

“You will not fear,” Psalm 91  
Tom Johnson, Feb. 21, 2010

Psalm 91 says that the Lord is our refuge and fortress—the one who delivers us from the traps and snares of this world. He is the one who protects from hunger, disease, the terrors of the night, and the arrows that fly by day.

Thousands and ten thousands of people may fall around me—but the one who trusts in the Lord will not fall. Those who make the Lord their dwelling place will not be overcome by evil.

It seems too good to be true—that God promises complete and ultimate protection of us—that we have nothing to fear—that there is no one who will be allowed to harm us.

A year ago, I preached a sermon with a similar theme—that “God works all things together for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28). The sermon was in fulfillment of my coursework and was evaluated by one of my professors.

In the sermon, I used the example of US Airways flight 1549 that crash landed into the Hudson River on January 15, 2009. Many of us were caught up in what was called the “Miracle on the Hudson” where the pilot, Sully, was praised for being the hand of God.

When my advisor heard the sermon, it was a few weeks later. He heard my sermon just a few days after Continental Flight 3407 crashed in Amherst, NY killing 49 people on board and one person in their home.

A family friend of my advisor died in that airplane crash. Although I did not mean to sound like God is only with those planes that crash land with happy endings, that was the danger of calling the crash landing in the Hudson a “miracle.”

It could send the wrong message to those of us who have lost loved ones in tragic accidents—that God was not there. My advisor tape recorded his response to my sermon.

He said with pain and anger in his voice, “Where was your hand, God, when my friend’s plane crashed? Are you only concerned about the big planes in New York City?” He called this “it all worked out fine” kind of theology “crap theology.”

And he asked, “Where is God when things don’t work out fine?” And so, I am challenged to ask the question of this Psalm—Psalm 91. Where is God when I fear the terror of the night? Where is God when the arrow flies by day?

Where is God when good, Christian people suffer? Where is God when bad things happen to faithful Christians? Where is God when any human being suffers? Where were the angels when I stub my foot upon a stone?

This Psalm does not answer the question of why God allows tragedy in our lives. God does not give us an explanation of why things happen the way they do—why evil lurks in the darkness and people shoot of arrows and guns in broad daylight.

What God’s Word does say in this Psalm is “you will not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day.” What God promises is that he will not allow evil to befall us—to overcome us—to have final victory over our lives.

We will experience the power of evil in this world. Bad things will continue to happen to good, faithful Christians. Tragedy will occur in our lifetime just as it did a month ago in Port Au Prince, Haiti with the earthquake.

God does not say, “You will not experience the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day.” He says, “You will not fear.” God promises that these things must not rob us of the peace and comfort of God’s presence in our lives.

Fear is a powerful enemy. We fear what may or may not be in the future. We fear what is hidden in the shadows and under the cover of darkness. We fear the unknown. Ultimately, we fear living our lives without the watchful eye and strong hand of a loving and caring God.

It is significant that what should comfort us in this Psalm are those invisible guardians of our souls, the angels. “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.”

We don’t even know all the dangers angels have delivered us from even this week! How many times have the angels kept us from stepping in Satan’s traps? How many times have the angels protected us from the evil and dangers of this world? We may never know because what they do, and what God does for us, is often hidden from our eyes.

There is one more plane crash I want to talk about: United Airlines Flight 93. Often forgotten, it is often forgotten among the thousands who died on September 11, 2001. Here is a plane crash that did not have a happy landing—44 people died.

However, there are many powerful stories in the midst of this tragedy. There is a hidden strength in those who fought the terrorists and died. Many of the passengers expressed their faith and peace in God even in the midst of evil and death.

If you look at the change in the flight path of the airplane, it is easy to see why many experts believe that the plane was heading to our Nation’s Capitol, Washington, DC to kill hundreds, if not thousands, of people.

For those who have God as their refuge and fortress—for those who take cover behind his massive shield—for those who make the Lord their dwelling place we will not fear. We will not let fear overcome us.

“For he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). Though hidden from our eyes, the angels surround us to guard our souls. And because Jesus died and rose again, we know that we have triumphed over death and the devil.

We tread upon that prowling lion and serpent of old underfoot because Jesus has given us the ultimate victory. We will not fall into ruin and be abandoned because the Lord is on our side.

And even if we should die before our Lord comes back, just as the poor man Lazarus did in the story of the rich man and Lazarus and was carried off by angels into heaven, so death for us is a reassignment for the angels.

Instead of guarding us from the terrors of the night, the arrow that flies by day, the pestilence, destruction, and death—they will bear us up and life-flight us into the presence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We may appear to those on earth as the fallen—but in the eyes of the angels and great cloud of witnesses—we are the living—we are those for whom death has no more victory over us than stubbing our foot against a stone.

Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us. This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will. He can harm us none. He’s judged; the deed is done; one little word can fell him.

We, on the other hand, will not fear but will be carried away by angels and will shine like the sun. And, in the meantime, they invisibly guard us and God has us in the palm of his almighty hand.