

## **A Biblical Response to Fear**

### **Psalm 91**

This morning we have a window between sermon series' where I can preach about anything, and as I thought about what to preach about and started writing down ideas, the thought of fear came to mind and I quickly felt confirmation that that's what I should preach about – a biblical response to fear.

I thought about the world we live in, the season we're in with a national election coming up. I thought about the political tension, all the messages of warning and woe coming at us from various sources. The flames of fear are being stoked by the media, even from Christian sources. What is going to happen to our nation? Our way of life? Our peace and prosperity? "This is a critical election..." "the turning point, the tipping point, this could be the last chance to turn things around..." Fear is becoming a strong ally in marketing efforts and campaign strategies. Fear sells. Fear stirs up action. Fear makes money. Fear moves people.

These are uncertain and tumultuous times, and they are also times of growing wickedness and rebellion against God. How long will God allow these things to continue? Not only is there the fear of the direction we're headed, but there's also the fear of what's going to happen when God puts his foot down and there is judgment in our land. Perhaps that's already happening. It is a shaky world and the setting is perfect to stir up fear. You see it all around us and you can feel it. Perhaps you've also been controlled by it.

Fear affects us personally and feels terrible, but not only that, it also effects the way we treat other people. It can be a powerful master, making us do and say all kinds of things that we normally wouldn't say or do. Therefore, fear creates issues and situations. It causes friction and tension in relationships. It brings separation and makes enemies. There are people we'll just never talk to again because of fear.

So this morning I want to look at a biblical response to fear. As Christians, fear is going to happen. None of us is oblivious to it, we're all going to feel it for one reason or another, but fear shouldn't control us, so rather than giving in to it or

condemning ourselves just for feeling it, I want us to look at how the Bible says we should handle it.

There are a lot of great Bible passages we could use, but the one that came to mind is Psalm 91 - a Psalm that's often thought of as the Soldier's Psalm. It's often used by soldiers to encourage them before heading into conflict and danger and it's a good Psalm for us to learn from as well with the fears we encounter in our lives.

I'm going to look at this Psalm in 5 sections. We are going to see wonderful promises in these verses and I want us to keep something in mind as we look at them so that we interpret and apply them correctly. These promises were originally given within the covenant that God had with Israel and therefore there was a very real expectation of physical protection based on God's covenant promises. If Israel was faithful to the covenant and trusting in him, protection was guaranteed. If they were unfaithful, it was a different story.

We need to apply these verses a little differently because God's plans and purposes in our lives are different than those he had for the nation of Israel. There is not the same level of guaranteed physical protection – God may allow suffering to happen to us that he did not allow to happen to a faithful Israel – that doesn't mean God has failed to keep his promises. We need to understand that if we suffer, we can know for certain that it will only come to us through the hands of our loving, sovereign, wise, good heavenly Father who uses all things for our ultimate good (becoming like Christ), even suffering. So our biggest takeaway from this Psalm should be to see who God is and that we can trust him and take refuge in him.

Psalm 91:1-2.

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

<sup>2</sup>I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress,  
my God, in whom I trust."

This Psalm begins with a reminder of who God is and who we put our trust in. The Expositor's Bible Commentary points out that the author uses the names of God to evoke confidence. He uses four names: Most High, The Almighty,

The Lord (Yahweh), and My God. These indicate the power of the Creator-God and the endearing love of the covenant-God. Those who dwell in his shelter will abide in his shadow and will find him to be a refuge and fortress in whom they can trust. This is an invitation to the protection of God.

Illustration: When my kids were little and ran to me for protection from an uncle trying to tickle them.

We put our trust in God because of who he is. He is our Creator, he is powerful to accomplish all his will, he is all knowing, and he loves us. We need to learn to trust him for who he is rather than just trusting him to do what we want him to do. Sometimes what we want him to do doesn't match up with his plans and purposes and instead of letting that unravel our faith, we need to learn to trust him for who he is. He is trustworthy no matter what.

Psalm 91:3-6

<sup>3</sup>For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
and from the deadly pestilence (plague).

