

Psalm 91: 1-16; “The Corona Glory of Christ”, A Sermon preached during the time of the Coronavirus restrictions, sent out as a video sermonic message, Online, on Sunday, April 5th, 2020.

My attention was directed to this Psalm this week by brother Ed Foster who texted me and asked whether this was the Corona Psalm, because of David’s references to pestilence and plague in verses 3, 6, and 10? I said to him – Yes, I believe so. From what I have been able to glean, the coronavirus gets its name from the fact that when it is looked at, under an electron microscope, each virion (that is, the complete infective form of the virus host cell) is surrounded by a “corona” or a halo. Each infected cell has its own haloed glory. But we, as people who might be infected by this virus see and feel only the effects of sickness and possible death coming from exposure to it. But, at this hour, I would preach to you of the lasting spiritual remedy for all who are worried about the coronavirus. It is found in, beholding by faith, the Corona-glory of Christ.

One of the meanings of the word corona, besides its being a halo, is that it also is a crown. And Christ, because of His sufferings and death, has conquered sin and death, and He now wears a spiritual corona. He has been crowned with glory and honor by God the Father, and the Father has put all things under His feet. Practically, this means that the Lord Jesus Christ is presently ruling over all men and nations. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and God the Father has given Him all power in heaven and earth. And this further means, that since He has this highest of positions over all of mankind, He is the only One who is equipped to save you, to help you, to heal you, and to bring you to heaven and to eternal glory; in both a spiritual and physical sense. By faith in Him, God forgive all of your sins, He heals all of your diseases, and He redeems your life from the pit. He crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, it says in Psalm 103, verses 3 and 4.

Since the God of the Bible is the only true and living God, every person in this fallen world of sin and disease, must come to believe in Him, and in His only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, if they would know eternal comfort and good hope. “Those who live a life of communion with God are constantly safe under His protection.” (Henry) So I want to tell you now, that if you will make the Lord Jesus your Refuge and the Triune God your Secret Dwelling Place, then all of God’s promises will be made good to you, and you will be kept eternally safe. So let’s take a closer look at God’s precious and magnificent promises found in this text. 1st of all – God’s promises of safety and deliverance in the time of the perilous pestilence. (verses 1-8) 2nd – God’s promises of no evil befalling you. (verses 9-13) And 3rd – God’s promises of setting the believer on high through Jesus Christ our Lord. (verses 14-16)

1st of all – God’s promises of safety and deliverance in the time of the perilous pestilence. (verses 1-4)

“He who dwells 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 I will trust.’” “Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence.” “He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.” We need to understand that Christ is the One whom this Psalm is speaking of, in the first and primary sense. When you place your faith in Christ, you find that the promises which are given here, which were perfectly fulfilled in Him, are fulfilled to you as well, through Him, and because of Him. And thus, when we are trusting in Him, we come to find this blessed reality; that we do not have to be afraid of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noon day.

Why is that? It is because God, when we are trusting in Him, we find Him to be a spiritual Refuge and a Fortress to us; to everyone who believes in His name. So each of us must ask

ourselves today whether we are trusting in God, whether we are believing in His promises, or are we simply trusting in what the government, or other people, can do for us in this present crisis? Let me ask you now – Are you dwelling in the secret place of the Most High God? This secret place is the place of His presence. Psalm 31: 20 – “You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly from the strife of tongues.” What does it mean to be kept in the secret place of God’s presence? What does it mean to be secretly kept by God? It means that you have believed in God and His word, and you have come to know His loving care over you, in every aspect of your life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

These are not figments of the Christian believer’s imagination. They are realities to the person who has learned to abide in the shadow of the Almighty. Abiding in His shadow is your consciously and continually placing yourself under His protective care, both in regard to your body and in regard to your soul. If you believe in Christ, God is with you and He is for you. He loves you and is watching over you continually for good. If you have believed in Christ for salvation from sin, then you are spiritually, and continually, in His presence. This is not something which you always known by your being able to sense His presence, but rather, His presence is come to be understood better by you in your trusting in God’s promises, and your having fellowship with Him in your heart.

