache, in the midst of my mental stress, in the midst of my illness, in the midst of my broken relationship? Where is God now?'

Where is God when my husband leaves me? Where is God when my wife dies? Where is God when that child I loved is taken away? Where is God when my business fails? Where is God when my roof caves in? Where is He? Come on! Take down the facade, Christian. Take away the mask, Christians - answer the question, it's worth answering: 'Where is God when these things happen to me? Where is He?'. Have you ever asked that question? David, in the Psalm that we read, asked exactly the same question. But he asked it because there were those around him who were asking it of him, and he got to hear it so much that he began to imbibe it and think it himself - and he began to say, 'Where is God? Where is God in my life?'

The background to the Psalm that we read this morning is simply this: that David, and some of the Jews, were exiled far north of Palestine. He was taken away from Jerusalem, he was taken away from his home, and in a foreign land, in foreign sod, he cries out for his homeland. He misses it. But remember that David was a King, and David was the King of the people of God, God's chosen people, and perhaps the thoughts were coursing through his mind: 'Why has God forsaken His people? Why am I here in a foreign land? I can't go to the temple to pray, I can't bring my daily worship to God'. And people were walking by him of another religion, of another nationality, looking at him and saying: 'Where is your God now? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who tells fables about going across [the] Red Sea, about earthquakes, and lightning from heaven, and ten commandments? Where is God now? He delivered you out of Egypt. Where is your God

now? Where is He?'. So David becomes downcast in his soul, and for all we know he could start think that question himself: 'Where is God?'.

I want to ask you this morning, in your life this morning - believer or unbeliever - is there a spiritual drought? In your life, like David's, is there a drought? You see, David, in verses 1, 2, 3 and 4, he cries out to God, he says: 'As the deer pants after the water brook, so pants my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before Him?' - he is longing for God. You can see it, can't you? That deer, the bones sticking out of it all over, its skin and fur parched as it walks in the desert, its eyesight weakened, its tongue hanging out as it's looking for refreshment, freshness - it's looking for water, and it pants out for it. And just in that same way, David is panting for his God, he just wants to see God. In all of his mess, in all of his crisis, in all of his anguish - all he wants to do is feel the hand of God on him and to know that God is there. Like the traveller in a desert, like the spaniel in the hot day's sun, like the alcoholic gasping for a drink, David is coming to God and David is gasping in thirst for Him. And in David's depression, in David's despondency, he has an insatiable thirst for God's presence - He wants God to be near him!

When we look at verse 2 we see that - we know ourselves that hunger, you can put up with hunger for a little while, but thirst is something that you cannot put up with - and it got so unbearable that he's crying out to come before God, he has an intense craving to see God, to meet God! Is that you today? Of course, every Christian should have an intense desire to meet God, we all know that. But perhaps you're here this morning, and there is something in your life, like David - there is something that has shattered your life, there is something in your life that seems to have made it pointless. Your life, as far as you can see, is over and you're asking, you're just wanting - as if God could come down, and God could lift you up like a little child and take you and nurse you. You want God to be there. If that's you this morning, do you know what I want you to do? I want you to thank God, thank God that you have a thirst after Him! It's not nice - and what many of us are going through may not be nice - but thank Him for the fact that you have a thirst, you long for answers!

In verse 3 we see that David says: 'I stopped eating. I hadn't eaten for long time, and the only food I had, the only meat I had was the salt that was in my tears. My tears were my food, day and night! That's all I had! That's my diet!'. And you all know that tears show earnestness, don't they? You never know a person's more sincere than when they shed a tear - and David's shedding tears In the midst of his sorrow, in the midst of his pain, he is at the end of his tether and he is crying out to God, 'Oh God, look at my tears'. And God says 'Look David, I'm taking your tears into a bottle, I'm counting them - they count before me, they're holy water!'. Your tears count in the sight of God.

But do you know what David does? He makes a mistake that many of us make, and in verse 4 he starts to look within himself, and he says: 'When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday'. He's saying, 'When I remember, I pour out my soul within me' - do you know what he's doing? He's destroying himself, he's becoming introverted, he's becoming introspective, he's looking within himself for an answer, he's looking within himself to blame, to apportion guilt upon himself. And then he begins to think of the good old days, many of us have done that. He thinks of when he was in Jerusalem, and when he was with the multitude, and when he went up to the temple on the Sabbath, on holyday, and he worshipped the Lord - and maybe you're here this morning and you used to worship the Lord regularly but you can't do it any more. You used to come to church regularly, but you can't bring yourself to it, perhaps you're listening on the tape and you can't get out - there's something stopping you, and it's not illness, it's not health, and you feel like David. Maybe you can't come, maybe you won't come - and maybe all that you can think of is the days that used to be, when things were alright, when things weren't the way that they are now. And you say with the hymnwriter:

I sigh to think of happier days,
 When Thou, Oh God, wast nigh,
 When every heart was tuned with praise,
 And none was more blessed than I!

But those days are gone. And like two men, David's reason reasons with his faith, and David's faith reasons with his sorrow, and David's hope argues with his sorrows and his anguish, whether God is true. Is He true to His word? Is He with me through the darkness, through the clouds and through the shadows? Is He there? Is He with me? - and David's in a drought.

But then we see that David longs for different days. He talks in verse 6 of the Jordan, '...the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, and the hill of Mizar...' - and we know now that those places were places of great water. But I want you to see how the tone changes within this Psalm, because one minute he's in a drought and he's looking for water, but the next minute we find that David is drowning. He has gone from drought to drowning. And the very source that he thought would solve his problem - the very thing that he thought would give him life - it is the thing that overwhelms him, it's the thing that drowns him - and nowhere, no matter where he turns or where he looks, no matter who answers his question, he cannot find satisfaction, he cannot find peace. He begins to drown.

I don't know whether you've ever heard of William Cowper, but he wrote such hymns as 'There is a fountain filled with blood' - some great hymns he wrote. But William Cowper, at the age of 32, passed through a great crisis in his life. William Cowper tried to end his life by taking poison, and then when that failed he tried, and hired, a taxi - in those days a horse-drawn cart - and he ordered the driver to take him to the Thames. And he went to the bridge there, but on that night it was a very foggy night and the driver wouldn't take him any further - so, disgusted, he got off the cart and he walked to the bridge himself, only to find him[self], by the providence of God, standing at his own doorstep. Frustrated and angry at this, he went into the house and he tied a rope to the ceiling and he tried to hang himself. He was found unconscious, but alive, on the floor. The next morning, he fell upon a knife - [only] for the blade of that knife to break, and his life again was spared. This is a hymnwriter now! The next morning, in an unusual fit of joy that just seemed to come upon him, he lifted the word of God from a shelf and he opened at the epistle to the Romans. And whatever he read - I don't even know what it was he read - but from it he found great strength, he found great relief and he penned these words as he thought of his past day:

'God moves in mysterious ways,
 His wonders to perform.
 He plants His footsteps in the sea,
 And rides upon the storm.

Blind unbelief is sure to fail
 And scare will wash in vain.
 God is His own interpreter
 And He will make it plain'.

David goes to the places where water is found, and he cannot find relief, he cannot find satisfaction - and outside he says 'Deep calleth unto deep', what does that mean? It means this: that perhaps there was thunder in the sky, perhaps there was lightning - and it seemed that that lightning, that thunder was echoing the anguish and the brokenness that was in David's heart. Echoing around his soul was this terrible storm of grief and pain. It was like the beat of a drum, you know when you hear a band going down the street and you nearly feel the beat within you - it was like that. It's like a stringed instrument, I'm told that when you tune a

stringed instrument in unison with another stringed instrument exactly right, and you pluck one of the instruments, without plucking the other, the note will sound. And David, from all the turmoil outside, could feel his turmoil within - and he felt that the deep of the sea with all its devastating anger was within him, destroying his soul and destroying his spirit. That's what Jonah said, you know, in Jonah chapter 2 and verse 3, when he was being tossed to and fro in the sea, what did he cry out? He cried out what David cried out in verse 7: 'All thy waves and billows have come over me!'. And David felt that he was drowning.

David felt, in verse 9, that he was forgotten - and his faith was inquiring of God: 'Lord have You forgotten me? Have You put me on the shelf? Have You forgot to care for me? Have You forgot to love me? Have You forgotten Your promises towards me?'. And in verse 10 he feels as if there's a dagger going into his very bones, he feels - in our terms - as if there's a bullet going between his ribs, right into his heart and soul, and it's so, so painful! Have you ever been there? In drought? In drowning?

