



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 1
March 6, 2022

The Lord Your Dwelling Place

Psalm 91:1–13

¹ He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. ⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. ⁸ You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.

⁹ Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge—¹⁰ no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. ¹² On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

Satan uses today’s Psalm in his vain attempts to tempt Jesus to abandon His mission to live a perfect life in our stead and to sacrifice that life in our place upon the cross. In doing so, he was actually trying to beat Jesus at His own game: bringing Scripture to bear on the topic at hand. But, like all heretics, he quotes the Bible out of context, seeking to make it say what it does not say, thus leading his victim down an erroneous path. But one has to wonder if he really understood Who he was dealing with. Like a school child, who makes up a story that fools all his friends and thinks that same story will fool his parents, only to discover that they’re too smart for that, surely Satan must have thought that, since he’s able to fool so many “regular” humans, he’d be able to fool this one – Jesus. But he inevitably found that his “wit” was no match for the One who created all things, himself included. Let us not be deceived, however; though Satan was no match for Jesus, he is more than a match for us.

No strength of ours can match his might.
We would be lost, rejected.

Yet, let us not be comfortless.

But now a champion comes to fight,
Whom God Himself elected.



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Jesus, God's own Son, defeated – and continues to defeat – Satan for us.

He holds the field victorious.

This Jesus is the One who is our Refuge and our Fortress, our God in whom we trust. To dwell in the shelter of the Most High is to have faith in the One who delivers us from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.

Let us be clear on this, beloved. Satan is the fowler, the one from whose snare we are being delivered. Satan is the author of all the ills that afflict us. He is the author of sin, death, disease, pestilence, and bondage. Satan is the author of the pandemic, regardless of how it began. Satan is the power behind those who wish to abuse, oppress, dominate, and kill their neighbors. And Satan is the voice egging on those who labor to turn the truth of God into a lie and strive to silence those who call them out. Every evil in this world was birthed in the heart and mind of its father, the devil, including the lies you tell yourself whenever you hear a Word of God that shakes the foundation of those things you wish were true, but are not in keeping with His clear and expressed will.

Sometimes we get so wrapped up in what we want and the way we think things ought to be, that we forget, or even ignore, the way things really are, the way God has made them to be.

Jesus seems to be quoting this Psalm, when He laments: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34). Pinions are the tips of the wings of a bird. A mother hen will gather her chicks under her wings when there is danger, shielding them against her own body. This is the picture God is using in this Psalm. God wishes to hold us close to His own body, to shield us from danger. But, like Jerusalem of old, we often don't want it. We either don't perceive the danger, or, if we do, the enemy deceives us, causing us to think that the danger is more appealing, more alluring, more exciting than the security God Himself wishes to provide. And it makes Jesus weep.

For He wants to be our shield, our defender. He wants us not to fear the terror of the night, not because it's not terrible – it *is!* – but because He will defend us against it. He wants us not to fear the attacks upon our persons, regardless of the time of day, whether they come by enemy or by illness, not because they are not dangerous – they *are!* – but because He will protect us.

We are not without cause to fear in our day. When professors at our own universities are under attack by their peers for speaking the truth in the face of falsehood, we have cause to fear. When leaders in the church threaten to sue the church because they do not like our historic doctrine drawn from Scripture itself, we have cause to fear. When faithfulness to the Word of God is derided and truth is shut out of the public square, we have cause to fear. When livelihoods are stolen by a court system run amok, when freedom of religion and freedom of speech, guaranteed us by the founding documents of



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our country, are denied us because we dare draw a line in the sand and say, “There we will not go!”, we have cause to fear. When the faith of our children, whom we send to school to be taught the truth, instead enter an arena where the very faith in which they were raised is ripped from them right and left by secularists who themselves have drunk the Kool-Aid of the mainstream scientific community blind to its own fallacies, we have cause to fear.

But God does not wish that we should fear. He has promised to be our shield and buckler. “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.”

Two things need to be said about this. First of all, this cannot mean that no physical harm can come to us who follow Christ. The long history of Christian martyrs testifies against this, from Stephen down to those today who are beheaded in foreign lands for their witness to Christ. Nor can we legitimately say that no Christian in Ukraine has died at the hands of tyrannical men. Physical harm comes to everyone. Jesus said that the Father “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). We live in a sinful world; bad things happen.

This is not to say that He doesn’t bring good things out of them. Romans 8:28 is still in effect: “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good.” Do we always see the good? No. Neither do we see the wind, but we would never deny its existence.

So, if this protection is not necessarily from physical danger, what are we protected from? “You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.” Is wickedness a physical thing or a spiritual thing? I would argue that it is a spiritual thing with a physical manifestation. A man is wicked, his heart is wicked, and therefore he does wicked things. Jesus said, “Out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within” (Mark 7:21-23). It is against the spiritual disease of wickedness that God has promised His protection. “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.” You may be surrounded by wickedness, by the allure and attraction of sin that can drag you down to the depths and land your soul in hell . . . but it will not drag you, it will not capture you, it will not consign you with the damned, because the LORD IS YOUR refuge and your fortress, your God, in whom you trust.

Secondly, to whom is this promise given and how does a person lay claim to it and hold on to it? “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.” “Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place . . .” This does not speak of someone with a casual familiarity with the things of God. To dwell in a place means to live there, to make it your home. Near Woodstock, Vermont, there’s a Billings farm and mansion. Years ago Liz and I visited there with my younger brother and his family. But they didn’t give us a key to the house. I may bear the name, but it’s not my house. There are many who bear the name of Christ, who call themselves Christians, but



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they don't live there. They may visit once in a while, but it's not their home.

What does it mean to dwell in the shelter of the Most High, to make the Lord your dwelling place? There must be more to it than the name. The Christian Faith cannot be merely a label, like a tag you wear at the high school reunion. Even the slightest faith in Christ can get you into heaven. But, if that faith is to sustain and protect you as God intends, it must be a faith that's lived in. It must be a defining character of your life. Dare I say, it must *be* your life. That's the kind of faith God *wants* to give you. Without it you will never have the certainty that his angels will guard you in all your ways. You will never have the confidence that they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. You will not be able to hold firm in the day of temptation.

But, with a faith that's lived in, you can fearlessly repent under the convicting of God's law and joyously receive the absolution of His gospel. With a lived in faith, you can stand when the world is crumbling around you, when your freedom is taken away, when you're arrested and thrown into prison because you're a Christian. No name tag faith will protect you like that. But, with the Lord as your dwelling place, you may tread on the lion and the adder without fear; the young lion and the serpent you may courageously trample underfoot. For then you will know that God Himself is fighting for you, preserving your faith, and you will be able to sing with Luther:

Were they to take our house,
Goods, honor, child, or spouse,
Though life be wrenched away,
They cannot win the day.
The Kingdom's ours forever!

Glory be to Jesus! In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen