

**SERMON NOTES**  
**Psalm 91:1-16**  
***“Where Do You Turn with Your Fears?”***

**Intro:**

- Visits to doctors and hospitalization rates for influenza-like illness are higher now than what is seen during the Jan – Feb peak of many regular flu seasons
- An unprecedented 46 states are reporting widespread influenza activity at this time – including Iowa.
- Almost all of the influenza viruses identified so far are 2009 H1N1 – which is a genetic descendant of the 1918-1919 influenza that killed 50 million people worldwide
- *Thus far there have been 5,000 H1N1 deaths worldwide; 1000 deaths in the USA; 95 of these 1000 have been children; 11 flu-related pediatric deaths were reported the week of Oct. 11-17 alone*
- Pregnant women, children and youth are considered high risk for the H1N1 flu and pneumonia complications
- *Many of you have children who are at risk of severe illness*
- Beth and I have three pregnant daughters – *that’s right – I said 3* – Emily is pregnant now also and we have grandchildren due in Feb., April and May – making 4 in 16 months!
- *Do they get the flu shot vaccine – or not? What are the risks either way – both for them and for their babies?*
- *Who of us has not felt some level of fear as we think about the potential impact of the H1N1 flu virus on our loved ones?*
- Add to that other health concerns / job losses / financial concerns / marriage & family concerns / teenage and young adult children making poor choices // children being abused or molested or abducted – most of us have some cause for fear
- *Wednesday I received this email from my sister Ginny who lives in a suburb of Milwaukee: “I was shopping with Kiersten and Linnea and came home to 2 cops in front of my house and a guy being dragged away in cuffs.*

- A friend of Kiersten's and 2 10 yr. old boys she walks home from school with were being chased from the park and down the block by a guy. They ran to our back door, and David let them in.
- They were screaming that a guy was chasing them, and Hannah (high school student) locked the door. The guy ran up the deck stairs and was trying to get in the back door, Hannah took the 3 kids, Jake and David downstairs and called 911.
- The one boy called his mom on his cell, and she arrived b4 the cops ( she lives about 2 blocks away) The mom saw the guy coming around our house from the back, pulling up his pants. The cops arrived a few seconds later, and arrested the guy. Evidently he is a registered sex offender, and was drunk."
- *Every parent's worst nightmare almost happened to my nieces and nephews*
- ***Where do you turn with your fears? What do you do when you feel afraid?***
- For centuries believers have turned to Psalm 91 for comfort in dealing with their fears

## I. THE CONDITIONS FOR EXPERIENCING GOD'S PROTECTION AND SECURITY

**Psalm 91:1-2** <sup>1</sup>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!"

- *The blessings of safety, security and protection promised in this Psalm are not for all people – and not even for all believers – but only for those believers who live in close fellowship with God and fix their hope and affections on Him*
- **Many who believe in God and in Jesus Christ do not abide in Christ day by day and moment by moment**
- *There are many who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation but do not rest confidently and consistently in his love and provision and protection*
- It is not to Almighty God where they turn first and foremost when they are sick or in trouble or in need
- ***The blessings promised in this Psalm are for those whose hearts are steadfast in abiding in the Lord and trusting Him first and foremost***