I want you to see, as we close this morning, that David had a divine hope. We see it in verse 8, in verse 9 and verse 11 - and David says, he just sums it up, and he says, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?', he answers the deep crying within him, 'And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him who is the help of my countenance and my God'. When Sir Harry Lauder lost his only son - he was killed in World War I - he turned to his best friend and he said this, and I quote: 'When a man comes to a thing like this there are just three ways out of it. There is drink, there is despair, and there is God. By His grace the last is for me'.

If I can tell you with all that I can muster up within me, on the authority of this Psalm - and listen, I don't know what your anguish, I don't know what your turmoil is, I don't want to even venture and think of how awful it is - but listen! Listen to me! Listen to God! God is there! He is there! And the world might say, 'Where is your God? He is dead!'. But listen! God says to you in love, and listen to His voice, you've been yearning for it, you've been thirsting for it, you've been longing for those words of a lover in compassion to you: 'I am there!'. Do you hear Him? And as if, like gulps of divine mercy, as David - like Jonah was tossed to and fro in those great breakers and rollers - he gets those gasps of divine air and grace, and he feels the life flowing back within him...and he remembers that a loss of the sense of God's love is not a loss of that love itself. Did you hear that? Just because you can't feel it, just because you can't see it, just because you're not aware of it, it doesn't mean it's not there - and in fact, God could be nearer to you today than He has ever been!

'O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitteing and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I flee from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there'. That's what God's saying to you this morning: 'If you go to heaven My child, I am there!' - '...if I descend to hell...' - 'If you make your bed in hell, I am there!'. 'If I take the wings of the morning...', if you try to flee from God, He says, 'I'm there, I'll get you, I'm with you! 'If I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea...' - 'I'm there My child! I'm there! Even there shall My hand lead thee, and My right hand shall uphold thee'.

Listen! God is love! Christian, non-Christian, listen! Unserved one - God is love! In all your anguish, in all your disaster He wants to take you, He wants to embrace you, He wants to love you - in His mercy, in His grace, in His compassion, He wants you! God is love and God is faithful - and because God is love and God is faithful, David says that there is hope: 'Hope thou in God' - God is there! He loves me, He'll never fail me. Hope in God!

Don't murder yourself for asking the question 'Why?'. If we had time this morning we could turn to the Lord Jesus Christ when He was on the cross, and some of the most famous words that He spoke were these: 'My God! My God! Why? Why hast Thou forsaken Me? Thy Son - why have You done it?'. Now no-one can tell me that He didn't know why. Do you honestly think that the Son of God didn't know why He was on the cross? Sure He went through His whole earthly ministry telling people that He was going to the cross, telling His disciples and sharing with them why He was going to the cross - that the Son of Man must die, and the third day be raised from the dead for the forgiveness, for the remission, of sins. He taught that was what His life was about - about him dying, and rising, and forgiving! Why did He ask 'why' on the cross then - if He knew? Do you know what that tells me, my friend? It tells me this: answers aren't any good. Christ had the reason, He had the reason on the cross why He was there - for sin, for God's holiness - He had it, He knew it, yet He still cried why! Why? Because it wasn't a cry from His intellect, it wasn't a theological cry - it was a cry of a Son to a Father from His heart! He knew why, but His heart still cried out to His Father.

I don't know why you're suffering - and let me tell you, nobody but God can tell you why. But listen, my friend, this morning: the answer to that question wouldn't make a difference to you, it wouldn't ease your pain, in fact it may even amplify your pain. But what you need to know is this, this morning, listen from David, who testified of it in his life: that in the midst of your sorrow, your anguish, your pain, in your storm - God is there!! He is there, and He isn't going anywhere. He says, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee'. He says, 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness'. He says, 'The Lord of hosts is with us! The God of Jacob is our refuge!'. Listen, my friend, in your pain: God's grace is sufficient for thee.

Spurgeon was once on a boat floating down the Thames, and he spied a little fish, and he thought about that fish, and how that fish - how much water that fish would swallow daily. And he thought of the River Thames, that great river, saying to the fish: 'Little fish drink as much as you like'. And God is saying to you, my friend, in your pain, in your heartache, in your anguish, in your bereavement - God is saying: 'My grace, here it is My child. Drink as much as you like'. Will you take it? Will you feel Him lift you up in His arms of love? Will you let Him embrace you? Will you let Him comfort you? Will you have that hope that is in God?

Our Father, we thank Thee for this great assurance, this great comfort and balm - that in the times of life's storms, when the sea billows roll, we know that we have a refuge, we have a safety, we have a cave, we have a covert in the breast and in the bosom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, help us - all of us - to take shelter there today. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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*Appendix B:****"God Over All!"***

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We're turning this morning to Psalm number 9, the ninth Psalm, and we'll read the whole Psalm. There's only two verses that I want us to concentrate on this morning, but we'll read the whole Psalm to get the context. Reading from verse one:

"I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will show forth all thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praises to thy name, O thou most High. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence. For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right. Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever. O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them. But the Lord shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness. The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee. Sing praises to the Lord, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings. When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble. Have mercy upon me, O Lord; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death: That I may show forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughters of Zion: I will rejoice in thy salvation. The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not always be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever. Arise, O Lord; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight. Put them in fear, O Lord: that the nations may know themselves to be but men."

Let's take a moment's prayer together: Our dear Father in heaven, we pray to Thee today, that the blessed Lord Jesus Christ in His risen exalted power, may presence Himself with us. That He may come by His Spirit, and Lord them that have needs, them that are oppressed, them who are in times of trouble, may know what it is to find their refuge in the Lord. Fill me, I pray, with Thy Spirit, and help me in Jesus name, Amen.

Sam Scholl (sp?) was an American who settled his farm in Arizona. And out in that deserted place with his wife and his family, he pitched his tent and he began to farm. A few nights after he had moved there was a fierce storm, and within that desert everything was turned upside-down, the rain and the hail came down and the high winds blew. And after that night of awful storm, at daybreak Sam got out of his bed and, feeling quite sick and ill, fearing what might have come to pass, he went out to survey the loss. The hail had beaten the garden, the vegetable patch was destroyed into the ground, the house was partially unroofed, the hen-house with all the hens and chickens - it had totally been destroyed and there were dead carcasses of little hens all over the farm. Destruction and devastation were all around. And while he stood dazed, dismayed, evaluating the situation - he wondered what was left and what would happen in the future. Suddenly he heard a little sound, and a rooster began to climb out of the debris. It climbed to the top plank that it could find, and there it stood, dripping wet, most of its feathers gone, standing there on the horizon of destruction -- and it

just crowed. Pathetic scene isn't it? As that animal, almost dead, flaps its bony wings, and proudly crows. But it tells us this: that in the midst of destruction and the vilest and most acute oppression that a human being or even a beast can face, there is a spirit, there is an attitude that prevails -- that enables a person to be able to climb on top of the debris, and for a split second forget about all the destruction that is around them, and crow in pride, the pride of their God, and praise the Lord.

That is the situation of David that we find in Psalm 9. And I want us to concentrate this morning, for a few moments on verses 9 and 10 -- look at them: "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." Perhaps at the top of that Psalm in your Bible you'll have this little strange title: 'Muth-labben', Muth-labben -- it's a Hebrew expression. And some of the scholars have debated about what this really means, some of them believe that this signifies the tune that the Psalm is to be sung to. Some think it is the instrument, the musical instrument to be played. Some even feel it maybe is the soloist that is to sing this Psalm. If it's only these things, we can be sure that there's nothing in this title to teach us from the word of God. But if you look into the Chaldean version of the Old Testament, that's the version that those in Babylon read, by the Chaldean language. You find that they translate this title 'Muth-labben' as this, written on top of their Psalm is this: 'Concerning the death of the champion who went out between the camps'. Concerning the death of the champion, the warrior, who went out between the two camps. And indeed many scholars feel that 'Muth-labben' means this: 'The death of a son'. Many believe David to have taken up his pen many years after he defeated Goliath there on the battlefield, and written this Psalm declaring the glory of God, praising God for his wonderful deliverance through God. And as we look at this Psalm, and as we look and read about the oppression, the wicked that seem to be growing and thriving and as we read down it and read about the enemy in verse 6 and verse 3, we can look and we can see there, by the eye of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Isn't it wonderful to know that we have a victorious Saviour! Isn't it? Verse six reads: "O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them." We can declare to our enemy today, upon the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we can declare: the enemy is defeated! We have a Conqueror! And what a message to discouraged saints, to those who are downtrodden, to those that are oppressed in this life, or maybe even feeling it's so hard to be a Christian in the days in which we live: here is a song of victory, declaring that our Conqueror, the King of kings, the Lord of lords - not will have the victory - but He has conquered! And on His thigh, and on His vesture is written the name 'The King of kings, the Lord of lords, The Conqueror of all flesh and spirit'.

