

Security in the Midst of Insecurity

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you, Neil. Thank you, Ian. Very good morning to you all. It's lovely to be back here. And on behalf of the whole of Bellevue, I send their greetings to you. It's wonderful how strong our relationship is with you. And we pray for you, and I know you pray for us, and we are very grateful for that. If I may add a very practical prayer point at this stage, we're slightly without a building. We had hoped to have our first service in our new refurbished building, but some glitches with getting a certificate that allows us to properly actually using it has meant that we're in some temporary accommodation yet again, and we'd love to start using the building. So we would value your prayer on that. But thank you for the privilege of being here. It's lovely that so many are out this morning as well. And what a joy to be looking at a psalm, and of all the psalms, at Psalm 91. I understand you've been looking at a few psalms, so maybe you heard already last week that this is part of Book 4. There's five sections in the Psalter, and this section in particular celebrates the kingship of God. And what a good reminder for all of us to realize yet again and to celebrate the fact that God is sovereign. As I said, Psalm 91, I think, jumps out as one of the great songs. I believe when you read Christian biographies that throughout history, it seems to have been a great support. And one example I wanted to start off with this morning, and that is of the godly Dutch lady Corrie ten Boom, or as we would call her, Corrie ten Boom. I don't know if you've ever heard of her. If you've never have, then I recommend you reading her biography or autobiography, the hiding place, where she tells her story of how, together with the family, they hid some of the

Jews, hid them from the Nazi Germans. Here's a lovely photograph. Now, they never found the Jews that they hid in their home in the city of Harlem, but they did end up in the concentration camps, and that's where she lost her father. She lost her sister there as well. And yet, one tradition that she recounts in this book is the fact that as a family, they had the lovely tradition of at least once a year, around the time of New Year's Eve and the New Year's Day, of reading this psalm, Psalm 91. And because that was the tradition, it was actually right there in the midst of her time in the concentration camp that all these truths came bubbling up, and actually she found that in the darkest days, this psalm particularly gave her the greatest hope. Now, personally, this psalm has meant a lot to me as well. I used to go to summer camps, a wonderful way to have your faith strengthened.

And I remember one of these camps where, at the end of the week, your camp leader gave you a Bible verse, a verse that they had thought over and very specifically wanted to give you as an encouragement or also as a challenge. Well, my camp leader that summer gave me the end of this psalm, Psalm 91, verses 14 onwards. And he gave me this instruction, and I would recommend it as a bit of homework to take this away this morning. But he said, read this and fill in your own name. So he said, you know, you should read it as saying, because Christian holds fast to me, sorry, holds fast to me in love, I will deliver Christian. I will deliver Christian because he knows my name. And when Christian calls on me, I will answer Christian, and so forth. Isn't that a beautiful, beautiful psalm to remind ourselves of very regularly and points us in the right direction? Not to ourselves, not even to the people around us, but ultimately to the sovereignty of God. But one thing I wanted us to notice this morning is maybe somewhat obvious, but I think part of the beauty of this psalm is simply in the fact that it acknowledges the reality of suffering. We don't want to glance over the fact that this is not a psalm that was written somewhere on a beach where someone has had a wonderfully comfortable life.

But actually, when you go through the experience of the psalm writer, there's a deadly disease, there's fear, there's all these awful things, turmoil that he's faced, but actually out of all that turmoil, this psalm has been written. Life hurts. Now, interestingly, why I think this is important is that I think most individuals would like life to be quite smooth. We would like it to be comfortable. In some

ways, we would like it to be predictable. Maybe not all the time, but certainly controllable. That's certainly me. I like to kind of, I like surprises, but not too big a surprise.

And so a lot of us, although maybe we like life to be somewhat adventurous and exciting, we want it to be controllable. I think the scary thing is that here in the West, we actually are almost able to give ourselves that full sense of security through surrounding ourselves with lots of stuff, making life comfortable. I believe it's true that actually what dampens a lot of our desire and hunger for heaven is because we've kind of started to create our own little heaven already here on earth, and we're comfortable. Now, it's not just stuff that helps us to be comfortable. I think busyness can do that as well, or we can cover. What is there not to insure these days? It's incredible how secure we seem to have made life by covering ourselves with all these insurances, as well as escapism.

[6 : 04] And escapism comes in all kinds of shapes, forms, and sizes. Busyness is one. Gaming can be one. Where you try to seek the comfortable so that you can forget about the reality of life.

We've done this in such a way that I believe we even started to expect that life should be comfortable. The research is actually showing that we have a generation growing up now that are actually struggling to cope when life isn't working out the way we'd planned.