When you abide in Christ, you abide in the secret place of His favor, His love, and His care. Christ has died for your sins, and He lives for your justification. He sanctifies you by His truth. And you find refuge in Him from His wrath. God is no longer angry with you; He is reconciled to you through Jesus Christ your Lord. In justification, He looks at you as He would look at Christ. You are perfect and complete in Him. You are accepted in the Beloved. All of your sins are covered; indeed you are covered and comforted by what He has done and what He is doing for you by His grace, day by day. These tender mercies and this care are the feathers of His wings, which are in this marvelous word picture, spread over you. You take shelter there, under His wings. There you are spiritually protected and kept in His love. You learn to cast all of your burdens upon the Lord, and He sustains you. He will not suffer the righteous to be moved, as it says in Psalm 55: 22.

When you dwell in the secret place of the Most High, you are taking refuge in all that He has provided for you in Jesus Christ. You dwell between the wings of the cherubim. You are shown mercy, and you are given grace to help in time of need. The eternal God is a dwelling place and underneath are His everlasting arms. His truth becomes your shield and buckler. You read of the arms of Christ stretched out on the cross. You read in the Bible that God remembers Christ’s righteousness and His sufferings, and He forgives all of your sins, remembers them no more. You are adopted into His family. You are gathered to Him as a hen gathers her chicks.

You now take refuge in the shadow of His wings, and you now see the arms of your Savior welcoming you into God’s presence when you believe all of what He has done on your behalf, and you believe, and you are helped. When you believe in Christ, you are brought into a secret place of relationship with God, through Him, in your heart. Psalm 25: 14 – “The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.” “My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net. There may be people listening today who are praying, and they are saying in their prayer to God, the words of Psalm 25: 16-18 – “Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted.” “The troubles of my heart have enlarged; bring me out of my distresses!” “Look upon my affliction and my pain and forgive all of my sins.”

If you pray this way, dear listener, in the name of Jesus, God will answer you favorably. For you are taking refuge in Him. You will be able to say in the words of Psalm 94: 19 – “In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.” The secret place is the place of real and living spiritual fellowship and communion that you can have with the Father

and the Son in your heart. When you abide under the shadow of the Almighty, you are taking refuge in Him from all that the world, your flesh, and the Devil bring to you; sinful thoughts, fears, doubts of God wisdom or His goodness in permitting you to experience something like this pestilence that we are going through. But Christ dwells in you now, and you dwell in Him. Trusting in Christ God will most surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence.

2nd – We need to think together about God’s promises of no evil befalling you as a Christian. (verses 5-13)

“You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, Nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.” “A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you.” “Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked.” “Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.” “In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” “You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.”

We are presently living in days in this country where many are afraid of the coronavirus, but these verses say that the one believing in Jesus should not be afraid, because they have made God their refuge and dwelling place. No evil will befall them. Well, someone will ask – Do not Christians also die in pestilences and plagues? And I will say to you – Yes they sometimes do. But what the Christian should know, if they do not know it, is that no evil has really befallen them if they die. Psalm 23: 4 says – “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me. And also the promise of verse 8 – Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. A Christian, when they die, is simply removed from this life’s sad scenes by Christ Himself, and brought into the eternal realms of endless day. In that place there is only brightness and glory forever. No more sorrow or sickness; only pure and holy delights.

Now, what these verses that I have just read to you are saying, is that God is well able to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked in the judgments that He brings. He is certainly able to put the pestilence on the wicked alone, like He did with the death of the firstborn of Pharaoh in Egypt, when He was going to bring Israel out of bondage. In that case, when God makes a distinction like that, a thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come near you. What each of us needs to understand and believe, is just how sovereign God is, in all of his judgments; as to who will get the virus, and who will not. I am not saying that Christians will not get it, or that they will not die from it. But whether they live or die, they are Christ’s, and it will actually be a wonderful thing for them to depart and to be with Christ; far better, as it says in Philippians 1: 23.

Sometimes I am sure that God brings a pestilence both as a test to believers and as a judgment upon unbelievers in a nation. He does this in order to awaken them both to His righteous expectations. He brings a pestilence in order to deal with the pride and self-sufficiency of many people in that nation. He brings pestilence to deal with pride in the hearts of that nation’s leaders. Do you recall the incident that David passed through in 2nd Samuel chapter 24 that precipitated the crisis of a pestilence coming upon Israel? It says there – “Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, ‘Go number Israel and Judah.’”