If you look at verses one and two of the Psalm, you see that Psalm 9 is almost an overflow of the praise that we find in Psalm 8. Look at Psalm 8, it's a famous one: "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens." - and then verse 9, it ends - "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!". And then David continues: "I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart", not half-hearted, "I will show forth all thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O most High". The text that we have taken also speaks of His name, verse 10: "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee". You see it's the name, the name of God. It is the name of Christ, the name of the Holy Spirit, the name of the blessed triune God, the three-in-one, that we praise. We are to lift our praises onto Him, and David as he has ringing in his ears Psalm 8, the praise of it, continues in Psalm 9 talking about this great name that is worthy to be praised. You remember the song of the Shulamite young girls, the daughters of Jerusalem? In Song of Songs in chapter 1 and verse 4 they cry to the bridegroom, and we can see typologically there the Saviour and the church, the Christian and the Christ - and they say: 'Draw me, and we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.'

Do you rejoice? Do you? Do you praise the Lord with a heart full of adoration and gratitude for how He is your deliverer, for what He has done in your life? And you might say 'But David you don't realise what I'm going through this morning. You don't realise the burdens that are on my heart. I find it hard at times even to speak in a nice way to my friends, to my husband or to my wife, because of what I'm going through let alone bring a joyous song out of my heart to God!' Yet John in Revelation 19 and [verse] 7 speaks to a church that is going through persecution and says to them: 'Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready'. Oh how sweet the name of Jesus sounds, doesn't it? It doesn't matter – or it ought not to matter - what you're going through; and I am not underestimating the problems of life - far be it from me. But oh how it transcends the problems when we hear whispered by the Holy Ghost of God the sweet name of Jesus!

It's that name that is talked about in verse 10: the name of Christ, our victorious Redeemer. And what I want to bring to you today is three messages: first of all, there is a refuge for the oppressed. Look at verse 9: 'The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble'. We've just been reading about how God one day will judge the wicked, and it may seem at the moment that they're getting away, literally, with murder - but there is a day when God will judge! And God will sit on His throne, and the wicked, the sinful, those outside of Christ will have to answer to Him. And after talking about how God is a judge to the wicked, David tells how God is a refuge to the oppressed. You know what oppression is don't you? Oppression can come in many shapes and forms -- there can be oppression from Satan, there can be oppression from men and women, from family, from circumstances. And the Hebrew word that's used here for 'oppressed' -- do you know what it means? 'Crushed, injured, afflicted'. Do you ever feel like that? Crushed! Destroyed! Injured! Deep affliction and oppression in your soul -- but he goes on and talks about oppression and times of trouble. That Hebrew expression 'times of', it can be translated [like] this: 'A due long season'.

You know what I'm talking about, don't you? Something that you think is never going to end, the light [at the end] of the tunnel - you've long gone stopped hoping for it! You feel it's never going to come, you're never going to have an end of this long due season of oppression, of destruction, of that deepest injuring of your soul. What does he say: 'Oppression and times of trouble'. Know what that word means? Listen: 'tightness' - you know the feeling within your soul, you feel as if someone's wringing out your spirit in the very depths of your soul with worry, or anxiety, or the things that you are facing. That word means a rival, an adversary, affliction, anguish, distress, tribulation of an enemy! And some of you know what I'm talking about all too well, for every morning you awake it's on your mind. It's at the back, and even if it's not there in the morning, it works its way to the front, and before the sun goes down you're thinking about that oppression, that destruction, that anguish, that tightness within your soul that oppresses you from day to day. My friend listen! The message of God to your heart is this: 'We have a refuge!' God is our refuge.

In the Old Testament there was something called a city of refuge. Have you heard about it? You see if you accidentally knocked someone down, or accidentally killed someone in work and you didn't mean it, there was no intent in it: it wasn't murder, it was only manslaughter. If you did that there were various cities, and we read in the book of Numbers that there were six cities around Palestine where you could flee - and once you got beyond the walls of that city you were free! No one could touch you. It's amazing: there were six of them, and they were distributed throughout the land at proper distances from one another. You know why? So that everybody had a chance. And as they were distributed all of them were convenient to people, no one had an excuse, they were in every part of the land, and it was said that they were situated on high precipices, high places so that they might be easily seen from a distance. Do you get it? It says that the roads to them were always continually kept in a good state, and on each road there were signs that were written: 'Refuge, refuge!' My friend, it's a tragedy isn't it? That so many never see the refuge of the Lord Jesus Christ - isn't it? Oh, it's blatantly obvious - there are six refuge cities - the gospel is preached all over our land, so that everybody's given a chance, all the roads to the gospel - the road of the 'whosoever will' - is cleared. God has

a signpost, the word of God, the preaching of the gospel: 'Refuge, refuge!' pointing to the cross! But maybe you're here today, and you miss it every time. Do you? And you know that oppression, you know that tightness, you know that feeling of being shattered - that painful anguish within the depths of your soul: well listen to Paul in the book of Hebrews, 'That by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge!'. Have you? What does a boat do when it's out fishing in the middle of the ocean and the storm comes? It flees for refuge into the harbour. What do the little chicks do when they feel they're lost or in trouble? They flee under the wing of the hen mother, where there is safety, where there is refuge. And my friend, if you're not converted, flee to the cross!

A few weeks ago, when I was having my devotional time with the Lord, I was looking in the Psalms - and I try to read a Psalm every day. And I thought of Psalm 46, considering the refuge of God, and you know it all: 'God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.' And my Psalm for that particular day was Psalm 18, if you would turn to it for a moment with me, Psalm 18. And I think it's important, you know, when we're talking to the Lord and reading the word of God, that we try and picture what is being written here. Now we can let our imaginations run away with us, that's not what I'm talking about - but trying to picture with the eye of faith what is written before us. And we read in verse one and two: 'I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my' - here's the first description - 'rock...my fortress...my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower'. Now I couldn't read any further - look at the mighty descriptions that is being given of God and His strength! God is a refuge! Do you know what I did? I took my notebook and a little pen and I thought of God as my rock, and I drew a mountain. You know, a mountain, a large rock - that's my God. He is a fortress! And upon that rock of a mountain I put a castle. He is my deliverer - I put a knight in shining armour approaching that castle, strong, invincible there. He is my buckler - and there that knight had a shield. He is the horn of my salvation, and - like a unicorn - upon that horse there was a horn coming from its forehead. And, oh, I could see in all those pictures of God, the Holy Spirit giving to me, how my God is a refuge! Do you see it? A rock! A castle! A shield! A fortress! A deliverer!

You might say: 'David, well I don't feel that God is that for me at the moment'. You know if we go through scripture we find that some of the refuges of God don't seem like refuges at the time. Do you remember Jonah? Do you think when he was swallowed into the belly of that fish, and he was swimming up and down in the lactic acids of his belly, that he thought he was in a refuge? Not a bit of it! But he was! He was [in] refuge [from] the storm, he had been cast overboard, he would've been drowned, but God had him there - and it didn't seem a refuge at the time, but it was! Do you think, when Miriam was watching that little basket going up the Nile, that river - and then the daughter of Pharaoh, who he was trying to escape from - the whole household of Pharaoh - came and lifted the little basket and brought it into her home. I'm sure the first thought that she had was: 'That's the end, the child's dead' - but that was God's refuge! And perhaps there's something strange happening in your life, my friend, and you can't see God in it. Well that thing might be God itself. Do you know what I mean? God may be using that dreaded, awful thing to protect you.

It's true, isn't it, that we never appreciate a refuge unless we're in times of trouble. Remember Daniel in the lion's den? If he was singing Psalm 46 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.' - he might have thought: 'Well, He wouldn't have me in the middle of this! What kind of a refuge-God is He, having me in a den of lions?' But God was his refuge! Hard to see, isn't it? What about the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, you would have thought they would have been saying: 'Well if God is a refuge, then He wouldn't be letting me be thrown into this, He would have delivered me before it all'. But God delivered them! Are you oppressed? Well, listen: God is a refuge for the oppressed.