- What does it mean to dwell in the shelter of the Most High and to abide in the shadow of the Almighty?
  - *This is more than Sunday morning church attendance // this is more than a daily quiet time and Bible reading // this is more than crying out to Him for help when we are in trouble*
  - **This is a way of life – our hearts and minds fixed on the Lord and His love and His care and His sovereign power**
  - *This is a lifestyle of ongoing conversation with the Lord throughout the day – sharing with Him all of our thoughts and feelings and worries and concerns and struggles*
  - **This is a trained, disciplined default response of “Whenever I am afraid, I will put my trust in God”**
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- *How do you abide in Someone's shadow?*
  - **You need to follow close behind and stick close at all times**
  - *How do you abide in the Shadow of the Almighty?*
  - **You need to follow close behind and stick close at all times**
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- *Our protection and security do not come merely from crying out for help when we are in trouble – though that is good to do – but our greatest protection and security come from abiding in the shadow of the Almighty*
  - **For where His shadow is – His Presence is – and where His Presence is – His omnipotent power and protection are**
  - *When we abide in the Shadow of the Almighty – the Lord God Himself is our bodyguard – so to speak – nothing comes to us except through Him*
  - **No spiritual attacks or physical attacks or harm or evil of any kind can reach us without first being screened by our all-powerful Lord**
  - ***When we abide in the Shadow of the Almighty – there we find security // there we find rest // there we find serenity // there we find comfort***
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- **Abiding in the Shadow of the Almighty involves fixing our hearts and minds on the Lord and His care – but those who believe also need to declare – to go on record giving witness that the Lord is our refuge and fortress**
  - **There is spiritual power in making a verbal declaration of trust in God and in our Lord Jesus Christ to protect us from spiritual forces of evil**
  - ***When we are tempted to give in to fear – instead we declare with confidence and authority: The Lord is my refuge and fortress – my God, in whom I trust”***
  - **God is our refuge where we flee for safety and peace and quiet and rest when facing troubles and trials and temptations and spiritual enemies**

- ***Our God is a Mighty Fortress – a Strong Tower of defense – where we are secure and protected against spiritual attacks and the enemy of our souls***

- **The conditions for experiencing God’s protection are repeated in vs. 9:**

**Psalm 91:9-10** <sup>9</sup>If you make the LORD your refuge,  
if you make the Most High your shelter,  
<sup>10</sup>no evil will conquer you;  
no plague will come near your dwelling.

- ***If you dwell and abide in God – you shall be secure and protected***
- ***If you make God your refuge – you will find God to be a refuge***
- ***If you choose to make the Lord your refuge and the Most High your shelter – then no evil will touch you***
- ***No spiritual attacks or physical attacks or harm or evil of any kind can reach us without first being screened by our all-powerful Lord***
- ***But again – this promise is not for those who merely believe in God – this promise is for those who consistently choose to make the Lord their refuge and the Most High their shelter***
- ***The Lord Himself restates the condition for Protection in vs. 14***

**Psalm 91:14 (God speaking)** <sup>14</sup>“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. <sup>15</sup>He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;

- ***What is the condition for God’s promise: “He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him”?***
- ***Because he has set his love upon Me – because he has known My name***
- ***Love, devotion, allegiance – set upon God – is the distinguishing mark of those whom the Lord secures from harm and from evil***
- ***The promises of this Psalm are not given to the one who only thinks about God when he is in trouble***
- ***Sometimes in His grace and mercy God answers those cries for help – but He has not obligated Himself to do so by the promise of His Word***
- ***These firm promises of His Word are given to those who love and trust God and abide in the Shadow of the Almighty as a way of life***

- *To set your love on God is to bend your best energies and thoughts and affections on God and the doing of His will*
- *Think of the way an athlete or musician or businessman sacrifices everything toward excellence in their pursuit – that is the kind of devotion enjoined here*
- **It is to leave other allegiances and cleave to God as a husband and wife leave father and mother and cleave to one another**
- *“I will set Him on high – safe and secure from harm and from evil – because he has known My name”*
- **What does it mean to know God’s name?**
- *To know God’s name is to know God’s character – it is to know the attributes of God so well as to trust in God and thus to experience His faithfulness and His guidance and provision and protection*
- *The better we know God’s name and character – the stronger our faith grows and the less we will give way to fear*
- **To know God’s name is to study and contemplate and worship the perfections of His character: His holiness // His righteousness // His Justice // His Love // His Mercy & Grace // His faithfulness // His omnipotence**
- **And ultimately – to know God’s name is to know His character as revealed in the Word made flesh – Jesus Christ**

## II. THE KIND OF PROTECTION GOD PROMISES

**Psalm 91:3 - 6 (NIV)** <sup>3</sup> Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. <sup>4</sup> He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. <sup>5</sup> You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, <sup>6</sup> nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

- *The ultimate fowler or trapper or hunter who seeks to ensnare us and trap us and devour us is Satan, who deceives many a man and woman with his cunning lies and seductive temptations*
- *Love of money // debilitating discouragement // seductive lust // erroneous beliefs // mistrust of God // self-condemning thoughts // crippling despair*
- *God can rescue us from each of these traps – as we abide in the Shadow of the Almighty and as we grow in our knowledge of God and His character*
- **No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper**
- **The promise in this Psalm is not only for protection from spiritual attacks – but also from physical dangers – deadly pestilence such as plagues**