There is a real concern about a growing number of burnout and depression, particularly amongst teenagers and young adults. To some of the older generation, this seems mind-boggling. What is there to get stressed about? But it's the high expectations that reality so often doesn't seem to live up to. I also believe that burnout also happens spiritually.

There are some Christians who would proclaim what I would call an over-realized eschatology. And eschatology is simply the things that are still to come. But there are some people that proclaim that actually heaven is already here, or it certainly should be here. And God is someone who is so full of love that He doesn't want you to be harmed. He doesn't want any harm to befall you. Sometimes we misquote that amazing verse in Jeremiah 29, verse 11, where it says that God knows the plans He has for us. And what does it say? There are plans for us to prosper, not to harm us. And so even Christians can have this habit of trying to avoid any pain, any illness, or any suffering, because that is certainly not part of what God has in store for you. However, reality is that there is an element of the here, now, but also the not yet. Yes, Jesus did inaugurate that kingdom of heaven, but the fullness of it isn't going to be enjoyed and experienced until His return. And so reality is that some of you this week may have a doctor's appointment where you'll hear news that you had not expected. And that might pull the, what's the expression, pull the carpet underneath you. You know what I mean. Or maybe you're in a job that you thought was secure, but all of a sudden this week you're going to hear news that your job is on the line and you do not know what's going to happen. And maybe it's not the loss of a job, maybe it's the loss of a loved one. And maybe it's exactly that experience, maybe it's exactly that turmoil that you're facing right now. Maybe you have lost a loved one quite recently. And you can sense what this psalmist is saying is true for life. This bit of news came through not too long ago about Hawaii.

And when I think of Hawaii, I can only think of this beautiful picture. I've never been, but it's that one wonderful place that you think, oh, I would love to live there. You know, it's secondary to Edinburgh, of course, but you know, Hawaii seems to always have good weather, you know, a bit like this, but then all year round, lovely people and you can go swimming in the sea at any stage. And then recently there was the news of the volcano. And this is really the reality now of some parts in Hawaii. Unexpected, probably a lot of lives thrown upside down. But that is so often what life seems to be about. We try to create our paradise, but reality hits. And actually reality hits Christians and non-Christians alike. And it's a reflection of a broken world that we live in that is in need of redemption. Now one slight sidestep here. Maybe you're sitting here, you're saying, actually, my life is going swimmingly. Everything is just going according to plan. I'm in a great job.

[10 : 05] I've got, you know, my family. It's all, everybody's happy. I'm happy. Well, actually, maybe then this psalm is especially for you. There's a Canadian theologian, a New Testament professor by the name of Don Carson, who wrote this very helpful book called *How Long, O Lord?* I can highly recommend it. It's meaty, but it's worth reading. But this is the interesting and I think the wise thing he did when he wrote the book. He said he wrote it as preventive medicine. And I'm going to suggest today that maybe for some of you, Psalm 91 is preventive medicine. Listen to what he says. He says, actually, very often we start thinking about the wise and the hows when we're in the midst of a storm. But this book, he says, is designed to actually help establish patterns of thoughts that would be strong enough to remain standing when tragedy hits. See what I mean? And so the

truths of Psalm 91 should be those pillars in our lives that should already become those strong rooted truths in our lives so that when our life is turned upside down, these are the truths that remain. So Psalm 91, we need this psalm. And we need this psalm not just to avoid putting our head in the sand. We need this psalm not just to not be paralyzed by fear.

We need this psalm so that we don't blame God for all the bad things that happen in our lives. We need this psalm for this psalm helps us to honestly reflect on the uncertainty of life, but also because ultimately this psalm gives us the security in the midst of insecurity.

Security in the midst of insecurity. That's kind of my first point. Secondly, I want us to notice then that the psalmist points us to where our security is. And he does it by proclaiming God's promise of protection. He proclaims God's promise of protection. One of the hardest questions that a non-Christian can ask a Christian or the church, and maybe you've had this conversation, is where people say, why, if God is a God of love, is there so much suffering in the world?

I'll have to disappoint you. Psalm 91 doesn't answer that question, but you know, it answers an even more beautiful question. It doesn't answer the why, but it answers the where. Where is God in the midst of our suffering? And the answer is found in four names and eight actions. Four names and eight actions.

First of all, the psalm focuses on four divine names, which gives us a great foundation to understand where the actions come from. For example, God here is called the Most High. The Most High. You've got to envision, and this is hard, but you've got to envision the pictures we get in the Bible of the heavenly throne room, where God is above all powers and all kingdoms. God, who is sovereign, is seated on his heavenly throne in the heavenly throne room surrounding by the angels. That's the first thing.

