

Session 6

January 7, 2024

THE PROTECTION OF GOD'S NAME

Psalm 91:1-6, 9-16

I can't read this psalm without thinking about heights. Everything about it conjures (in my mind, anyway) images of mountains and cliffs and shadows and the dangers that lurk in the crags.

Danger comes from all sides, but especially from above. Yet God is higher. In fact, according to this psalm, He's the Most High...and He casts a big shadow of divine protection. Where do we see His protection? The psalmist points out three sources.

In His power (vv. 1-6). The psalmist begins with the person of protection, here described as the epitome of power, the Most High God. And He can afford us protection, because He is the Almighty one. Notice the scope of His protection. He is a refuge, a fortress, and a trustworthy God (v. 2). Yet He is personal: He is MY God, in whom I can trust. That's quite a comfort when compared to the frailty of humanity and the dangers that are lurking everywhere. Verse 3 speaks of the hunter's net—those evil people who seek to entrap us—and “deadly calamities” that might come from the world around us. Verses 5 and 6 mention the terrors that accompany the night, the arrows coming at us during the day, the plagues that creep in with darkness, and the sicknesses that can attack at any time. No wonder we need protection! The psalmist uses the metaphor of a mother bird (v. 4) to illustrate how our God protects us. In Matthew 23:37, Jesus likens His own compassion for God's people to a mother hen that gathers her chicks under her wings. There, it is heartfelt and tragic. But here, the psalmist is bold. Picture an eagle perched on a rocky cliff (see Deut. 32:11), her unyielding wings spread over her young. Morning, noon, or night, the little ones are safe. If attacks come from above or from down below, they are covered. Her wings are strong and broad, and they envelope (or “shield”) her young (v. 4). For reflection: *Verse 1 speaks with a bold confidence, but also presents a condition. Those afforded God's protection are those who “live” in it and those who “dwell” in His shadow. What implications can be made from those two words?*

In His provision (vv. 9-13). Verses 9 and 10 review the characteristics of the great Protector, but verse 11 introduces another aspect of God's care. This verse is well-known for two reasons. First, it was quoted by Satan and applied to Jesus when our Lord was tempted by him in the wilderness (Matt. 4:6). Second, it provides the basis (however loosely) for the concept of “guardian angels.” That teaching is attractive, but somewhat misguided. The context here is more general than specific. C. H. Spurgeon rightly preached that these verses refer to the entire host of angels who act “as the bodyguard of the blood imperial of heaven” charged by God with the safeguard of all who are His. Just think...if one personal guardian angel would be good, how much better to have the entire host watching over us? The meaning behind the foot striking the stone (v. 12) refers not to the pain it might cause, but rather the more serious injuries associated with stumbling; either physically or spiritually. For reflection: *Consider all the work assigned to God's angels. What do these verses say about the provision of God that He would include us as part of their responsibilities?*

In His presence (vv. 14-16). Another notable feature of this psalm is the movement of pronouns. In the first several verses the pronouns shifts from “I” to “He,” to “I,” to “you.” By the end of the

psalm, we are back to “I;” but this time the person doing the talking is not the psalmist, but the Lord Himself. Notice the condition implied as well. “BECAUSE HE IS LOVINGLY DEVOTED TO ME...” Who is he? The one who lives in His protection mentioned in verse 1; the same one who dwells in His shadow. Because of his devotion to God, look what God will do for him: He will deliver him and protect him (v. 14); answer him, be with him, rescue him and honor him (v. 15); satisfy him, lengthen his life, and show him His salvation (v. 16). For reflection: *Think about the relationship between God’s protection and His salvation. How did the psalmist connect the two? Was he successful in doing so?*