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<sup>1</sup> You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,  
<sup>2</sup> will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.'

Psalm 91:1-2 (NRSV)

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Here is a bit a 'pop quiz' as we begin our meditation today: how many times would you have prayed the Lord's Prayer in your life? Let's do the maths...

The average age of Australians is currently 37 years old, but let's say here we use 67 years. Then say this person has attended worship every Sunday, plus various church festivals, and then other events like weddings and funeral. For a 67-year-old person, that would equate to saying the Lord's Prayer around 4,500 times. But if we also include those times of morning and evening prayer (as per Small Catechism), that would equate to saying the Lord's Prayer around 55,000 times.

As you think about all the times you have said the Lord's Prayer, and prayed this prayer, how many times have you stopped to think about what you say/pray?

Take, for today, the Sixth and Seventh Petitions: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (Or, as English Liturgical Language Consultation Text says "Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.").

How appropriate are these today? ("Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." "Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil"). How appropriate are these as we consider the events of the past week or so, with the dramatic and tragic floods across our land, and the incredibly sad events across Europe? Here we are in circumstances we would have found difficult to image just over a week ago. A week ago, COVID was still the number one item on the news. How things have changed! Who could have imagined the scenes we are currently seeing in the Russian invasion of Ukraine at this time? And who could have imaged the incredible damage across Australia from torrential flooding rains? It's a disturbing time. Unsettling.

And yet what do we hear in the Bible today? We hear of God who has brought His people out of slavery, and into a 'Promised Land flowing with milk and honey' (Deuteronomy 26:1-11). We hear that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). And we hear of Jesus' encounter with the Devil, and where Jesus answered him, and the Devil left Him (Luke 4:1-11).

And in our Psalm today we hear these great words, "You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.'" (Psalm 91:1-2).

Psalm 91 is an exultant hymn of proclamation and praise, and the psalmist's trust in God is absolute, and he encourages his hearers to share that certainty.

One Jewish scholar has described Psalm 91 as an "amulet psalm." The term originated from a practice that developed in both early Jewish and Christian communities of placing bits of Psalm 91 in amulets so that the wearer would feel God's nearness and be reminded of God's providential care in times of trouble.

While today we might consider such a practice superstitious, this custom draws attention to the heartbeat of this psalm, the unwavering testimony of the psalmist that God is our refuge and our strength, the one in whom we can put our confidence. An individual psalm of trust, the psalmist pulls out all the stops and holds nothing back in this confession that God will indeed cover the psalmist with divine protection such that “no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent (verse 10).”

It's easy to see why this Psalm is so popular right now. It's one of those pieces of Scripture that seems to speak directly to us today and now. The fact that it was written thousands of years ago somehow makes it feel more impressive and helpful.

The opening verses of Psalm 91 speak of God's presence with and protection of the psalm singer as “the shelter ... the shadow ... my refuge ... fortress” and uses four names for God — “Most High — Elyon,” “Almighty — Shaddai,” “LORD — Yahweh,” and “God — Elohim.”

From the first two verses, it's easy to understand why people are clinging to this psalm. It seems like things are getting more and more fragile every day. So where do we really shelter in place for our protection? We abide in our God, who is a shelter. We rest under the comforting shadow of the Lord. We find safety with a Saviour who is our refuge and our mighty fortress. These first few sentences of Psalm 91 remind us that God has infinite power over everything, including the threats we face today.

But that brings us face to face with the great problem of Psalm 91. How will God deliver us? The Psalmist makes some sweeping promises of protection. “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.” Really? Were no Christians killed in a hail of arrows/bullets in WWII, after being given this Psalm by their pastor? “You will not fear... the pestilence... or the plague...?” Weren't there any Christians among the thousands who died from COVID? “Then no harm will befall you, no disaster will befall you.” And are there no Christians killed in the terrible wars around the world?

These extravagant promises of protection from harm and danger just don't seem true to our lives. What's more, these promises don't seem to mesh with other parts of Scripture. To pick just one, Romans 8 seems to say that danger and difficulty will always threaten the true believer. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’” God does not keep all these bad things from us. But, Paul continues, God will keep us in all these things, so that “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

So, if our experience and our Bible tell us that we are not protected from danger the way Psalm 91 says we are, what shall we do with Psalm 91? What are we to do with this Psalm? In these trying days many of us are understandably turning to the Psalms, which reveal a raw and helpful honesty concerning living in a fallen world. The Psalms make it clear that the children of God are not exempt from the sometimes very powerful and destructive storms of life.