- ***This is not to say that Christians can never get sick – but it is to say that believers who abide in the Shadow of the Almighty need not fear any harm or evil coming to them except that which God allows for His own good and loving purposes***

**Psalm 91:3** <sup>3</sup>For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from the fatal plague.

- ***Through the centuries many believers have found these promises to be literally true***

In the year 1665 death came calling on the city of London. Death in the form of bubonic plague. People called it the Black Death, black for the colour of the tell-tale lumps that foretold its presence in a victim's body, and death for the inevitable result. The plague germs were carried by fleas which lived as parasites on rats.

The early spring of 1665 brought a sudden rise in the death rate in the poorer sections of London. As spring turned into one of the hottest summers in memory, the number of deaths escalated and panic set in.

The nobility and those with means left the city for their estates in the country. By June the roads were clogged with people desperate to escape London.

By mid July over 1,000 deaths per week were reported in the city. It was rumored that dogs and cats spread the disease, so the Lord Mayor ordered all the dogs and cats destroyed. Author Daniel Defoe in his *Journal of the Plague Years* estimated that 40,000 dogs and 200,000 cats were killed. The real effect of this was that there were fewer natural enemies of the rats who carried the plague fleas, so the germs spread more rapidly.

When one person in a house caught the plague the house was sealed until 40 days after the victim either recovered or died (usually the latter). Guards were posted at the door to see that no one got out. The guard had to be bribed to allow any food to be passed to the inmates.

Throughout the summer the death rate escalated, reaching a high of over 6,000 per week in August. The best guess is that over 100,000 people perished in and around London, though the figure may have been much higher.

- Lord Craven lived in London when the plague raged. To avoid the danger, he resolved to go to his home in the country. As he was walking through his hall with his hat on, his cane under his arm, and putting on his gloves, in order to step into his carriage, he overheard his negro

servant saying to another servant. *"I suppose, by my Lord's quitting London to avoid the plague, that his God lives in the country, and not in town."*

- The speech struck Lord Craven and made him pause. *"My God lives everywhere, and can preserve me in town as well as in the country. I will stay where I am. That negro has just now preached to me a very useful sermon. Lord, pardon this unbelief, and that distrust of thy providence, which made me think of running from thy hand."*
- He immediately ordered his horses to be taken from the coach, and the baggage to be taken in. He continued in London, was remarkably useful among his sick neighbours, and never caught the infection.

Daniel DeFoe: The misery of the poor I had many occasions to be an eyewitness of, and sometimes also of the charitable assistance that some pious people daily gave to such, sending them relief and supplies of food... *Some pious ladies were transported with zeal in so good a work, and so confident in the protection of Providence in discharge of the great duty of charity, that they went about in person distributing alms to the poor, and even visiting poor families, though sick and infected, in their very houses... giving their blessing to the poor in substantial relief to them, as well as hearty prayers for them.*

I will not undertake to say, as some do, that none of those charitable people were suffered to fall under the calamity itself; but this I may say, that I never knew anyone of them that came to any ill, which I mention for the encouragement of others in case of the like distress, and, doubtless, if they that give to the poor lend to the Lord, and he will repay them, those that hazard their lives to give to the poor, and to comfort and assist the poor in such misery as this, may hope to be protected in the work."

- ***Is this Psalm promising that believers who abide in the Shadow of the Almighty and put their trust in God shall never succumb to influenza?***
- ***Were there no Christians in close fellowship with God among the 50 million who died of influenza in 1918-1919?***
- ***Godly men and women are not exempted from the sufferings of this world***
- ***Yet it is also true that there are many true stories of godly people being preserved in time of great calamities***
- ***Many godly people can testify to the truth – some literally and some metaphorically – of Isaiah 43:2, for example***

**Isaiah 43:2 (NIV)** <sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when

you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

- **Many will testify that there is in truth a very real and practical benefit to abiding in the shadow of the Almighty**