Now, notice that the anger of the Lord was against the nation’s many sins, but He wanted to deal with it more specifically in relation to David as their king, for the king is the political head over the nation and he represents them all. In 1st Chronicles 21: 1, the parallel passage, it says –

“Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.” Well, I hope that you can see what was happening here. What was happening was that God was very displeased with David’s pride in his thoughts of having such a great number of fighting men, and trusting in numeric strength instead of His, that is God’s, strength. God knew that it was because of David’s pride that he did not see where his true strength lay. The same is true with us. Our true strength and our country’s true strength lies in our having God to be our God. Our true strength lies in our holding fast to Him, obeying His word, and not even when we are healthy, or safe, or financially secure. He would show us that He is enough when we seek Him and pray to Him.

And so God permitted Satan to tempt David to number the fighting men in Israel. Verse 2 – “So David said to Joab and the leaders of the people, ‘Go number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know it.’” “And Joab answered, ‘May the Lord make His people a hundred times more than they are.’” “But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord’s servants?” “Why then does my lord require this thing?” “Why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel?” Joab knew that what he was saying was true, and he knew that David ought to have known this, even better than he did. “Nevertheless the king’s word prevailed against Joab.” Verse 7 – “And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel.” Afterwards, when the plague came, David said to God – “I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now I pray, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”

So, here David did the right thing in confessing his sin and his foolishness, but still there were going to be these consequences of the plague. God sent the prophet Gad to David and he said to him in verse 10 – “Thus says the Lord: I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you.” And he set before him either three years of famine, or three months to be defeated by his foes with the sword of his enemies overtaking him, or else for three days of the sword of the Lord – the plague in the land, with the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel. And David was in great distress over this, but he said – “Please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man.”

Now, this choice of David’s was also a good one, in the sense that David wanted to fall into the hand of the Lord instead of the hand of man, because He knew that the mercies of the Lord were very great. But the Lord still sent the plague upon Israel and it says in verse 14 that 70,000 men of Israel fell. In sending this plague, God had sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. See how sovereign God is in a plague or pestilence? An angel took people’s lives at His express order. Sickness and death are never random happenings. We should never believe it. But we should learn to fear God. But as the angel was destroying, the Lord looked and He relented of the disaster, and He said to the angel who was destroying – It is enough; now stay your hand. This too, is what we should pray for in relation to this coronavirus. It is that the Lord would show mercy, and that He would stay His hand.

And the angel stood by the floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David saw this angel, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem, and he said to God in verse 17 – “Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered?” “I am the one who has sinned and done evil indeed; but these sheep, what have they done?” “Let your hand be against me and my father’s house, but not against Your people that they should be plagued.” “Therefore, the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David that David should go and erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.” Now, we need to see the connection between mercy and atonement for sin which are portrayed for us here. This was why David was commanded to erect an altar and to offer sacrifices. It was to show forth his faith in the coming of Christ to atone for sin; his faith in the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

What was God’s purpose in all of this, in terms of David and the nation of Israel? It was to bring David, and the nation with him, to repentance; that they would repent of their thinking

that their strength lay in themselves to do battle against their enemies, and that the temple of the Lord might thus be built by a humble and thankful king and his subjects, their having been forgiven of their God-dishonoring sins. This is the same concern God has in regard to His people and His church in his sending this plague of the coronavirus. It is to cause us to have real and serious dealings with him over the sins in our hearts and lives, and to show us that we do not help in the building of His Church, unless we see that the work is done according to His word, and by the power of His Holy Spirit. God must have the glory in all that is done by Christ's Church.

And furthermore, we should understand that Satan's schemes must be defeated and destroyed before really great results can be seen in the building of Christ's Church. You will recall that verses 11 and 12 of this Psalm, Psalm 91, were used by Satan to tempt the Lord Jesus when He was led by the Spirit, out into the wilderness to engage Him on our behalf. In Matthew chapter 4, verse 5, it says that the devil took Jesus up in to the holy city, and he set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and he said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down." "For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you, and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" And Jesus said to him, - "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Jesus knew that His Father had, and He would give His angels charge to keep Him in all His ways." They could indeed bear Him up in their hands lest He dash His foot against a stone. But He also knew that it would be testing God His father to do what Satan wanted Him to do, throw Himself down, in order to find out.