But secondly, look at verse 10: 'And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for the Lord hath not forsaken them that seek thee'. Our salvation and our faith is one of knowledge. Remember Paul: 'I know whom I have believed' - it's a faith of knowledge, it's an intelligent faith. And the church of Rome might say: 'Ignorance is the mother of devotion' - but rather 'Ignorance is the mother of unbelief'. That's why they worship an 'unknown' God - they don't have a precious relationship with a personal Saviour. But we know - or we ought to know - our God: 'By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many' - by knowledge! Do you know Him? The knowledge is found in verse 10: 'know thy name' - that's the knowledge - 'trust in thee' - that's the faith, the experience is 'thou hast not forsaken them'. You know ignorance sends millions to hell, but ignorance in the life of a believer prevents them knowing a refuge in Christ. Did you know that? Do you know the name of your God, do you? The name of your Saviour?

Perhaps you're bereaved today - do you know what His name is to you? 'I am the resurrection and the life'. Perhaps, as you sit, you're fearful of what the future might hold - perhaps you've got results of a test or you're worried about some disease that might rise its head up again - and He says to you as He said to John at His feet: 'I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the ending, I know everything, and everything is in my control'. And if you're sick: He is the Great Physician. If you're a widow: He is the Bridegroom and the Husband of your heart. If you're fatherless: He is the Everlasting Father. If you're a sinner: He is the Saviour! If you're simple, read the book of Proverbs, and you feel that you don't know enough: and we find there that He is the wisdom to man's head and man's heart. If you're needing guidance and you can't find the way: He's the Wonderful Counsellor. If you're in the middle of turmoil: He is the Prince of Peace. If you're hungry: He is the Bread of Life. If you're at a dead-end street: He says, 'I am the door'. And if you're wandering - and some of you are: He is the Great Shepherd.

Jehovah-Jireh: Do you know the name of your God? This is the name that you're meant to have refuge in, that you're meant to feel safe in, that you're meant to know the security of God's salvation and life in! Jehovah-Jireh: your provider. Jehovah-Tsidkenu: your righteousness. Jehovah-Shammah: God, Jehovah is there. Jehovah-Shalom: my peace. Jehovah-Nissi: my banner. Elohim: the strong one! El-Gibbor: the great God. Spurgeon said: 'Every one of these names anchors the soul from the drifting seasons of peril'.

You know the Egyptians, in the old times, used to live in the marshes and the bogs: the marshy place, where all the flies and the locusts, and all the things that bit, came and bit them - and they were tormented day and night with gnats. You know what they used to do? They used to sleep in the high tower, where those creatures were not able to soar high, and they were delivered from the bite. My friend, God wants to rise you above, in the refuge of the rock, in the fortress of your salvation. He wants you to find in Christ a refuge in them that know His name - but you need to know His name, you need to know the great God that you have: well, will you trust Him? For He says in verse 10 that He hath not forsaken them that seek Thee - He is a refuge for those who seek Him! Have you sought Him in salvation? Have you sought Him in your trouble? John Trapp says: 'We never trust a man till we know him, and bad men are better known than trusted. Not so with the Lord, for where His name is ointment poured forth the virgins love Him, fear Him, rejoice in Him and repose upon Him'. Do you see your Saviour this morning? Do you? The blessed Lord Jesus Christ, your Victor, your Conqueror, your Deliverer who can be a refuge and a protector to you in the midst of your trouble. No wonder the hymn-writer could write: 'Oh hope of every contrite heart. Oh joy of all the meek, to those who fall how kind Thou art, how good to those who seek. But what to those who find, ah this, nor tongue nor pen can show, the love of Jesus what it is - none but His loved ones know'.

Let us pray, and if you're in our meeting today and you're not a Christian, you're not saved, or you are a Christian and you're going through turmoil and perhaps no one beside you or around you, or the nearest and dearest, know what you're going through. Well, listen to the word of God: 'The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee'.

Our Father we thank Thee that the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross, is the city of our refuge - the place that we are saved from the consequences and the judgement of our sin, and the place in the times of our trouble where we can shield the storm, where the wind does not blow upon us, and where we have perfect peace and rest. May the troubled one today, whether troubled in their sin, or in sickness or sorrow - that they may hear the voice of Jesus say to them, 'Come, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and find rest for your soul'. For we pray these things, asking Thy blessing upon us now in Jesus worthy and precious name. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2000

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Appendix C:

"When Bad Things Happen To Good People"

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If you have a copy of the Old Testament, I'd like you to turn with me to the book of Job. The book of Job - you have Esther, Job and then the book of Psalms - and Job chapter 1 we're turning to.

I'm going to take time to read the whole chapter, starting at verse 1: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.

And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly".

Our Father, we pray that You would help us this morning, for we seek not to hear the voice of men but the voice of God. For we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Her name was Patricia. She was 35 years of age. I called her my aunt, but she wasn't really my aunt, she was just a friend of my mother. She was a girl who was extremely intelligent, a girl who - it seemed - had everything going for her. She had been through full-time education, she had attended University, she had become qualified to teach other young people. But at 35 years of age she was diagnosed as having cancer. She went through all the medication that you go through, she tried everything and it seemed that it had relapsed for while, but it came back. At 35 years of age she passed into the presence of her Lord.

Stephen is his name. Twenty-one years of age. I went to school with him, he had everything going for him - a brilliant mind. He dropped out of University, he could take it, but he just didn't want the bother. He went into business and seem to be being quite successful - but on a road quite near where I lived, his car careered off the road into a ditch and he passed into the presence of his Lord.

I'm sure you have people in your family, whether young or old, and at some point in their life something has taken hold of them - and you can remember it so vividly - an illness or a sickness, or simply an accident. And suddenly life, when it's so vibrant, when it seems to be at its peak, whether it is through death or through illness, that life seems to be snuffed out. It could be life, it could be simply circumstances - you look around you and the homes of the people you see, they're so degraded. The marriages that you see, perhaps, around you have been broken. The poverty in your area, or even in this town of Portadown, some of it is atrocious. And as we look at these things we can often - so often - be so confused, and we can look heavenward, we can say to God: 'God, what is this all about?'

Archibald McLeish was a playwright. He took pen and paper at one stage and he wrote a play, a contemporary play of the story of Job that we read together this morning. But in this play he has the character of Satan, and the character of Satan says these words: 'If God is God, He is not good'. In other words, he looked at all the things that were happening around him, and he portrayed Satan saying: 'Well, if God is really God, if God is really in control of everything that is happening, He cannot be good'. He went on to say: 'If God is good, He is not God. Because if He was good He wouldn't let these things happen. If He was God He would have control of these things, and He would stop these things'. The playwright commented further, he said: 'Millions and millions of mankind are burned, are crushed, are broken, are [murdered], are slaughtered - and for what? What is it all for? For thinking? For walking round the world in the wrong skin? For walking round the world with the wrong shaped nose, eyelids? For sleeping in the wrong city?'

Today in our age of technology everything is seen as something that must be understood. Everything must be seen as something that we, as men and women, can control. Even our children at school, they are taught in school now to ask questions, rather than to learn facts. Everything that confronts us, we are to ask a question about it - and life, as it seems, is portrayed for us in terms of questions that need answering, problems that need to be solved.

In the book of Job that we read together this morning there are plenty of questions that are given to us, but it seems as you read right through the whole book, there is not much in the way of an answer. The biggest problem that is presented in this book is simply this: 'Why, God? Why do the innocent suffer? Why, God, does bad things happen to good people?'. Now, an easy answer that I could give to this this morning, and you could all go home, is: sin. It's because of sin that bad things happen to people. But if I was to give that answer this morning, that would be a wrong answer, because that is the answer that Job's so-called friends gave him when they were counselling him. They said to him: 'Listen Job, you might think you're righteous but there's something in your life that's offending God, and that's why God is punishing you in this way'.

Well, if we're not willing to accept that explanation - which I'm not willing to accept - the question is not so much: 'Why do bad things happen to good people?', but the question is: 'Why, God, why at all do these things happen?'. In Job, the book of Job, the need of an answer shows the deepest question, one of the deepest questions, that man has ever asked and it's this: 'What is the point of serving God? Does it pay well? Does it give good dividends?'. The question I want to ask this morning - ask of you all, and ask of myself - as we look into Job chapter 1 is: What does it take? What kind of person does it take? What kind of faith does it take, that a person can keep their faith in a loving God, in a just God, in a sovereign God, when everything around them in the world and in their personal life is falling apart?