[13:30] Secondly, he is called Almighty, which is the Hebrew word for Shaddai, or El Shaddai, which is the name that actually sustained the homeless patriarchs as they traveled obediently, following God's lead and God's guiding. In the sense that God isn't just sovereign, but he's also all-powerful. But before we start thinking, oh, God is all-powerful and he's enthroned, but he's far and far away, the third name that we get here is the Lord, which is the word Yahweh. And Yahweh would have been the personal name, the name given to Moses, the name meaning I am, or I am with you, or I am who I am, I am present.

So not just is God the sovereign God and the all-powerful God, he's also the all-personal God. But fourthly, he's also called simply God. And not just God, but my God. In the sense that, on the one hand, it's the more general term of the divine and supernatural creator God, but it's also made intimate by the possessive. So God isn't just able because he's sovereign and all-powerful, but he's also willing because he's the God who comes close, who sits right beside us, and who carries us through. What an awesome picture. What an awe-inspiring God we have to turn to in the midst of the questions of life. He is greater than great, and yet he's right there with us. Now what does this awesome God do? Do we use the word awesome so much? It was a word I always came across in the States, in America, where I spent a little bit of time. But it's a word that I think is underused. For God is awesome. But is he passively awesome? No, he's not. Because when you turn to verse 14 through 16, we find eight things that God undertakes, which even seems to have an element of progress. So it starts off in verse 14, where God promises deliverance, but it ends in verse 16, that the psalmist will be satisfied in God, and God will show him his salvation. So God delivers.

God delivers. God delivers. God delivers. God answers. God rescues. God is with us. God honors. He satisfies us. He satisfies us. And he shows us his salvation. I wonder where your need is today. Is it that you've been praying and you've been seeking for God to speak? Then be encouraged that God is a God who's always spoken. Or if it's protection, because the situation that you're in, it's maybe not even protection for yourself, but for someone else. Then be encouraged and know that God promises his protection. And any of these, may they speak right there into your situation. People, I know it's hard sometimes, and we wish that God would take our struggles away. And yet, even though God chooses so often not to, he does promise all these things to those who believe and trust in him. I think part of it is because he knows that the turmoil in our life can actually help us and form us and shape us and often draw us closer to him. And I pray that it does.

[17:20] But may we know that in the midst of that turmoil, his constant care is there. His lasting love is right there with us. I think what the psalmist is trying to do is, he's trying to put our fear into perspective. So maybe the thing that we're facing at the moment, whether it's illness or whatever it may be, or the loss of a job brings that fear. What's going to happen?

What is the future going to look like? May the psalm, Psalm 91, point our eyes towards the Almighty God.

And exchange that fear for earthly things with a healthy fear for the awesomeness of God. One example that just kept coming back to this psalm is actually the Lord Jesus himself, who I believe put this psalm into practice when he was facing the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane.

His prayer was, Lord, if it is at all possible, may this cup of your wrath be able to pass. But he also said, not my will, but yours be done.

And what happens next is that an angel comes to strengthen him. God did not take that away because he knew ultimately that was the only way to bring salvation and the forgiveness of sins for all of us.

[18 : 47] And Jesus knew that too. But right there, when he was sweating blood, in such anguish, God was right there. And if God was right there with his very own son, he promises to do the same for each one of us.

Isn't that what you see time and time again? When you see Joseph in jail and you wonder what's going to happen? Even Joseph himself ultimately can conclude that all these things that happened in his life, God meant it for good.

Again, Corrie ten Boom is maybe a good example, if I may, that when she was in a concentration camp, they had a huge issue with fleas. And if it was me, I would pray, God, please get rid of these fleas.

They don't help you to sleep. They are not only uncomfortable. They were nasty. But then she started to realize that actually because they had fleas, the guards left them alone.

And because the guards left them alone, the one Bible that they had smuggled in was open in Bible study and all freedom. That is God in the midst of our turmoil.

[20 : 02] Whereas Paul puts it in Romans chapter 8, verse 35 and onwards, where he says, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation, distress, famine, danger?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I'm sure that neither death nor life, nor angels or rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our God is able and willing. And this is the security that we have in the midst of security.

I see it as the big difference between putting a sticky plaster and finding complete healing with the sovereign God himself. But thirdly, let's then see how we actually get to enjoy all these promises that are found in this psalm.

Because maybe you're sitting here and you're saying, Well, actually, that's all well and good, but that's not my experience of God at the moment. God seems far away.

