

Psalm 91 A Song of Trust

The best thing in the world according to one five year old boy was motorbikes. He loved them. The faster and louder they were the more he loved them. Every time he saw one he would yell, “Wow! Look at that! I’m going to have one of those one day!”

His mother, on the other hand, was not so thrilled at the thought of her son screaming around the roads on two wheels and her answer was always the same, “Not so long as I’m alive, you won’t.”

So, one day while the boy was playing with his friend in the front garden a brand new, shiny super bike zoomed by and pointing it out to his friend he excitedly cried, “Look at that! Look at that! I’m getting one of those just as soon as my mum dies!”

Ever had the feeling that you haven’t quite managed to communicate with your children? Sometimes it’s hard to instil a healthy sense of fear into other people, sometimes they just don’t understand why you are scared of something but we all have something that we are afraid of. So if we are all afraid of something Psalm 91 is great for us because it is a comforting Psalm, a song designed to reassure us when we are afraid.

One way adults deal with things that frighten us is to take out an insurance policy, we think that money will reassure us and take away our fear – although that doesn’t seem to quite work. The problem is the small print - its always worth reading the small print to discover what isn’t covered - I was looking through internet insurance sights and found one where the small print confirms that your insurance is invalidated if you tow two caravans at the same time! I’d like to see you try, although obviously someone has!

But it is also worth checking what extra things are covered so that you have additional peace of mind. How wonderful to think you have lost everything and then discover that you not only are covered for the basics, but the extras too and with more care and help than you thought.

Well Psalm 91 begins with what looks like God's insurance policy for us – a list of what we are protected from;

Snares (verse 3a); we're protected

Pestilence – that's disease (3b); we're protected

Violent attacks from enemies (vv5-8); we're protected

Safety for both yourself and your home (vv 9-10); we're protected

And protection from wild beasts (vv 11-13); thanks to angels - we're protected (plus trip hazards too!)

But, really? I mean, does that mean that bad things will never happen to God's people? If so either none of us are really members of God's people, or God's promises are lies, because we know that bad things do happen to everyone!

Well, actually this psalm never claims that nothing bad will ever happen to us in the same way that an insurance policy doesn't prevent accidents, or fires or death. In fact the Bible recognises that bad things will happen to us; much of the Old Testament deals with the suffering of God's people, the New Testament sees the early Church being persecuted and Jesus himself is nailed to a cross and left to die a terrible death. Being a Christian is not a soft option.

But this psalm is so much better, so much more realistic because it has some great "extras" – first and foremost where it reminds us of God's promise that "[he] will be with [us] in trouble" Psalm 91:15.

And that's really good news because we know that this isn't a perfect world, we know that bad things happen to good people so to know that God is actually with us when bad things do happen means that the bad times are not so scary.

And God tells us why we can trust him in those times. First of all in verses 1 and 2 God says he is like a strong castle, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

It's a great picture of being able to flee to a fortified castle when under attack and being safe from the enemy. Imagine yourself living hundreds of years ago in a small village. When enemies attacked your home would provide no protection what so ever, so what you had to do was run as fast as you could into the castle that you had sensibly built your home next door to, the portcullis drops, the drawbridge comes up and the walls are so thick and high that nothing and no one can get through – you are safe!

God is like that; at Tiddlywinks we sing a song which reminds us that Jesus is "strong and he's mighty, creator of all things" there is no one greater or more powerful.

Then in verse 4 the psalmist goes on to say; "[God] will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart."

It's a softer image – a mother bird protecting her young, which tells us how much God loves us, how he feels about us; just as a mother bird will do anything she can to protect her young God will lovingly look after us, but it is again linked with military terms – that protection will be a shield and a rampart – God's protection is not insubstantial, it is strong, it will endure.

Again our Tiddlywinks song goes on, “Yes he is kind and he’s gentle, he’s my Saviour, friend and king.”

So God’s promise is that he will be with us in the bad times, but is there no real protection at all? Well, yes – there is – it’s a great “extra”; God will actively protect us against the greatest enemy, the great lion, the serpent; Satan. Listen again to verse 13, “You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.”

In the New Testament Peter warns us, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8) and of course we can go back to Genesis for the picture of Satan as a serpent. But this Psalm is a song of trust and promise, do you remember that big word we learned back in January when we began this journey through the Bible? Protoevangelion – the “first Gospel”, the first time we hear the message of salvation proclaimed? Its in Genesis chapter 3; “So the LORD God said to the serpent,I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” That’s exactly what God promises here!

Psalm 91 isn’t just a promise of protection against wild animals, this is a reminder that the victory over sin and death will be given to us by God and that it is fulfilled by the descendant of King David – King Jesus who at the cross crushed Satan, the serpent, the prowling ravenous lion just when Satan thought he had dealt God a fatal blow.

Suddenly the greatest enemy, the greatest fear we can have – eternal death and separation from God is no longer frightening, God will be with us through everything tough and bad time that we face especially when we face our own mortality.

But at that moment Satan will have no hold over us if we flee into the stronghold of God's fortress-like mercy and love, safe forever in his care because of the victory won by Jesus.

The Bible isn't just a book of rules, or history, its full of poetry and praise and through it all is the reminder that if we trust Jesus, then no matter what we face we need have no fear because God will rescue us and protect us and save us.

So how do you behave when trouble comes? Do you blame God, or trust God? When you are overwhelmed by sin do you abandon God, or trust God? When you face your own death will you be overwhelmed by fear, or fearless because you trust God? In short, will we trust the psalmist in declaring "I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."