Jesus answered the devil's quoting of Scripture with another more appropriate Scripture. He did not deny that these words of promise were written about Him, but he would declare to the devil that trusting in God's word of promise does not lead to presumption. And it does not lead to setting aside obedience to His holy word, at any point. But I want you to see from these verses that the strength to defeat Satan's schemes was certainly not in David, for he fell right in with Satan's schemes for a time. But God brought him out of his sinful mistake, and He disciplined him diligently, and He went on to establish worship in a glorious way, in letting him make the preparations to build the Old Testament temple, through his son Solomon, on the very ground where he sacrificed to God on the altar which God had him make.

All this is meant to show us that Christ alone can give His New Testament saints the help that they need, by His Spirit, to help Him in the building of His Church so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. It is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord. (Zechariah 4: 6) But even though this is true, we need to see that each of us does have a very real fight to win, in personally overcoming the evil one. We are the beneficiaries of Christ's grace, and so by His power we too are expected to overcome the evil one. If you are humbly serving God in the strength that Christ supplies, if you are taking up the armor of God, and the weapons of righteousness, you shall indeed overcome. You shall stand in the evil day.

It is because of Christ's victory in His treading upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent, (these being word pictures of Satan and his emissaries) that you by His grace and wisdom and strength, shall be victorious. It is by faith in these promises which Christ has fulfilled by His righteous life and sacrificial death, that we can together see Satan trampled underfoot, and crushed under our feet. Satan no doubt has many mischievous schemes underway to try to destroy the forward progress of Christ's kingdom during this time of the coronavirus. But God has plans which are far greater than his, to bring good out of it, just as He did with David. And so, let us pray to be faithful, and let us pray that God will help us to see the gospel go forward, and conquer in many hearts, during this time of great weakness and sickness.

3rd – Because Christ set His love on the Father, the Father set Him and us, on high.
(verses 14-16)

“Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has 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 honor him.” “With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation.” Our Lord Jesus Christ set His love on the Father during the whole time of His earthly ministry. It was because He perfectly succeeded in loving God with all of His heart, that it says here, that the Father delivered him, and set Him on high. It was because the Lord Jesus was perfect in holiness and righteousness as a Man, that the Father delivered Him. So here we see what the word “deliver” means in relation to both the Lord Jesus, and in relation to ourselves as believers. Was the Lord Jesus delivered from going to the cross and from having to experience all the sufferings of God’s righteous wrath upon Him for our sakes? Well, you remember in Matthew 26: 39, when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, and He knew what was coming upon Him, that He said – “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” And in verse 42 – “Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.’”

And you also remember that it says in Hebrews 5, verse 7, that in the days of his flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear...” God the Father heard the cries of His Son, and yet He did not spare Him the death of the cross. But rather He delivered Him up for us all. His being heard was in regard to doing the Father’s will, and drinking the cup. It was found in not being spared from death. In Psalm 22, verse 21, when Jesus died on the cross, He said to the Father – “You have answered Me.” And so the Lord Jesus triumphed in death, and over death. God was with Him in His trouble. The way that He delivered Him was in His raising Him from the dead, and having Him ascend on high to sit at His right hand. He showed Him His salvation, and with a long life He is now satisfying Him; that is, length of days forever and ever.

And in Him, the Father will do the same for us. Our prayers may not be answered to be spared from the coronavirus. Jesus died at the age of 33. It was not with an earthly long life that the Father satisfied Him with. It was, and is, the heavenly eternal life that He was blessed with; of His reigning over His saints forever. Similar to Him, we may not have a long life, but we will be delivered from all evil, and God will keep our souls, and He will bring us to Himself on high if we have faith in Jesus. And so you need not fear the coronavirus if you will behold the Corona Glory of Christ and what He has done for you, a sinner.

With such precious and magnificent promises as we find in this Psalm you have every reason to rest upon Him and trust in Him. And dear believer, as you set your love upon Him, remember that He has blessed you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. God has set Christ on high and He has spiritually set you on high with Him. He has raised you up together with Christ, and He has made you sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come, God might show you the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards you in Christ Jesus. O may you let these truths sink down in your hearts, and sustain you during this time, when you are sheltering at home. I pray that you will make the Lord your Refuge and Fortress; even the Most High, your dwelling place.