One Christian writer notes that Jesus is the only one who ever fulfilled the terms of this psalm perfectly. He is the only one who could, without reservation, say, "My God" (v. 2), even from the cross. He was the faithful Son who made the Most High His dwelling place (v. 9). He had set His love upon His Father (v. 14). He knew the name of God (v. 14). And so God promised to deliver Him (v. 15), and the long life promised was in fact given through the power of an indestructible life (v. 16). And Jesus displayed His understanding of all of this in the wilderness, while being tempted, and on our behalf.

Now, think about this: Jesus could have walked through this world without a single sorrow or challenge. He could have been delivered from His enemies. The promises of Psalm 91 could have been immediately His. He earned it. He was covenantally faithful. But He chose to forego these promises. He chose rather to suffer. He chose to be bruised by the evil one through various evil deeds by people.

Verses 5–6 promise that those who meet the conditions of Psalm 91 will "not fear ... the destruction that wastes at noonday." The word translated "fear" has the idea of being so disturbed that one reverses course. It is true that Jesus was troubled in his spirit (Mark 14:33). And at noonday on that Good Friday, He faced "destruction." The word means to be cut off. Jesus was cut off from his Father so that He cried out "My God, My God why have You forsaken me?" And yet Jesus never reversed course. He remained on the cross to pay for the penalty for our sins.

That is the main point for you and me. We have a Redeemer who suffered for us and who was delivered for us. In Christ, we too have all the deliverances promised in Psalm 91. The last word of the psalm says it all: "salvation" (16). Because Jesus fulfilled this psalm, those in him are ultimately safe being represented by Him.

When the evil one quotes Psalm 91:11, 12 to Jesus in the wilderness, goading Jesus to throw Himself off the temple, Jesus rejects any notion that God is at His beck and call. Responding with Deuteronomy 6:16, "do not put the Lord your God to the test," Jesus spurns the suggestion that one can presume upon God's saving power for one's own gain. The testimony of Psalm 91, then, is not that God's people are immune to suffering, especially when that suffering comes as a result of folly or sin. Instead, it is that God will not ultimately let suffering or even death separate us from His love and care.

We have the assurance of his everlasting promise and therefore of His ultimate protection. We are safe in Jesus even if infected with the coronavirus. We are safe in Jesus even if unemployed, or we experience some trial in home and family. We are safe in Jesus even in time of war, because we are sheltered in the One who is The Shelter. Our live is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1–3).

Psalm 91 has the idea of safety and refuge from the attacks of Satan with images of warfare. "I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!" (91:2). A "refuge" is a place of rest. A "fortress" is a place of defence. Notice that this does not say the Lord will provide these things. Rather, it says that the Lord is these things. This is why our dwelling in Him is essential; it is in Him alone that we will find rest and defence.

Take time to consider the last word in verse 2: trust. It is a translation of the same Hebrew term found in Proverbs 3:5. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding."

We see in Psalm 91 that the author made God his place of safety, and God wants us to know that He will be ours as well. Our personal, intimate relationship with the living God gives us the protection and confidence we need to serve Him. George Smith was a 1950's jet test pilot, who was known among his peers for his nerves of steel and fearless courage. He thought he could handle anything until he had to eject from a plane that was going faster than the speed of sound. He survived, but was hospitalized for many days. As he recovered from his injuries, he slowly grew more and more afraid at the thought of flying again. He felt an unnatural fear slowly gripping his soul.

A nurse, who was a believer, noticed his growing apprehension and prayerfully gave him an antidote to fear. She read Psalm 91 to him, and then said, "Courage is knowing the worst and discovering that, in God's world, the very worst can't really hurt you." Like an arrow from heaven, this truth deeply impacted his heart and healed him of his fear. He was again able, both physically and spiritually, to fly. Has fear somehow crowded into your heart and mind recently? Have you retreated from something you shouldn't be afraid of but find that you are? Believe God's promise. Trust Him and take Him at His word for your life.

The promise is not that pain and tragedy will magically flow around us, but that ultimately nothing can separate us from the reach of our God's arms, from his love. We live "in the shelter of the Most High"; we rest and find comfort "in the shadow of the Almighty." We do not fear because the all-powerful God of heaven and earth is here with us. We're safe in God's care, and He is always with us.

It is by grace through faith that we are saved and it is also by grace through faith that we are to live, moment by moment, and day by day. We are united with Christ by grace through faith. Christ is our promised Defence and our trustworthy Defender and His sure pledge rests in the One that is Faithful and True. May we abide in Him and never step away from His protective covering, for His promises are sure and His mercies are new every morning - great is His faithfulness.

Thank You, Lord, that no matter what circumstances invade my life, there is no evil or harm that the enemy can inflict on me that can separate me from Your love. Thank You that as Your child, my times are in Your hands, and I pray that I may draw closer to You, day by day, and abide under the shadow of your protective wings of love. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.