What is God holding from us? What is God not telling us that will make sense out of life, or even make its lack of sense a little more bearable? What is God not telling us? Well, this book of Job - it pushes past pat solutions that we are used to hearing, it pushes past one-liners, quips that we are used to hearing - and so often we are guilty of giving to those who are suffering and are unconverted. It moves past all those synthetic explanations of evil. How many times have you been told: 'You'll get through OK. Don't worry about it, you'll get through - remember that where there's bad, well, there's always worse'? How many times have you been told that? How many times have you heard the proverb: 'I wept because I had no shoes, until I saw a man with no feet'? Somebody out there, they're always worse than you are - but that's OK until you look down at the feet of the person telling you that proverb, and they're standing in a pair of boots! You think to yourself: 'Hold on, he's telling me that there's somebody out there worse, yet he's better than me - why can't I be like him? Why can't I have his health? Why can't I have his status? Why can't I have his wealth?'

So often when we're instructed to look over elsewhere at somebody who's worse than us, what happens is - and I know it happens with me - is my head doesn't look to them, my head looks to the person that is better off than I am. Now, yes, positive thinking may have helped Job when he lost his livestock, when he lost his cattle, when he lost his camels, when he lost his agriculture. Positive thinking might have helped when all that happened - but surely it would have been mockery to say to Job: 'Well, look on the bright side', when he lost his children, when he lost his home, and later in the book we see that he actually lost his physical health and his friends!

On the other side of the coin, it would have been wrong simply to take the fatalistic attitude and say to him: 'Well, that's the way the cookie crumbles. That's life! It's tough, you just have to get over these things!'. Some comfort that would have been to a man who was standing there, at one moment in his life he seemed to have absolutely everything that this life could give, and now he has nothing! So in this book I want to see, and I want you to see this morning, that we are face-to-face with a godly, good man who is suffering - and his suffering is intolerable! It seems that his suffering is unending and, as it were, the Holy Spirit catches us up into his pain, into his anguish and into his misery to see the seeming injustice of it all. We hear his poignant plea to God: 'Lord, what on earth is happening? Lord, what from hell is happening? Where is this coming from? Why God, why is this happening to me?' - and we feel, as it were, his sense of abandonment by his own family. We feel, as it were, his pain as his wife turns to him and says: 'Curse God and get it all over with and die!'. We feel his pain as his friends seem to counsel him, and tell him: 'It's all your fault, you've brought it on yourself'. We see his anguish as the God in whom he had faith, he feels that that God has forsaken him.

The frustration is, as we read this little book, as we look into it, as we picture the story here, the biggest frustration of it all is this: that there is nothing we can say, or nothing we can do to ease his pain, or even explain the existence of it! We are powerless as we look into it, we are faced with the failure of ministry - yes! Christian ministry! We are faced with the failure and the inadequacy of some preaching, the inadequacy of some synthetic advice that we give off like a shotgun at times. But to Job God seems callous, God seems unfair, God seems distant - and we are forced, as Christians, as we read this book, to rethink our theology, to remove our prejudices, to look at the whole meaning of what pastoral care and pastoral ministry really

means. Even when we re-evaluate all of that, and even when we look at his despair here, and we rethink our theology, and we rethink our ministry - there's still one question that remains, the question of all time: 'Why do the innocent suffer? Why, oh God, did You allow this in my life? Why, God, did you let my child die? Why have I contracted cancer? Why have I this disease? Why is my heart and my home broken?'. The common denominator of all of these questions seems to be one, and it's this: 'Where is God in all of this?'

So, where was God in Job's life? If you look at chapter 1 and verse 1, we see that God at the very start was right there in Job's life. In verses 1 to 5 we see Job's piety in his prosperity. If you look at verse one it says that Job was perfect, he was upright, he was a man that feared God and eschewed evil. This man was pious, he was a godly holy man, he was morally perfect and upright - now that doesn't mean that the man had no sin, but what it does mean is that this man was blameless. You couldn't have pointed the finger at Job and said: 'Look what he's doing', or you couldn't have told stories about Job and said: 'I remember the time when Job did that'. Because in the eyes of men, although his heart was still sinful like us all, in the eyes of men he was blameless and he lived a holy life - he did what God required and he was obedient to God.

His godliness, verse 1 says, has a positive and a negative aspect to it. First, positively it says he feared God. If you go into the Old Testament, and you go to Proverbs chapter 1 and verse 7, you see that the Old Testament writer there says that the fear of God is the secret to holiness. He says: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction'. So positively, this man Job feared God, he lived his whole life out to please God, as far as he knew it he wasn't putting a foot wrong, he wasn't making a wrong tick with his pen, he did every single thing right it seemed. But negatively it says that, not only did he fear God but he eschewed evil, or he shunned evil, or he turned away from evil. Again this man's life was in keeping with the perfect Old Testament ideal saint. What does Psalm 1 [verse] 1 say? 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful' - all Job was was an epitome of this! Positively he feared God, he worshipped God, he followed God in his life. Negatively he left sin, he shunned sin, he pushed it as far away from his life as he could, he was a pious godly fearing man.

If you look at his family in verses 2 to 5, it seems that everything he had was ideal. He had an ideal size of a family for a man of his riches and his land. He had seven sons and three daughters. It seemed that there was perfect harmony in that family. They went to one another's houses for tea and they shared everything with one another. Job, it seems, was a good father. Job was a man who knew that his children weren't perfect, but he even offered sacrifices on behalf of his children - he was the ideal man!

We see his possessions. The passage says that this man, in terms of his possessions, was the greatest and wealthiest man in the whole of the country - and, even though he was the wealthiest man, it says that his riches didn't corrupt him. In fact in chapter 31 and [verses] 15 to 22 you can read that he even gave his money and his riches out to help the poor. Job was so close to God, that God was able to trust him with such riches, such blessings, such privileges.

But it appears that Job's children weren't as great. It appears that Job's children were more prone to the deceitful nature of wealth and the material possessions which their father had. Yet Job was such a great father that he wasn't fooled by their sinfulness, he knew that they were worldly, but he also couldn't keep his children - he knew - from the world. He knew that, no matter what he did or what he said, he couldn't stop them from going into the world - so what he did was he prayed for them. He knew that if he tried to stop them going into the world all he would do was create a spirit of rebellion against his faith. So Job rather got on his knees and, it says, prayed for their souls continually. Parents we can take a lesson out of that, can't we? We can say all we like to our children, and our children love us, and our children respect [us] and may behave at home in a way that you think is pleasing - but the reality is you will never, ever know what they are doing when they're away. The reality is [that] when the door is closed is you don't know what they're

getting up to, so it's better to be like Job and to be on your knees for your children rather than nagging at them.

Look at Job. A more caring, godly, ideal man you couldn't think of. Let's look at the heavenly perspective of Job's problems, which are from verse 6 to 12. Look at verse 6, there's a total change of scene. It's almost as if the picture frame has changed and it's gone up like a telescope to heaven, and it says: 'Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them'. There's a change of scene, it seems that we've been taken into the court of heaven and the sons of God were brought before God, and Satan is there. Now the word in this passage is 'the Satan' - the Satan, because Satan means 'accuser'. It appears here that Satan was often before God, he came before God to give an account to God, and his job was to draw attention, and fret out, and pull out the evil of all mankind. He was like a secret police man, like the KGB, probing for defections and reporting findings of evil in God's saints. Sure that's what Revelation 12 and verse 10 says, that Satan is the accuser of the brethren. So we must beware, because Satan is there, Satan is watching for every move that we make, and he is before God pointing those things out. 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 8 says, 'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour'.

As you look at this passage you can praise God this morning, do you know why? Because God controls Satan. Have you got that? God controls Satan! There is nothing that can go out of control in this world, there is nothing that can happen in this world that is outside the control and the will of God because God controlled him, He had a rein upon him. Now God, as we see from this passage, initiates the drama of the book by drawing Satan's attention to Job's unique character. He says: 'Look at this man Job, have you seen him? Have you seen how holy he is?' - and Satan with satanic cynicism takes up the gauntlet, and he says: 'I'll see how holy he is'. In verse 9 he says these words that you have in your bulletin: 'Doth Job fear God for nought?'. Satan says to him, 'Job has a good reason to obey God! Obeying God pays well! Take away the dividends, God, take away the blessings of Job's obedience, and Job will turn to cursing You!'. He says: 'Just cross him once and You'll see Job's true nature' - and what Satan was basically saying to God is this, 'You have put a hedge of riches, and wealth, and blessing, and success around Job - is it any wonder that he's so holy? Take it away and You'll see what he's really like'.