[21 : 22] Heaven seems silent. Well, the psalmist does explain how we get to enjoy these promises. And key here is verse 9. So look with me to verse 9, because it says there, Do you notice the little word because?

This little because is what I call a necessary condition to the promise. It's not that God is trying to play hard to catch or make it difficult for us, but he knows what is needed for us to be able to experience and to know these promises for ourselves, just like the psalmist.

And it's simply that to experience all that God longs to do in our lives is, just like the psalmist, is to make God our dwelling place, for God to be our home.

Now think with me for a moment. It means that we don't make God our bus shelter or an umbrella, because those are temporary emergency shelters, aren't they?

But God is to be our home, our dwelling place, which means it's to be a permanent dwelling and shelter. It means that God is not a fireman or someone who's like a quick fixer who we just phone up to sort things out in our lives and then for us to move on again.

[22 : 53] But it's actually only when our relationship changes from being an acquaintance to God to becoming one of his family members. And it's only when we actually abandon our own ramshackle shelter that we've maybe put together ourselves and moved into the loving Father's mansion, calling it our home, that we will actually be in the place where God can reveal his amazing grace and his undeserving love and his powerful salvation to each one of us.

Now again, a slight side note here is the amazing fact that God also allows those who are not seeking him or trusting him yet to taste some of these good things.

But to really fully be able to experience them for all that they are, it is necessary for us to enjoy God in surrendering faith and in joyful worship of God Almighty.

Tim Keller has written a book. He's an American pastor in New York. He's written a devotional book on the Psalms and in his book called *My Rock and My Refuge*, he actually gives a very helpful understanding of the two distinct metaphors that are given that I think helps us to understand what it means to make God our dwelling.

So when you look at verse 2, there's the picture given of a fortress and it's been great to sing the songs that have fitted in so well. We've been singing about God being our fortress.

[24 : 25] Now a fortress is something that has big walls, strong walls of impregnable strength that any arrows and anything that is thrown at it is able to withstand.

They will not put any dent in the stonework. But when you then go down to verse 4, there's a very different picture of God's protection and that is the picture of a mother bird.

And it's almost the opposite because a mother bird is actually someone who shelters with her wings that are essentially fragile. She shelters her young from the burning heat or the rain or the cold only by bearing it herself.

And Tim Keller concludes this. He says the only place where you see the two come together, the strong and the powerful and the impenetrable is the cross where God destroys the greatest enemy of death.

But it's also the place where actually God becomes most vulnerable, where He, like the mother bird, it actually takes the heat. It actually takes all that comes at us that we deserve and took it upon Himself so that you and I can be free and enjoy life in all its fullness.

[25 : 54] That is what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross absorbing God's wrath so we will not perish. He is our shield.

He is our protective wings. And so ultimately what the psalmist is saying, actually, if this is all true, that this is the God that we can trust in and confide in, there is action to be taken.

And for some of us, it may take a move. For some of us, it might mean that we need to make a vow of trust or maybe renew our vow of trust and not placing it on ourselves or on anyone else, but to put our trust in God who through His Son rescued each one of us.

It's exactly what Jesus talked about on the Sermon of the Mount when He's talking about worry.

What does He do? He's pointing us at the birds and the flowers and He's saying, are you not more than these?

And what does He say next? Jesus tells us to seek first the kingdom of God. Do you know how the psalmist puts it in Psalm 91? He says, cleave to Him in love in verse 14.

[27 : 10] Why? For with God we are safe. With God we are safe. And the question today to each one of us is, are you safe?

Are you safe? We may think that we are safe, but sooner or later we will come to the realization that actually we need God's loving and constant protection and ultimate salvation.

We may actually come to a point where we realize we need to acknowledge there is actually only true security with God. Well, maybe today is the day to renew our vow of trust in Him and in Him alone and to experience that God will be with you whatever you face in life.

Let me pray and I'll end over again to Ian. Lord, we thank You so much for the privilege that we have to meet together like this and to meet together around Your Word.

and we thank You that Your Word is relevant to us today. Lord, You know us.

[28 : 29] Lord, You know us not just by name, but You know everything that is happening in our lives and You know who is here today who especially needed to hear this sound. But help us not just to think that it's maybe not for us now.

Lord, it's so essential for these truths to become the pillars in our life so that when the storms of life hit us, we will hold on in faith to a God who doesn't change, whose promises never fail, and who today, next year and forevermore will promise to protect us and love us and show us Your salvation.

So Lord, help us to trust. help us to trust in You and You alone so that each one here today is safe. Amen.