



# Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

Reading Psalm 91.

## Sermon: 2 August 2009

The text for the sermon comes from Psalm 91 verse 1 and 2:

- <sup>1</sup> He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.<sup>a</sup>  
<sup>2</sup> I will say<sup>b</sup> of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress,  
my God, in whom I trust.”

As you all know I grew up in South Africa actually in the province of Western Transvaal. I grew up with the idea that the “arrow that flies by day” mentioned in the Psalm talks about thunder and lightning because to us living in Western Transvaal thunder and lightning was one of the biggest dangers that existed on earth. We knew so many people that were struck by lightning – we knew many fatalities because of lightning. Actually you will still find that when you play golf in South Africa that a special bell rings to warn and tell people to get off the golf course when there is thunder and lightning.

To me this Psalm meant that God will protect me from lightning. And to bring this Psalm much more to home we used to drive to the Cape coast crossing high mountains. Usually by the afternoon there were large shadows of the mountains on the roads and I could get a good picture what the Psalm meant by the “shadow of the Almighty”. To think that his shadow was bigger than the mountains – in fact it covered the whole world! It was a gobsmacking idea to think that He will protect me under his big enormous shadow.

Off course, when we came to Scotland I soon learned that snow could be worse than lightning. I am sure the Peru work party that had just returned have many stories to tell us about their experiences of the Almightyness of God.

I think it is most probably how we all feel when we read and listen to this Psalm.

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<sup>a</sup> Hebrew *Shaddai*

<sup>b</sup> Or *He says*

However I think there are a lot of things in the Psalm that we might not understand. So let us focus on the background information that we have of this Psalm.

This Psalm is considered a “wisdom psalm” where the intention of the writer is to tell the reader what wisdom really is. In the case of the Bible: wisdom is when you serve God, when you obey him and listen to his word. It is a general principle, seen in the Wisdom Literature of the Bible that those who serve God that is the righteous will be spared unnecessary difficulties and be prosperous as described in Psalm 91. However there are different Biblical views on wisdom. According to the wisdom teacher in Ecclesiastes it is not true that those who serve the Lord will only encounter good things on this earth. According to him the good and the dreadful happen to everyone, even the righteous who serve the Lord.

And I am sure this is exactly what the Psalm is saying but adding on by saying that when the bad things do happen the righteous will have God to help them. The author of the Psalm does not want to indicate or stress that the righteous, those who choose God as their refuge, will not encounter difficult situations. When the difficult things do happen in the lives of those who serve God, the Lord will help them to deal with it accordingly. The Psalmist says God is like a mother bird protecting the young under her wings like I explained in the children’s address. In nature you often find with hens that when a hawk flies past, she calls the chicks, open her wings and let them stay safe under her wings. So when the hawk flies over, he only sees the hen and not the young that she is protecting under her wings.

I think this is exactly what the Psalmist is telling us today. The only problem is where the young birds just instinctively know to run for their mother’s wings **we** often run away from God’s warnings. We often make choices against our better judgment and against our belief system - choices that we often regret later. Sometimes we choose not to listen to the Lord. We know He is the big architect of everything but sometimes we just grab the plans out of his hands. We know alcohol cannot solve our problems but still some of us see it as the only option. We know that bad friends can drag us down but still we rather enjoy their company than to be alone. We know that it is important to spend time on our knees but instead we prefer to do with our time as we please. We know that God speaks to us on Sundays but still we prefer to rest and save the effort for another day. And the more choices we make in the wrong direction the harder it gets to listen to the voice of the Lord.

We then find that we expose ourselves to all sorts of trouble, hardships, sorrow, hurt, and even destruction.

Is it not shocking that a young chick knows exactly what to do when trouble comes but we as very clever people living in a clever society do not know? Or do we know but just ignore it. And then to make matters worse when everything seems to fall apart, we blame God for all the hurt and sorrow in our lives. We accuse God for not loving us! But it is a fact of life – if the young does not climb under the wings of their mother, they most certainly will become the meal of the hawk!

In our case luckily God know us so well. He knows how deaf and stubborn we are. He chose to do something that we could never do namely to save humanity despite all our wrongs. He decided to keep his wings open for us to shelter us from the hurt and the pain that we encounter all so often. In Jesus Christ He became our only refuge in times of trouble. We have a choice – we have to commit ourselves to trust God in the most challenging times of our lives. We have to run to God in faith because if we do – we will experience his presence, peace and serenity. To be under God's wings does not mean we will be exempt form hardship and suffering. We will still suffer because that is our destiny as followers of Christ. We will still encounter difficult times but we will have the faith to cope with it. We will encounter days where we might feel utterly desolate and depressed but with the help of God's Holy Spirit we will find the strength to continue with our life's journeys. We will experience the need to solve our own problems with our own ideas and means but all we need is to pray and believe that God has a plan for our lives.

If you are sitting in this church this morning and you have difficult choices to make – close your eyes and give it to the Lord. He is your only shadow that will protect you. If you do not have perspective on the things that is troubling you, speak to a brother or a sister of faith. We have a saying in Africa – if you want to enjoy the beauty of nature do not stand with your eyes facing the sun. There is no way you can see anything with the sun shining in your eyes. Go to the shade of a tree and you will find a beautiful panorama.

Or in the words of the Psalmist go to the shade of the Lord and you will see everything in his perspective – even the most challenging troubling things that can happen to you. Go now before it is too late!

**Amen**

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## **Prayer for the week**

Lord, when in need we rush to you for answers,  
forgive our lack of faith.

When we are hungry and we turn to you for food,  
forgive our lack of faith.

When we seek signs and we look to you for proof,  
forgive our lack of faith.

When you feed us, give us the bread of life,  
and let us know that our faith is sufficient.

**Amen.**