I want you to notice something this morning - Satan knew something about religion that even some of us don't know. Because some people are in religion, some people are in Christianity for what they can get out of it, is that not true? They're in it for the perks, they're in it for the blessings, and somehow in this age that we live we have developed a supermarket mentality in the church of Jesus Christ. We have become commercial Christians, we have Christian gypsies who flit about from one church to another because of the atmosphere, because of the music, because of the facilities, because of its popularities or its organisations. And I really wonder today that if God were the only attraction in our churches would there be anybody in them?

Satan's argument was so clever because he said to God, he reminded God of all the false professions, all of the failures, the line of them who had fallen away back into sin, who when the going got tough they went going out the door of Christianity - and he insinuates to them that Job's godliness was artificial. Now was Satan right about Job? Is Job only in it for what he can get out of it? Are people only religious because of what they can get out of it? Is your faith in God dependant only on the good that you think you'll get? Or is God so great that He can be loved for Himself, not just for His giving? Can God be held on to by a man when there is no benefits and perks attached to Him? Can I ask you this morning: if you were like Job, think of this, and everything you had - family and friends, status, your job, your money, your health - everything you had was taken away would you be satisfied with God? Would God be enough?

In our lives and our experiences is God an end in Himself? Is our faith rooted and grounded in a personal walk, and a personal fellowship, and a personal communion with the living God - or is it commercial Christianity? Job's faith in God proved to be real and Satan was proved to be wrong, because in verse 20 to

22 we see Job's piety in his problems. No! Job didn't curse God! He took it from the hand of God, no matter what it was - even though it was bad, even though in his eyes it was evil, it was something that was destroying his happiness - he took it simply because it was from the hand of God. And he fell - think of this! - he had been raped of all the wealth that he had, and because it was from the hand of God, because God allowed it, he fell at His feet and he worshipped God. I don't know about you but that astounds me! Even in all of this his first reaction was to see the hand of God in it and fall and worship - what would our first reaction be? Would it be to curse God? What would it be? Would it be to question God? But what did Job do? He sought God!

You might say to me: 'Hold on a minute David, you're not answering the question. You started out with the question 'Why? Why do all these things happen? Why did God allow such bad things to happen to such a good man?'. Well, this is the whole point of the book, and I want you to grasp this this morning: Job wasn't meant to know why! Have you got that? Job wasn't meant to know why! All of the book hangs on this fact, that if Job had known why, there would have been all these things happening to him, Job would never have had a place for faith in his life - that man Job could never have come forth as gold purified in the fire. It was like, for Job, being in a maze. He couldn't where he was going, but God was up in the mountain looking down on the maze, He could see exactly where he was going - but He wanted him to learn faith, He wanted him to see his way through faith and not by sight.

Now listen this morning: we are to understand from Job, that there are some things which God cannot reveal to us in the present - because by revealing them He would thwart His purposes for good in our life. Enough is revealed by God in the scriptures to make faith intelligent, and enough is reserved in the scriptures to give faith scope for development. Why do the innocent and godly suffer? A final solution hasn't been given in the Bible, a final solution hasn't been given in the word of God, but there has been an interim solution, a temporary solution given which may bring peace to our hearts, until the full and final solution is given in a day that is yet to come. What is it? It's this: suffering fulfils a divine purpose for our good, until we shall see face to face, and until we shall be known even as we are known. The message this morning to your heart from the Lord is this: that there is blessing through suffering! Why? Why is there blessing through suffering? Because through suffering you can come face to face in a real encounter with God Almighty! Self can be slain, and God can be found.

This little book is just an illustration of Romans 8:28 where it says: 'And we know that all things work together for good'. It doesn't say all things are good, it says: 'All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose'. In Hebrews 12:11: 'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby'. It's not nice to taste it. It's not nice to experience it, no-one said it would be, but God knows what the purpose of it is and it's for your good.

What are your problems this morning? What are your trials? What are your persecutions? What are your private sorrows that break your heart when no-one else sees, and they seem to surpass all patience and quench all hope in your life? Well listen to me this morning, and listen to God: all of them are under the guidance of the infinite wisdom of God, and He is operating them for your good! Robert Burns, Robbie Burns in his 'Epistle to Davy' said these words, listen and I'll finish with this:

Though losses and crosses
Be lessons right severe,
There's wit there,
You'll get there,
You'll find nay other way'.

Appendix D:

"Courage For The Unknown Road"

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Joshua chapter 3 again, and as I was thinking about the message this morning, and realising that we have taken a short break over Christmas time from our studies in the book of Philippians, I was seeking the Lord's guidance as to what to bring to you today - whether to bring a message on the new year, or whether to just launch back into our letter of Philippians. I felt the Lord very forcibly giving me a text to bring to you all today as the Lord's people, but I want you to apply it personally to your individual lives and experiences. It's found right in the context of everything that we've read - and do not forget about that, and we'll be applying it in that context. Joshua gives the message of the Lord to the people of God at the end of verse 4: "For ye have not passed this way heretofore" - for ye have not passed this way heretofore.

The theme of my message this morning is 'Courage for the Unknown Road'. As I have outlined at the beginning of our reading for you the history of the people of God thus far in their journey toward the promised land, you will also remember that the evil report was given by the ten spies unto the people of God regarding this promised land that had been given to them by God. The report was not favourable of the ten spies - remember, ten were bad and two were good. Because of that there was somewhat of a revolt among the people of God. They rebelled against Moses, they rebelled against God, and because of that God said to them that every person under 20, they would know this - in the words of the Scriptures: 'Your children shall wander in the wilderness 40 years'. Everybody under the age of 20 years would know this for 40 years in the desert, wandering around in circles because of their unbelief and rebellion towards God.

During that time of going around in circles we read between the lines of the first five books of the Bible that God's people became familiar with the surroundings of the wilderness, even though it wasn't really God's perfect purpose that they should be there, they got used to it. They knew the features off by heart, if you like, for they frequently crossed these old tracks, and re-trod over old paths. They became familiar with this little plot of land that they were wandering through even though they were going towards the promised land. Yes, they had come out of the land of slavery, the land of Egypt; and yes, they were going up and down in the wilderness, but as they come right to the edge of the shore of the Jordan river they had never been at this spot before. They had never crossed the Jordan before. Forty years of familiarity with the wilderness, and wandering around in paths that they knew too well, sights that they had seen before from their childhood, many of them - but as they stand beside the river Jordan they're on new territory, they're on new ground, there are new difficulties that they are anticipating facing in the days that lie ahead of them, and a new series of events lie before them.

It's not too hard, is it, to make the application from the word of God to us today as we stand at the brink of a new year. We will face strange paths, we will go through new experiences, we will be asked to travel by God along new territories that we have never ever seen before. Throughout the desert experience, 40 years, of these children, many a time they fretted, they worried, they became anxious, they stepped back from the brink of crossing over into God's land of promise, and they ran away from it - that's why they were 40 years, a journey that should have taken a matter weeks or even, at the very longest, months. But as they stand before the Jordan God says to them: 'Ye have not passed this way heretofore'. As we stand in a place that we have never been before, and are about to embark upon an untrodden way that we have never been, there is a

danger that we can too become anxious and fretful, and the fear of the unknown can grip our hearts and our lives.

Before I say anything else this morning I want to lay down this foundation very firmly: the importance of faith and trusting God, that is having a sound trust in God in our pilgrimage down here on earth. There's nothing more awful than a distrustful, fretful Christian; an anxious and a worrying child of God. I'll tell you why: because that more than anything robs God of His glory, the glory that He is the great Jehovah who can guide us through the pilgrim land; the glory of His word that tells us that God is trustworthy; that He is a God who provides, Jehovah-Jireh; and that He will bring us through whatever difficulties there are. It was the Israelites' distrust, 40 years in the wilderness, that dishonoured God. Really by inference, it was claiming that God was less than His word in following through and coming through for them.

Now you don't have to read too much of the word of God to find out that the Spirit of God energetically encourages us to trust in God. In fact that, if anything, is what the whole book is about, apart from declaring who God is as a revelation of His person, it is to encourage men who are but dust and fallen in depravity to reach out and to trust God. You only need to look at Isaiah chapter 40, that great passage of comfort, to see that the will of God is that His children should be comforted: 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem'. God wants us, and we can conclude that God desires His saints to be comforted as they go through this earthly pilgrimage - and to lose that comfort is a serious matter. Spurgeon said: 'He glorifies God most whose faith staggers least'. George Mueller, that great pioneer of faith who trusted God in a way that many of us perhaps - I hesitate to say this, I hope that you do trust God in the same way, but many of us will never do so - he said: 'The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith', isn't that right? 'The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith', and he goes on, 'and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety'.