**Psalm 91:4 (NIV)** <sup>4</sup> He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

- *Even as a hen covers her chickens – or perhaps an eagle covering her eaglets would be a better image for the Almighty– so also the Lord provides tenderness and comfort and protection for those who dwell in Him*
- Hawks in the sky and snares in the field are equally harmless when we nestle so near the Lord
- *His truth and His faithfulness to His promises is our shield and armor*
- And what is one of the primary benefits of abiding in the Shadow of the Almighty and finding refuge under His wings?
- *What are the next words in verse 5?*
- **You shall not be afraid**
- **Fear is one of the most harmful toxins for the human body – and brain**
- *Fear weakens our immune systems and makes us more susceptible to disease and illness*
- **Can faith protect you from the H1N1 flu?**
- Yes and No
- *Certainly not in the sense that faith gives perfect immunity to sickness or that people come down with the flu primarily because they are lacking in faith or godliness*
- **But yes in the sense that faith can strengthen our immune system by casting out fear – and a mind that is free of fear will strengthen the health of our body**
- *When we abide in the Shadow of the Almighty – nothing comes to us except through Him*
- No spiritual attacks or physical attacks or harm or evil of any kind can reach us without first being screened by our all-powerful and all-loving Lord – *and only that which serves His good and loving purposes is allowed through*
- **When we are afraid, we put our trust in God – our Protector and Deliverer**

**Psalm 91:11-13** <sup>11</sup>For He will give His angels charge concerning you,

To guard you in all your ways.

<sup>12</sup>They will bear you up in their hands,  
That you do not strike your foot against a stone.

<sup>13</sup>You will tread upon the lion and cobra,  
The young lion and the serpent you will trample down.

- *Not just one guardian angel – but as many as are needed to secure our safety and protection – charged to this duty by Almighty God Himself*
- *These spirit-beings function as our spiritual bodyguards – to guard and protect us in all our ways – wherever we go*
- *These guardian angels repel demons and counteract spiritual plots against us as well as protecting us from physical harm from accidents and human foes*
- *One day it will be revealed to us all the ways in which we have been protected and delivered from evil by these unseen warriors*
- *Many of you – myself included – could give testimony to experiences when we know we were being protected or assisted by God’s holy angels*
  
- *Though not omnipotent like God – these unseen servants are extremely strong and powerful – and knowledgeable and wise*
- *They are also perfectly obedient to the will of the Father – carrying out His orders promptly and thoroughly*
- *Whatever God orders them to do on our behalf – they will do*
  
- *Where do you turn when you are in danger and afraid?*
- *There is no human weapon or human power or human force on earth that can come close to matching the strength and power of God’s angels*
- *Do you remember the story of one single angel of the Lord destroying 180,000 of Assyria’s troops – the most powerful army on the earth at that time*
- *Our weapons today may be more sophisticated and technologically advanced – but they are still no match for the supernatural power of angels*
- *One angel armed with the power and glory and authority of Almighty God is stronger than a whole army*
- *Why would we put our confidence for protection in human weapons when Almighty God offers us the protection of superhuman angelic bodyguards?*
- *Why would we fear any physical or spiritual harm when Almighty God has commanded these powerful spirit-beings to serve us and guard us in all our ways as we abide in the shadow of the Almighty?*

- Of course, the promise of these verses does not prohibit soldiers or law enforcement officials from carrying and using weapons and protective gear
- *And the promise of these verses is not for the foolhardy or presumptuous or rebellious*
- This is not a promise to protect us from the negative consequences of following our own sinful ways contrary to God's ways
- *This is not a promise to protect us from taking foolhardy risks and deliberately putting ourselves in harm's way – thus putting God to the test*
- Of course, this is exactly the tactic Satan attempted when he tempted Christ in the wilderness
- *Psalm 91:11 is the verse Satan quoted – and misused – seeking to entice Jesus to put God to the test by throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple – expecting the angels to lift him up in their hands and gently place him unharmed on the ground*
- Of course, Jesus saw the trap and the twisting of Scripture for what it was and resisted the temptation – quoting the Scripture in Deuteronomy that says: ***“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”***
- Verse 13 applies first and foremost to Jesus and then to us who are in Christ:

**Psalm 91:13 (NIV)** <sup>13</sup> You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

- *The early church saw this as a clear reference to the Lord Jesus Christ crushing Satan under his feet through his death and resurrection*
- This verse – and its fulfillment in Christ – becomes the backdrop for Jesus' promise in which he gives to us His own authority over the power of Satan and the spiritual forces of evil:

**Luke 10:19 (NIV)** <sup>19</sup> **I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.**

- And also Paul's words in Romans 16

**Romans 16:20 (NIV)** <sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

- Charles Spurgeon: *To men who dwell in God, the most evil forces become harmless... Their feet come into contact with the worst of foes, even Satan himself nibbles at their heel, but in Christ Jesus they have the assured hope*

*of bruising Satan under their feet shortly... The people of God are the true lion kings and serpent tamers. Their dominion over the powers of darkness makes them cry out: "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy word."*

- The Psalm then concludes with this summary of promises by the Lord Himself:

**Psalm 91:14-16** <sup>14</sup>“Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him *securely* on high, because he has known My name.  
<sup>15</sup>“He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.  
<sup>16</sup>“With a long life I will satisfy him And let him see My salvation.”

### III. WHERE DO YOU TURN WHEN YOU ARE AFRAID?

- Most of us deal with some kind of fear nearly every day – sometimes many times a day
- *Fear is an inescapable part of human existence in a fallen world filled with sin and death and evil and suffering and illness and accidents and calamities*
- Your child comes down with the H1N1 flu
- *You lose track of your child at a crowded shopping mall*
- You send your child off to their first week of camp or their first mission trip
- *You get a call that a loved one is in the emergency room resulting from a serious accident*
- Your doctor sits you down and says the dreaded words: *You have cancer*
- You send your son or daughter off to combat duty in Iraq or Afghanistan
- *You wonder what your teenager is doing when they're out past curfew*
- You get word that one of your married children is very unhappy and contemplating divorce
- *You wonder if you will be the only one in your circle of friends not to get invited to the big dance*
- You get laid off at work and wonder how you will ever find a job in this economy
- *Your dad has been drinking and you wonder who in your family is going to get yelled at or hit this time*

- The game is on the line and you're afraid that you're going to fail again just like you did last time
- *You get word that your daughter with a heart condition passed out during rowing practice*
- You get word that your daughter is passed out in a lodge on her way down from a climb in the Himalayas – and she has gas poisoning or a head injury and has been unconscious for over an hour – and they fear there has been brain damage – but they won't be able to get her to a hospital until a helicopter airlifts her in the morning
- **Where do you turn when you are afraid? What do you do with your fears?**
- Do you let your mind race to all the worst-case scenarios?
- *Do you give in to your fears and dwell on your fears?*
- Do you try to battle your fears on your own?
- *Do you reach for a drink – or a pill?*
- Do you call a friend?

**Psalm 56:3 - 4 (NIV)** <sup>3</sup> When I am afraid, I will trust in you. <sup>4</sup> In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid.

- *As a father – and now grandfather – many of my fears are triggered by something having to do with my daughters*
- **When I am afraid, my first instinct is often to try to take control of the situation**
- *That is harder to do when your children leave home*
- The temptation is to resort to fear-based parenting – which is often controlling parenting: *“Don't do that – do this instead”* – which really means: *“Don't do it your way – do it my way instead”*
- Fear-based parenting is unhealthy parenting
- *When I am afraid, I will trust in YOU*
- So I turn away from my natural instinct to control and instead choose to trust: *Abba Father, my children and grandchildren belong to You – I place them under your wings – under your authority and covering and blessing and protection – Abba, Father, they belong to You*
- I do it as often as needed – as often as I have fearful thoughts – *I turn to my heavenly Father – the Almighty – and put my trust in Him*
- *When you are afraid, where do you turn?*

**Psalm 91:1 - 4 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup> He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. <sup>2</sup> I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” <sup>3</sup> Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. <sup>4</sup> He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

**Psalm 91:14 - 16 (NIV)** <sup>14</sup> “Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. <sup>15</sup> He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. <sup>16</sup> With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

### ***Prayer***

**Hymn # 47 “God Will Take Care of You”**