

## SERMONS FROM SELECT PSALMS

## LIVING FEARLESSLY

## PSALM 91:5-7

***"You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you."***

The roadside sign read, "Danger Ahead!" I slowed down and soon came to another sign that said, "Falling Rocks." Within another mile I came to another sign that informed me, "Mudslide Ahead." Such was the experience of driving through mountains in a rain storm.

Life is somewhat like that. The only difference is that there are no warning signs posted along the Highway of Life informing us of what lies directly ahead. This can cause us to be fearful and apprehensive about what lies around the next bend in the road or what dangers we may encounter in the next valley through which we must pass. However, we travel by faith in the God of Whom the psalmist said, "I will fear no evil for You are with me."

It is rather awkward for us men to talk about fear. But if we are absolutely honest we will all admit that we all have or have had, either anxieties, worries, apprehensions, misgivings, qualms, frights, scares, intimidations, alarms, faintheartedness and even raw fears from time to time. Therefore, Psalm 91 is for all us to one degree or another.

There is a Culture of Fear in our country perpetrated and perpetuated by Hollywood in its movies. The persons who make these movies are among the most fearful people on earth! Beverly Hills is the home to most of the leading actors and actresses and it has more psychiatrists per square mile than any other community in the U.S. averaging one psychiatrist for every 5 citizens! Fear is contagious and fearful people are dangerous.

There is no one who does not know what it is like to be afraid. We have either experienced fear in childhood, adulthood or both. The media and especially television, bombards us with fearful news; the newspapers are filled with horror stories daily; the entertainment industry is driven by a culture of fear and death. There is threatened war, global warming, uncertainty in the stock market - doom and gloom all around us. Such an atmosphere of fear can lead many to despair, discouragement and despondency. In such an environment Psalm 91 is an oasis in the desert of this world.

**ILLUST:** There are many things of which humans are afraid. Here is a list of some of the phobias: cyberphobia - fear of computers; ecclesiophobia - fear of church; lunaphobia - fear of the moon; astraphobia - fear of lightning; chrometophobia - fear of money; Europhobia - fear of the color red; homilphobia - fear of sermons; triskaidekaphobia - fear of the #13; peladophobia - fear of baldness; phobophobia - fear of fear itself. There is no end to the number of fears that exist.

**ILLUST.** A woman in Arkansas was sitting in her car in a parking lot in a dangerous neighborhood waiting for her husband who was in a nearby store. She was very scared because the area was a high crime area. The longer she sat the more fearful she became. Suddenly, there was a loud bang and something hit her in the back of the head. She was holding the hands behind her head when someone walked by and asked, "Are you OK?" The woman answered, "I've been shot in the head, and I'm holding my brains in."

Well, it wasn't her brains. It was dough. A Pillsbury biscuit canister had exploded in the back seat, from the heat, making a loud explosion and shooting the dough into the back of the woman's head. Most of our fears are like those of that lady. They are unfounded and irrational.

**What is fear?** Webster defines fear as: "An unpleasant emotion caused by the anticipation or awareness of danger." Fear is a learned response to what we perceive to be a threat to our well-being which could result in our hurt or harm.

Luke 21:26 tells us about persons who are so fearful that their hearts are failing. However, that need not be for God has promised deliverance from fear to those who put their total trust in Him.

Psalm 91 contains a message of hope and comfort: "*He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust."*" (Psalm 91:1-2)

Living fearlessly is to live life that is not controlled by fear. For us to live like that there are three actions that we must take: (1) We must Face our fears; (2) We must Fight our fears and (3) We must be Fortified against fear.

## **I. WE MUST FACE OUR FEARS.**

There are basically two types of fear: good fear and bad fear. Concerning **good fear**, we learn early in life that fire is hot; water drowns, a door slammed on a finger hurts etc. We learn that good fear protects us.

Then there is **bad fear**: When I talk about bad fear I mean all forms of worry, dread, anxiety and terror as a result of not trusting a benevolent Heavenly Father. Bad fear is injurious to our souls, spirits, bodies and our testimony.

Notice the fears that the Psalm writer talks about here in Ps. 91: "snare" v.3; "deadly pestilence" v.3; "terror of night" v.5; "arrow by day" v.5; "pestilence" v.6; "evil" v.10; "plague" v.10; "lion and cobra" v.13.