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

<sup>5</sup>You will not fear the terror of the night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day,

<sup>6</sup>nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,  
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

Here we see that those things that normally cause people to be terrified should not terrify those who are under the care of the Almighty. The author gives two images of God that promote confidence. He is the one who delivers those who are trapped in a snare and facing deadly peril. He is also the mother eagle with her young, who covers/protects those who are weak and vulnerable. His faithfulness is like a shield and buckler (think Captain America) that deflects the arrows of the enemy.

Because of his faithfulness to deliver and protect, we need not be terrified in the face of danger. He is with us and around us. What harm can come to us that must not first pass through him? Again, for us this does not mean that

harm will never come, but if it does come, God is right there with us. He will only allow suffering according to his sovereign purposes. In this way the saints of old could face torture and death because they knew nothing would happen outside God's control.

I readily admit this is a hard place for us to get to. I would prefer a guarantee of God's protection and that harm will never happen. But sometimes God uses those things in ways we cannot see, so we need to trust in him.

Psalm 91:7-10

<sup>7</sup>A thousand may fall at your side,  
ten thousand at your right hand,  
but it (pestilence and destruction) will not come near you.

<sup>8</sup>You will only look with your eyes  
and see the recompense of the wicked.

<sup>9</sup>Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—  
the Most High, who is my refuge—

<sup>10</sup>no evil shall be allowed to befall you,  
no plague come near your tent.

Here the author seems to envision the judgment upon the wicked – pestilence and destruction that God brings to them because of their wickedness. When God is carrying out his judgment on the world, we can be certain that the same fate will not befall us.

Many Americans are turning away from God and indulging in all kinds of wickedness and immorality. This is all leading to God's judgment in one way or another and many Christians are afraid of what's going to happen to us in the midst of it. But God does not punish indiscriminately. The righteous will not suffer at the hand of God like the wicked will, even in this life. Certainly there will be some level of broad suffering when God brings judgment, because everyone is going to be affected, but we can be sure that he will see us through.

There is a difference between God's judgment on the wicked and the persecution of the righteous. Both can be forms of tribulation on earth.

Christians will face the tribulation of being persecuted by evil men, but we will not face the tribulation of God's judgment like the wicked will.

#### Psalm 91:11-13

<sup>11</sup> For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways.

<sup>12</sup> On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.

<sup>13</sup> You will tread on the lion and the adder;  
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

This is a continuation of the former promise and some explanation of how it will come to pass. God has holy angels and has given them the charge to protect the saints. In times of righteous judgment the saints won't just get lucky, we'll have angels standing guard over us to protect us. The lion and adder, which appear to be symbols of God's judgment in this context that are sent by him to punish the wicked, will not succeed against God's people.

#### Psalm 91:14-16

<sup>14</sup> "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;  
I will protect him, because he knows my name.

<sup>15</sup> When he calls to me, I will answer him;  
I will be with him in trouble;  
I will rescue him and honor him.

<sup>16</sup> With long life I will satisfy him  
and show him my salvation."

Here the author changes the point of view and we have a very personal declaration of protection and salvation from the mouth of God. In this declaration, the object of God's salvation is the one who holds fast to him in love, knows his name, and calls to him in times of trouble. It is one who truly knows God, loves God, and puts his trust in him. This is the man or woman that is also known and loved by God. God promises to deliver, protect, answer, be with, rescue, honor, satisfy, and bring to salvation.

That is the very position I know that you and I long to be in, and that is the position we are in through faith in Christ. We have been reconciled to God in

Christ and adopted as beloved sons and daughters. We are under his wings. His shield and buckler is over us. His angels are protecting us.

So even though we live in uncertain and perilous times with many reasons to fear, we who are in Christ have an island we can go to, an oasis of shelter in the storm. That oasis is our awesome God who loves us. A God who is carrying out all his eternal plans and purposes here on earth, but who is also kind and good. He will watch over his people, he will not let us face the consequences of his judgment on the wicked, and no danger we face will come to us, except through his wise, good, and sovereign hands.

If you are prone to fear, I encourage you to memorize this Psalm and recite it to yourself whenever you feel afraid...