

“UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

March 15, 2020, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Psalm 91

Introduction.

I can only think of one other time in my ministry when the events of the previous week led me to change the sermon for the next Sunday. I remember doing that for 9/11, and I am doing it again this morning. Lord willing we will consider the third temptation of Jesus next week.

In thinking about what text to preach this morning two quickly came to mind.

James 4:8 Cleanse your hands, you sinners.

Isaiah 1:16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean.

But then I thought maybe not. So what then?

In our first email to you on Friday we listed three Psalms, Psalm 46, 91, and 121. I recommend them to you again and encourage you to meditate on them.

Let me read Psalm 91 and focus on one verse primarily.

For several weeks we have listened to the words of man. We have listened to the collective ramblings of a thousand talking heads. In times like this it is good to limit the words of man and increase the words of God. I am here to proclaim to you the true and eternal Word of the living God Himself. He has spoken to the particular needs, issues and concerns that face us today.

Psalm 91

Psalm 91:1-16, especially verse 10.

The psalmists references to deadly pestilence and plague and a thousand falling has entirely different meaning to us now, and gives us a bit more appreciation of the real threats the people of the OT faced.

Psalm 91 makes some staggering promises.

Verse 3: He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.

Verse 7: A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

Verse 10: No evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

Verse 12: On their hands angels will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

Verse 14: I will deliver him; I will protect him.

Does this mean those things will never happen to God's children? But what if evil has befallen me? What if disaster has come into my tent? What if I get the coronavirus? Does that mean God's promises don't apply to me?

Last week we heard Satan quote this Psalm to Jesus, but he misinterpreted it and misapplied it. Jesus didn't take the bait, Jesus knew that evil would befall Him and He would be struck down **and** He knew that didn't mean God was unfaithful to His promises.

God's grace is real, God's provision and protection are real, He does these things over and over. But it doesn't mean when evil befalls us, that those same things are no longer true of God. Sometimes God delivers us from and sometimes delivers us through, whatever glorifies Him and is good for us.

"It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord. Ill to him is not ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honor, death is his gain. No evil in the strict sense of the word can happen to him, for everything is overruled for good" (Charles Spurgeon).

No ultimate evil, no ultimate harm, no spiritually deadly peril will befall me.

Jesus said, don't fear those who can kill the body, don't fear what can kill the body, fear only what can cast both your body and soul into eternal hell (Matthew 10:28).

Let's consider that verse 10 more closely in the light of the coronavirus and ask what it tells us.

Verse 10: No evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

The coronavirus and Jesus.

Like the Psalmist, we live in a world filled with evil and plague, with sin and sickness, with pestilence and destruction, in a world where epidemics turn into pandemics.

The coronavirus teaches us the truth about our world. We live in a broken, fallen world where terrible evil exists. We live in a very dangerous world where we are all vulnerable. We are not as safe as we like to think we are. Millions of people die from all kinds of diseases, and millions more from accidents and natural disasters.

The coronavirus reminds us why Jesus came to earth. The coronavirus reminds us all of our need for the Gospel and points us to the Gospel for our hope and help.

While Jesus was on earth He did public miracles to demonstrate that He has all power over sickness, deformities, nature, death and the spirit realm.

Jesus came to earth, suffered and died, rose from the dead, and is now seated in glory at the right hand of the Father for just such a time as this. He came to be our only comfort and hope in body and soul, in life and in death.

John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

We should live now as we have always lived, in the knowledge that we have been saved and delivered from our sin and all fear of death.

So the coronavirus is cause for worship when we realize it is why Jesus came and why we have a so great a Savior. And nothing can separate us from His love for us (Romans 8:37-39).

To every fearful thought about the virus say, “Christ is risen!”

The coronavirus and God.

The coronavirus reminds us of who God is and what He is like, it reminds us of why we call ourselves Reformed Christians. In the midst of a world filled with evil and plague, we dwell under the shadow of an almighty God (Ps. 91:1).

The coronavirus did not somehow escape out from under God’s power and authority and is running loose under its own will and power. The coronavirus is not an exception to the rule.

If that were true then God would not be God and none of God's promises would be true.

God is not in heaven wringing His hands wondering what He is going to do. God is not in heaven saying, "Oh, no, how did this get past me." God laughs at coronaviruses, God laughs at evil, in the sense that He laughs at whatever is puffed up, proud and arrogant, at Satan himself, who thinks he is something when he is nothing before God and with a single word he and all evil with him will be destroyed and banished to hell for ever.

At times like this we need to draw close to the great doctrines of our faith. We don't need curtains and carpet and couches and pillows, we need concrete and girders.

The Heidelberg Catechism is a huge comfort to us. Someone described Q. 27-28 as an inhaler, like what a person with asthma uses to be able to breathe again.

Listen to this, inhale this deeply into the lungs of your soul.

Q.27. WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD?

A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty - all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand.

Do you hear this? Everything comes from or comes about by the fatherly hand of God, from a God who is a father God, a loving and gracious and compassionate and good God.

There are no accidents with God, no chance, fate, or bad luck.

Consider what God can do with the tiniest of microscopic viruses. With one little bug God can bring nations to their knees. God can send the stock marketing plummeting and erase billions of dollars of investment in a few days. God can shut down tourism and air travel and cruise ship travel.

In fact, you want evidence how strong and mighty our God is? What is one of the biggest gods of our world? God can even topple all the sporting events on the planet and all the entertainment events. That reminds me of the pagan god Dagon falling down before the Ark of the Covenant in I Samuel 5:1-7.

Q.28. HOW DOES THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S CREATION AND PROVIDENCE HELP US?

A. We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.

Paul writes about a peace that passes all understanding, that defies human logic and reason.

Paul writes about being content in any and every and all circumstances. Scripture talks about having confidence and assurance.

What is this grounded in? Our feelings, our opinions, our will power?

It is grounded in a clear knowledge that God is completely in control. Even if one of us gets the virus, God is in control. Even if one of us dies from the virus, God is in control. No evil can befall us.

If God is not in control of this virus then none of His promises hold true, but if this virus is completely under His control then all of God's promises hold true.

This doctrine of the transcendent greatness of God's sovereignty and providence over all of His creation is that spiritual inhaler we all need to calm us down and enable us to breathe again.

Something is going to happen in heaven that will blow our minds. We will see that for those who love God and are called by God to be His children, there was never even one time in our whole lives when our souls were close to any danger. We who belong to God are kept by God.

Let God's perfect love for us and His perfect power and providence cast out all fear, worry, doubt.

God is absolutely sovereign and perfectly good. Write that down, put it in your Bible, and on post-it notes in your bathroom or car or locker. God is absolutely sovereign over all the earth and His goodness is from everlasting to everlasting.

The coronavirus and Us.

A world full of evil and plague also reminds us that we are in over our heads, we are not able to rescue and deliver ourselves, that we are depended on God.

The coronavirus is a messenger from God to show us ourselves and expose a number of things.

It humbles us, reminds us of how truly weak we are that something so small, so microscopic can knock us off our feet and possibly even kill us. We are not as strong and independent as we like to think.

It humbles us as a nation that something so small can in just a matter of weeks rock our nation, send the stock market plunging, disrupt our entire economy, send businesses reeling. We think we so strong and mighty and can do anything. The truth is, apart from God and His grace we can do nothing.

We are not masters of our fate and captains of our souls.

We are vulnerable and every reminder of it is grace, grace to keep us humble. Grace that helps us to make allowances for each other.

Brothers and sisters, if this season of trial in our nation doesn't make us take a more eternal perspective on life, if it doesn't cause us to love God more and trust Him more deeply and desire to follow Him and serve Him more faithfully in the few short years that remain for us in this fragile life of ours, we aren't paying attention, we are being spiritually dull,

If we don't grow and learn and aren't changed by this, then we have wasted a great opportunity of mature our faith. Trials are tests from God. God brings trials to test the genuineness of our faith. Suffering is for learning. May it be found to be gold to the praise and honor of Jesus.

Implications and application.

What is God doing through the coronavirus? He is already at work and He wants to be at work in and through us.

Christians in China are ministering as they comfort in the midst of their own suffering.

Christians in Wuhan are have a huge impact on those suffering, caring for the sick.

Iran released 70,000 political prisoners, many of whom were Christians. God opened the doors.

In Italy, God is causing the Gospel to spread as people reach out to Christians for hope and help. Nominal Catholics are turning to Protestant evangelicals for answers and comfort and hope.

II Timothy 1:7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Be light in darkness. Face your fears with great faith. Let your kids see your faith in face of fears. Think of ways to minister to others, helps those in need. Offer to get groceries.

Take care of each other, check in, follow up. I know there are some who don't have computers who are watching with others who have a computer.

Devote yourselves to prayer. Sow seed this week for the sake of Christ and for the sake of souls that don't know Christ and the hope of eternal life.

Brothers and sisters, it is my privilege to walk with you through this season of trial. I am available to you at any time, to call or to visit. I am not too busy for you to call or for me to visit. I am here to help and serve in any way I can.

I am praying for all of our flock in this time that God will show Himself sovereign and good, powerful and merciful. That He will use this time to strengthen our faith, increase our trust, turn our hearts away from the things of this earth, the things of the flesh, and all ungodly pleasures, and turn our hearts to Him.

Psalm 91:14-15 Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.
15 When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.