Half the battle in fighting an enemy is knowing who or what the enemy is. Notice that the writer puts the fears into two categories: fears that are *readily seen* and fears that are *rarely seen*. Let us briefly analyze them both:

### **A. Fears That Are Readily Seen.**

What are the obvious fears in Psalm 91? They are: “deadly pestilence”, “arrows by day”, “plagues”, “and lions”. In this figurative language we have a picture of that which is visually observable and that terrify some people. These threats are pretty out in the open. Here are examples of enemies that can be readily seen. We know them to be real, they are out in the open, we can observe them, hear their roar, see their form, sense their danger.

However, fear of these dangers comprise the smallest percentage of our fears. An analyst has come up with these following statistics regarding fears:

- 60 % of that which we fear never happens;
- 12% of our fears are about our health;
- 10% are about our past;
- 10% are about petty miscellaneous superstitions;
- 8 % are real, legitimate threats. In other words, the readily seen fears amount to only 8% of all our fears!

Eugene Peterson, in his paraphrased, *The Message*, renders Matt. 6:34 as follows: “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”

That is an expanded version of: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” Live one day at a time, do not live yesterday over again, do not try to live tomorrow today but focus upon today.

### **B. Fears That Are Rarely Seen.**

Back to Psalm 91 - there are: “snares”, “terror by night”, “disaster”, “serpents”. We are confronted by some situations that are totally unexpected. We start the day with optimism and cheerfulness and are suddenly confronted with some-thing that was totally unexpected and suddenly our spirits are paralyzed, we are shackled by fear and plunged into despair.

What do we do when confronted by unexpected situations that make us fearful? Do we react just like our unsaved counterparts? Or do we respond with resolute confidence in our sovereign, ever-present, all-powerful, all-wise Heavenly Father?

More than 80 times God says “do not fear”, “do not be afraid”, “be not fearful” or “fear not”. Those statements are commands, not mere suggestions. Remember, 60% of our fears never happen. A tremendous amount of fear is built up by the imagination. Many times we imagine situations that never actually happen.

Have you ever had an injection with a needle? Gone to dentist for a tooth extraction? Had surgery? Our imaginations ran away with us – we perspired – pulse raced. When it was all over we said, “It wasn’t half as bad as I imagined it would be.”

**ILLUST.** I had a dentist whose name was, believe it or not, Dr. Hurt! He had a sense of humor for he had an embroidered sign on the wall in front of his dental chair that read:

“One thing I have learned  
While living through the years,  
Is that fear brings more pain  
Than does the pain it fears.”  
- Shakespeare

The point to all this is that “fear brings more pain than does the pain it fears.” Former U.S. President James A. Garfield said, “I have had many fears in my life, but the worst of them never came.” President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.”

So, in order to live fearlessly we must face our fears. We must ask ourselves, “What is the origin of my fears?” The spirit of fear comes from one of 3 directions: from God, from the Devil, or from humans including oneself. We can rule out one source very quickly - fear does not come from God! *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and self-control.”* (2 Timothy 1:7)

**ILLUST.** One of the popular T-shirts worn by young people today has the words, “No Fear” on them. Most of them are living scared. Those T-shirt represents false courage or denial or both. Courage is not the absence of fear, it is the mastery of fear! However, we cannot master our fears unless and until we face them, analyze them and know what they are. However, that is not enough, we must fight our fears.

## II. WE MUST FIGHT OUR FEARS.

Our fears attack us or we attack them! We must be pro-active in recognizing our fears and in resisting our fears.

There is the human side and the divine side to overcoming fears. God will help us but first we must be willing to help ourselves. We must go on the offensive against our own fears by appropriating God’s promises to us!

Look at verses 14 and 15 - *“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.”* According to these two verses, how do we overcome a fear attack? In threatening and/or dangerous situations the Lord tells us:

- 1) *“Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him...”*  
Therefore, **Count upon God’s power!**
- 2) *“I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.”*  
Therefore, **Concentrate upon God’s protection!**
- 3) *“He will call upon me, and I will answer him....”*  
Therefore, **Call upon God in prayer!**
- 4) *“I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.”*  
Therefore, **Consider God’s presence!**

**Note the 6 “I wills”** in Ps. 91:14-16 - God says “I will rescue”, “I will protect”, “I will answer”, “I will be with him”, “I will deliver”, “I will honor him.” Why, then, would we say, “I will fear?”

