

Psalm 91

1. *Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
and abides under the shadow of the Almighty.*
2. *Shall say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my stronghold.
my God, in whom I put my trust.'*
3. *For he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.*
4. *He shall cover you with his wings and you shall be safe under his feathers;
his faithfulness shall be your shield and buckler.*
5. *You shall not be afraid of any terror by night
nor of the arrow that flies by day;*
6. *Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor of the sickness that destroys at noon day.*
7. *Though a thousand fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand,
yet it shall not come near you.*
8. *Your eyes have only to behold
to see the reward of the wicked.*
9. *Because you have made the Lord your refuge:
and the Most High your stronghold.*
10. *There shall no evil happen to you,
neither shall any plague come near your tent.*
11. *For he shall give his angels charge over you,
to keep you in all your ways.*
12. *They shall bear you in their hands,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.*
13. *You shall tread upon the lion and adder;
the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.*
14. *Because they have set their love upon me, therefore I will deliver them;
I will lift them up, because they know my name.*
15. *They will call upon me and I will answer them;
I am with them in trouble, I will deliver them and bring them to honour.*
16. *With long life will I satisfy them
and show them my salvation.*

The Lord will give his angels charge over you
to keep you in all your ways.

Psalm 91 is a psalm of trust, spoken for the teaching of the congregation by a priest or worshipper, who has experienced God's deliverance. Deliverance is a frequent theme in the psalms.

The first part (vv.1-4) shows that to be in the temple is to be in God's shadow and under the protection of his wings. (as in Psalm 17: 'Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me under the shadow of your wings.' This may refer to the outspread wings of the cherubim on the ark of the covenant). The worshipper in complete confidence is safe from his enemies (the snare of the fowler) and from disease.

The second part (vv. 5-10) reflects the ancient belief that pestilence was the work of demons, who prowled about at noon and at night, shooting the arrow of sickness. The psalmist believes that the person, who trusts in God, is safe.

Then God sends angels to prevent the person of trust from stumbling along the road of life and to allow him to overcome every danger. Snakes and wild animals were regarded as agents of demons (see also the serpent in Genesis).

Finally, God declares that the person who holds fast to him in love and knows his name (saving nature) will enjoy deliverance, honour and long life.

So, we are encouraged to trust God, who will protect us. During times of peace, we have a tendency to forget God; we become very busy and are sometimes wrapped up in all our activity. In times of war or serious problems, such as the present virus, we may turn to God for help. I remember the old verger of the church in St. Andrews saying on Remembrance Sunday, "During the war, people were praying on their doorsteps."

Psalm 91 reminds us that God is always there, asking for our trust, assuring us that we are loved at all times, good or bad.

We shall come through, if we can learn to look more deeply beyond our everyday preoccupations, beyond the struggles and tragedies to Jesus Christ, who came to reveal God to us, to show us how to love, and to assure his disciples that God would never fail them.

Prayer

God of goodness and love, in whom we can trust in every hour of need: have mercy on all who are faced with fear and distress.

We ask that help may be given to them speedily, and that this emergency may be turned into an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of love and service, which bind people and nations together; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Christian Aid)