Now I don't know what trials you're going through today as we meet in this place, but one thing I know, a common trial that we will all face in the days that lie ahead is the unknown. We will all know change, in some small or large way we will step onto new territory, be found in novel circumstances and experiences, and within all of us I would say there is an inbuilt tendency against change. We build our little nest around us, and we want to live in our nest and die in our nest - and even if the present circumstances that we're living in at the moment are unsatisfactory and are very difficult, it's better the devil we know than the devil we don't, isn't it? We don't want to be launched into an even deeper problem, or even a different problem - perhaps we've even become used and comfortable with the problems that we're in at present.

I wonder am I speaking to folk today who are fearing what the new year holds for them. Maybe you're fearing new truths that God will reveal to you, and that you will have to be obedient to. Many people fear spiritual attainments: 'What if God should come into my home, or into my church in real revival blessing, and I would be shoved out of my comfort zone and my spiritual lukewarmness?'. People fear that, God taking a real dealing with them - maybe you're unsaved here this morning, and you fear that this year God should convict you with the guilt of your sin and God should save you! I pray to God that we'll all know that moving of the Spirit of God in our lives. Maybe you fear that God will lead you out in a new work that He's never asked you to do before - full-time service for the Lord in some shape or form, missionary service, going out as an evangelist, working among young people or children, I don't know what it is. Maybe it's a disease, so many of us here in this fellowship have suffered disease and sickness in the year that has gone by, but perhaps your concern and anxiety is that the disease would get worse, or that the pain would increase, or maybe even at the end of it all there is death in this year!

Some fear poverty, some fear old-age, some are dismayed at the prospect of separation from a friend or a loved one with whom your heart is wrapped. I don't know what it is, but I'll tell you this much: all of these fears, no matter what they may be, exercise an awful influence on the child of God - for we are not given a spirit of fear. It's easy saying these things, but change too often can hold upon us a paralysis that prevents us

going on for God, and going into the service and into the depths and the fullness that God would want us to. Old W.P. Nicholson said: 'If Satan can't stop us getting converted, he will do all in his power to get us diverted'. One of the greatest ways the evil one can get us diverted is to give us these fears of unknown uncertainties that are ahead of us in days or years or decades that lie ahead.

Now my aim this morning in bringing the word of God to you is to help some of you, to help some of you who are entering into the unknown year in fear - perhaps even paralysed, being terrified by what is ahead that you don't know, but you fear the worst. I want you to see that with the people of God, as this fresh emergency came in vogue and arose among them, they had new orders from God. When there was a new trial and a new path, God came in by His Spirit and gave them new orders and gave them divine directions. I want you to see today that we will always have the leading and guidance and direction of the Spirit of God if we will but wait for it, and if we will cry to the Lord like the Psalmist: 'Teach me Thy way, O Lord'.

Now there are three things that I want us to see today, and if we take them to heart I believe that God will deliver us, deliver us, from the fear of the unknown, and will bolster us with courage for whatever the year holds. The first thing is this: you need to seek the word of God, you need to seek the word of God. If you look at verse 1 for a moment, it says: 'And Joshua rose early in the morning' - now I'll stop there. Joshua rose early in the morning, now you don't have to read too far in this book - up to chapter 8 - to find that Joshua was an early riser. You find it in this chapter, chapter 6, chapter 7, and chapter 8 it says: 'And Joshua rose early in the morning'. Now why did he rise early in the morning? Did he just like the morning? Did he like to see the frost on the ground like this morning? Did he feed some cattle? No, nothing like that, but if you turn back to chapter 1 of Joshua and verse 8, he is obeying God's word to his heart. God told him: 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success'. God had commanded him in the mornings to be around the book of God, devoting time in prayer to God, meditating upon the word of God.

I have heard men say that you can't be dogmatic on this, but I'm going to be dogmatic anyway. Because I believe that the ordained, sovereign time that God has set to meet with Him is the morning - the primary time to meet with God is the morning. Now I'm not saying that's the only time: 'Evening, and morning, and afternoon will I pray and cry aloud and seek God's face', David said. Morning is not the only time, but I believe that God has ordained in the practice of these men of God, and some day I'll take time and preach on it the whole morning, God has ordained the morning that we should rise, and God's face should be the first that we look into, and God's voice should be the first that we listen to, and His ear should be the first that hears our voice.

The Psalmist said: 'Oh God, Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee. My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is'. If there is a good example for you to follow as you enter into the unknown year, it is the example of Joshua - and our Joshua, the Saviour, Jesus, Yeshua. It says in Mark 1:35 and in other places in the Gospels: 'And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed'.

Now I hope you don't think I'm too simplistic in saying this, and I'm not saying it in ignorance of other factors and circumstances - but I have found in my short experience, if any experience there is, that at times those who buckle under life's trials are those who are not standing firmly on the word of God. That's what I've found. More and more in counselling situations, and even recently in the mission in Cookstown I was talking to a person, and they were lamenting to me how they'd lost the joy of their salvation, how they had been backslidden in various sins and found that they were always going with the crowd and never had the strength of victory in their life. One of the very first questions I asked him was this: do you read your Bible?

Do you read your Bible? Is that too simple? I'll tell you: it's not too simple, for time after time after time again they say: 'No, no'.

It may be simplistic to you, but I believe the man that says: 'When you see a Bible that's falling apart, it belongs to a man or a woman whose life is not falling apart'. If you want to have a blessed new year, not without trials, but knowing the presence and power and guidance of God in the midst of your trials - I urge you at the beginning of the year: get into the word of God, morning by morning. Get a reading scheme - we were selling them the other evening, we'll be selling them tomorrow evening - but buy one and follow through the word of God! Not just one verse a day with a bit of a devotion, get into the word of God and He will guide you through it! We need it, surely you know we need it? For we don't know what's ahead of us in an unknown future.

This place, you've never been to before, He said to these Israelites, you've not passed this way heretofore. So it's inevitable, it makes sense that if we've never been here before we're going to need the Lord's guidance and presence as we step out each day. When we read the word of God, and pray to the Lord, and meditate upon it, and have communion with the Lord - do you know what happens? We actually put God into our situations, and God paves the way before us, He goes before to direct; and we must follow because God knows the way, God leads the way, and God opens the way.

There's the first piece of advice from the word of God, this verse 11 says He is the Lord of all the earth; and therefore if He is guiding us through His word we ought to have nothing to fear. The second thing I want you to see is that we need to look to the Ark of God. You need to seek the word of God, but you need to look to the Ark of God. Now if you look at the second half of verse 3, it says: 'When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it'. Now the significance of that is that when the Ark of God was at rest in the camp of Israel, it was always in the midst of the camp, it was right in the middle - and you've seen those pictures of the Tabernacle, of course the Ark of the Covenant was in the Tabernacle, and all the tribes of Israel camped around the Tabernacle, around the Ark theoretically, in the wilderness. So when the Ark was at rest it was in the middle of the people. When the people were in procession and marching the Ark of God would be in the centre of that procession, right in the middle as the people were in caravan to their next destination.

But this is a unique position for the Ark of God, right up at the front of the people who are about the cross over the Jordan river. The significance of this is that it marks a very special occasion and event in the life of God's people. It's special, it's extraordinary, it's a solemn occasion. The specific Levites that used to carry the Ark were not the ones that are carrying it here, there's a different group of priests and Levites - another sign to signify that this is a special event. Now what's special about it? Well, not only was it to be before them but it says that it was to be before them, verse 4: 'Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure' - that's about a mile, almost a mile ahead of the people as they were marching. The reason was that if they were too crowded together and the Ark was at the very front of them, people at the back and people at the middle wouldn't be able to see it - the view of the Ark would be intercepted. So there was a space of about a mile put between the people and the Ark, why? So that the Ark would be visible for all in the camp to see, so that the Ark would be recognisable as their guide along the untrodden way that they had never gone heretofore.