Why does God deliver us from fear? Because fear is the opposite of love and God is love, not fear: *“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”* And v.18 - *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”* (1 John 4:16 & 18)

Fear cannot exist in the atmosphere of divine love. Fear imprisons, love liberates; fear paralyzes, love empowers; fear disheartens, love encourages; fear sickens, love heals. We must face our fears and fight our fears. This is only part of the equation. The best part is that we can be fortified against fear.

### **III. WE MUST BE FORTIFIED AGAINST FEARS.** Psalm 91:1-2

*“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”*

When we are trusting in Him completely then:

#### **A. We Are Sheltered by The Most High.**

*“....in the shelter of the Most High....”*

#### **B. We Are in The Shadow of The Almighty.**

*“.... in the shadow of the Almighty.”*

#### **C. We Are in The Safety of God.**

*“He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”*

**ILLUST:** I have traveled over much of the Amazon Jungle both in boats and private planes. It is a most beautiful place but also a most dangerous place. One tribe in the Amazon jungle has a unique practice for training young men to be fearless. About the age of 12 the Father blindfolds the son and takes him deep into the dense jungle to spend the night alone with the wild animals. Once the desired destination is reached the father leaves. The son is free to remove the blindfold.

A certain young man’s time came to be initiated into manhood. He was taken into the jungle and left for the night. Every time a twig snapped, he would visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. Every time an animal howled, he imagined he would be attacked from out of the darkness. No doubt it was a terrifying night. After what seemed like an eternity, the first rays of sunlight entered the interior of the forest. Looking around, the boy saw only dense vegetation. Then, to his utter astonishment, he beheld dimly the figure of a man standing not far away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was his father. He had been there all night.

We have our Savior’s assurance that He will *“never leave you nor forsake you”* (Heb. 13:5) When we place our trust in God alone, we are fortified against fear.

I can sense that someone may be thinking, “But hurtful things happens to the very best Christians – bad things do happen to good people, so Psalm 91 does not work for everyone!”

If we think that way it is because we are confusing two different principles: the principle of *pain* and the principle of *fear*. Pain is what the curse of a sinful nature does to us; fear is what we do to ourselves.

God does not make provision for painless living but for fearless living! Listen to the testimony of King David: *"I sought the Lord, and he heard me and delivered Me from all my fears."* (Psalm 34:4) He did not say God delivered him from all his threats or dangers! Remember, Saul harassed and hunted him and God did not stop Saul from doing so. God is saying, "I'm in control; don't fear even though your experience may be temporarily painful – what I am doing is for my glory and for your eventual and eternal good."

We love the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. It contains these phrases: *"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil"*; and *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies."* David experienced dark valleys and dreaded enemies!

Do you remember the sudden storm and the scared disciple's story in Mark 4? *"They awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!"* (Mark 4:38,39) Sometimes He calms the *storm* – sometimes He calms *us* in the storm!

Then there is Jesus! He did not have a pain-free life but He lived a fearless life! God does not make provision for painless living but for fearless living! We can live a fear-free-faith-life or a fearful-faithless-life. It is up to us.

### CONCLUSION

What have we learned about fearless living?

#### 1. Admit it when you have fears.

You may ask, "Do you ever fear?" Yes, and when I do I say with David, who bare-handedly killed a lion, a bear and Goliath: *"What time I am afraid, I will trust in the Lord."* (Ps. 56:3)

#### 2. Submit your fears to God.

Remember the *"fear nots"* in Psalm 91. We do not need to live in fear. God is not the Author of fear "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of *adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."* (Rom. 8:15)

#### 3. Commit yourself to God's care.

God is our Fortress. Are we consciously living in the shelter, under the shadow and in the safety of Him Who is our Fortress?

What is your greatest fear or dilemma or anxiety or concern today? The future? Your family? Your finances? Your health? Death? God's people have faced them all. We can face our fears in faith, by turning to the face of God.

Here is an old proverb that says: "Fear knocked on the door, faith answered, and there was no one there!"

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