Do you see it? Well, it's the time to cross the Jordan, and they stand at the brink, the shore of that great river - and it's now in the flood stage because the snows of Lebanon mountains in harvest time melt, and all the great waters come down, and now the Jordan is very deep and extremely wide. But they're told: 'You keep your distance from the Ark, because everybody in the camp has to be able to see it'. I don't have time to go into Old Testament typology, but I'm just going to say this: the Ark of God signifies the Christ of God. Where the blessing of God is, the presence of God on earth was there, in the Holiest place of all, signifying

that mercy seat of the Christ who died for us, and His blood that was shed on our behalf to bring us into the very presence of God. Now what's God saying to us today? If you're to go into the unknown new year, you need to seek the word of God, but you need to always keep your eyes upon the Ark of God, the Christ of God.

What does the distance mean? Well, I venture to say that the distance means that we have to keep a respectful and reverential distance between us and Christ, with regards to delving into the mysteries of His person and His character. Sometimes there is a shameful familiarity with regards to looking at certain aspects and practices in the life of Christ when it is a mystery - God manifest in flesh - so we're to keep a reverential awe and distance of worship, but yet with that distance there we're to keep our eyes on Him! Oh, you'll not go too wrong this year if you keep your eyes on the Lord - and I'll tell you, that above all things will assure you a victory.

Remember Peter? We're so hard on him, I wish I had half of his courage. He steps out of the boat, remember that now! He steps out of the boat, and he walks on the water - he walked on the water when he kept his eyes on the Master, and then when he heard the winds and the waves; the Bible says he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried: 'Lord, save me!'. Do you see what happened? When he got his eyes off the Ark of God he became afraid, and then he sank; and these priests were being asked to get their feet wet. Both these things tell us that it takes great faith to walk on water, and it takes great faith to do the greater and walk through the water.

I'm asking all of us today in this place: are you still lingering in the boat for fear, are you still lingering on the banks of the Jordan because you fear the untrodden and unknown way? Well, let me tell you that if you seek the word of God, and if you, my friend, look to the Ark of God the future will become your friend, and when you follow the Lord and trust His promises you will have victory even in the depths of the darkest experiences that this year can throw up against you. I love that hymn: 'O pilgrim bound for the heavenly land, never lose sight of Jesus' - that's the secret.

In the quiet place this morning I was meditating upon a hymn - I don't think we ever sing it in the Believer's Hymnbook, but every time I say that somebody corrects me that we sing it all the time but I've forgotten! Number 182, listen to this:

'Oh, eyes that are weary,
And hearts that are sore,
Look off unto Jesus,
And sorrow no more!

The light of His countenance
Shineth so bright,
That on earth, as in heaven,
There need be no night.

Looking off unto Jesus
My eyes cannot see
The troubles and dangers
That throng around me.

They cannot be blinded
With sorrowful tears.
They cannot be shadowed
With unbelief--fears.

Looking off unto Jesus.
My spirit is blest,--
In the world I have turmoil,
In Him I have rest.

The sea of my life
All about me may roar--
When I look unto Jesus
I hear it no more.

Looking off unto Jesus,
I go not astray;
My eyes are on Him.
And He shows me the way.

The path may seem dark
As He leads me along,
But following Jesus
I cannot go wrong.

Looking off unto Jesus,
My heart cannot fear:
its trembling is still
When I see Jesus near:

I know that His power
My safeguard will be.
For, "Why are ye troubled?"
He saith unto me.

Soon, soon shall I know
The full beauty and grace
Of Jesus, my Lord,
When I stand face to face:

I shall know how His love
Went before me each day,
And wonder that ever
My eyes turned away'.

Seek the word of God, look to the Ark of God, and finally trust yourself to the providence of God. This was a place they had never been before. Now listen: Joshua had been there before, Caleb had been there before - not the Jordan, but you remember that they were among the throng that passed through the Red Sea. But there was, in the majority of the rest of them, a fresh generation born in the wilderness who had no recollection of the Red Sea and had no faith prepared by the great miracle that they had seen in the Red Sea. Some men put a lot by experience, and they're right to do so, but experience isn't everything because I'll tell you this: experience never helps you through an experience that you've never experienced before - the ground that you have never passed this way heretofore.

As they stand at the brink of the Jordan, they see the river full to the brim, and they ask the question: 'How are we going to cross it?'. They had no apparatus to cross it, they had no canoes in their tents - and as they

stand at the shore, maybe they think: 'Well, suppose we do cross it. We'll go into this great walled city of Jericho and ferocious enemies, men like beasts behind it, and they'll devour us. Suppose we do defeat the people, and the men of Jericho - there are hundreds more cities just as ferocious and wicked as Jericho, and we've to wipe all them out too!'. I'll tell you, their circumstance was one that might naturally excite a thousand fears, but what I want you to see is this: that faith and trust in the providence of God drove all their fears away! God sent His consoling word, and in their time of need they were given faith to be tried and God sustained them by His power - and there's no sign here of them drawing back and running away as they did 40 years before in the wilderness!

Isn't it wonderful? My friend, are you in a case like this? Are you in a place today that you've never been before? Are the demands upon your strength more heavy than at any former time? Or is your faith tested more than it has ever been? Or maybe you're fearing all of these things, as the conglomeration of tragedies that will be ahead of you this year? Well, I want you to listen very carefully in the closing moments, listen to these comforting thoughts. One: this year may be unknown to you, but this year is of God's appointing. Have you heard that? You ask the Israelites: 'Well, how did you get here?', they say 'We didn't come here, we followed this fiery cloudy pillar, and we watched by day and night and followed it wherever it went, and Jehovah brought us here!'. It's Jehovah has brought you to this new year, and whatever will come across your path, you need to see that God's providence never brings us to a wrong position, His wisdom cannot err at all, He maketh no mistakes.

It's only if you see the circumstances with the eye of fear that you'll fall, but if you see it with the eye of faith you'll see - I find this hard to accept, but this is what you've got to accept - you'll see that you're in the best possible position, for God always chooses the best for His people. Listen carefully: if it had been better that there was no devil, for the people of God now, if it were best that there had been no devil and that there be no death, there wouldn't be any devil or any death for the children of God. He would have taken us straight home, He wouldn't have let us go through any of it - do you believe that now? That all things are for the good of them that love Him! You have to believe that!

Think about this other thought: this year's untrodden way is new to you, but it's not new to God - it's not new to God. He doesn't know the word 'yesterday', He doesn't know the word 'tomorrow', He only knows the word 'today'. Where you will be tomorrow He is today - and a thousand, ten thousand, a million years ago He knew your trial and your sorrow - it's not new to Him. What is a new path to you is an old path to God, better than that: look higher to the very throne of God, look at the right hand of God to the Man of Calvary and see one there who not only knows the path that you will go through that is new to you as old, but who has gone through it Himself! What about that? He has gone through the room of your darkness, whatever it may be, before you - and as He's gone through it, He's sown it with light so that it will not be as difficult for you. Isn't it wonderful?

There's more, my friend it's not only not new to God, but it's not new to the people of God. Joshua and Caleb had trodden this path before as they'd gone through the Red Sea, and don't ever think that your woes are peculiar to you. Some people say to me: 'David, if I only knew that someone else was going through this' - they are going through it! More than that, they have come through it and done so victoriously! 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you' - better: this untrodden way goes in the right direction. If the Israelites knew that the way that they were going was going to lead them back into Egyptian slavery they would have a right to say to God: 'No, we're not going that way' - but they knew that it would end in a land flowing with rivers, and a land flowing with milk and honey. Is that not our case?

Best of all, listen: whatever our untrodden, unknown year holds, if we seek God's word, and look to the Ark of God, and trust in the providence of God it will bring glory to the Christ of God. What do I mean? Look at

verse 7: 'The LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee'. Who was with you when everybody else deserted you? Who ministered to you and nursed you when you were lying in a sick bed and your bones were poking through your flesh? The Great Physician. Who was with you when you went through that wilderness of sorrow? The Good Shepherd. And at the very brink of death, if you have to go through it - and maybe you've watched it and you've seen everything mortal melt away - you still know in the depths of your soul that He is the life, and the fullness that He gives is sufficient to fill the soul when all the other created joys disappear. I'll tell you this: it will magnify Jesus if you go on that untrodden way with faith, and if you say: 'Lord, whatever will magnify Christ, I'll go through anything, I'll give up everything to glorify Him'.

Though you have not gone this way heretofore, God's word says: go forward! And may the Joshua of our souls lead us all unto the victory.

Our Father, it was the Lord Himself that told us that this road is the hard one, it is the narrow one - but, our Father, it is the one that leads unto life eternal, it is the one that leads to Jesus. Lord, thrill us as we step into the unknown with Thy word, with Thy Christ, and with Thy providence - and though we step on ground that we have not passed through heretofore, that we will know the Lord God going before us. Amen.

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