**PSALM 91**

*(Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; Psalm 91)*

**The Fact, The Feeling, & The Faith**

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ…

 Our age is a time of different voices. Perhaps more than any other time we hear more voices clamouring to be heard than ever before. Whether they are competing political ideologies - from feminism right across to male chauvinism - or they are in attitudes to the environment - where you can go from extreme conservationism to the most blatant opulent waste - or it’s in religion - which can take you, in your own neighbourhood, from the most rigid Islamic faith to the Eastern New Age.

 We can get very sick of them. Those who are destroying so quickly the values Christianity has blessed our country with, just keep bleating away, on the TV screen, magazines, billboards - whether mild or obscene! But when we try to block out those distracting voices of the world sometimes the voice we **should** hear is muffled. Listen - it’s this voice you need to hear right here in Psalm 91!

 You may have noticed that the psalm was like a conversation. There was more than one voice, but there’s only one person who wrote it.

 It begins with the voice of reason in verse 1. There is a personal response to that in verse 2. Then we hear reason’s voice again until verses 9 and 10, where again he personally responds.

 After this the verses 11 till 13 return us to reason. And to cap it all off, the psalm ends with the third voice, in the verses 14 till 16, which we hear as God’s voice. To sum it up: In this psalm we hear the voices of fact, feeling, and faith.

 THE FIRST VOICE IS FACT. And it’s already there in verse 1. It tells us there is a battle out there. And just as in our society today you will see physical security around you everywhere, from the signs telling you these premises are alarmed, the CCTV cameras, right through to those uniformed military and police personnel, so the psalmist declares the spiritual protection around believers everywhere.

 The psalmist actually draws the physical-spiritual metaphors quite a way as he develops this protection in the verses 3 till 6. The fowler’s snare could well be the plots which trip us up, or compromise us with others. There may be reference to the illnesses that attack the mind, in the first part of verse 5, or the diseases that attack the body, in the second part of verse 5.

 As for God’s care, it’s pictured as the warm protectiveness of a parent bird. The word pinions in verse 4 is a word for the outer part of a bird’s wing which includes the feathers. That’s the part the mother bird wraps around her chicks.

 And it’s combined here with the hard, unyielding strength of armour. This is the shield and buckler. And “buckler” describes a smaller, personal, shield. The NIV compares this to a rampart – a protective wall around you.

 How much don’t we need that! It can only be the Lord God who keeps us from the terrifying monsters in our lives.

 Perhaps your life this past year has been an insecure and scary affair. Like so many others, you can’t wait to get into this new year - it couldn’t possibly be like this last year! This past year was the year that was filled with the devils threatening to undo us - twelve months in which the prince of darkness made things very grim.

 Whether that was through the coronavirus, the increasing power of secular humanism with new laws slated for abortion, euthanasia, and so-called ‘hate speech’, and everything else. And there were all those other things as well – perhaps ill health, relationship difficulties, hassles with the kids. Like Luther maybe you even saw Satan’s presence close enough to throw something at him!

 Listen to the first voice – it is saying “no fear” in verse 5, and “no evil” and “no plague” in verse 10. It describes precisely how God is making it all happen this way. There are even angels guarding you and what’s more - they’re lifting you up!

 Right when you’re at your weakest he is being the strongest! Though you step on the biggest lion and the deadliest snake he’s got you safe!

 It is about how you are kept secure, through the most dangerous physical description he can give of his time, that the first voice speaks. And it’s no different for us today!

 Take all those things which have haunted you these past twelve months. Think of any one of them. Go on - identify it!

 Now make it a lot worse. Was it something taken from you? Then imagine everything is taken from you! Do a Job - write off the whole lot.

 Was it bad health in some way? Take away your health altogether - put yourself in the most debilitating and depressing situation ever!

 Was it what someone else did to you? How didn’t that hurt you, and probably because they never said it to you, but you heard about it alright!

 Anything bad which you’ve gone through, multiply it to its biggest possible equation! What have you then got? Not a lot! Still - you’ve still got God - haven’t you?

 Come on - haven’t you! Or do you feel he’s gone on you too! You haven’t fallen with the thousands on the side, have you?

 I tell you now that if you’re feeling even that low, God has done it for a purpose. The apostle Paul tells us in 2nd Corinthians 12 that when he was spiritually flying on the mountaintop he had to take a tumble into the valley’s bottom. Something was sent from Satan to especially torment him, and despite his pleas with the Lord to take it away, the only answer he got, was, as verse 9 says there, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

 THE FIRST VOICE IS FACT. It is about the way things are. And because of it we realise that THE SECOND VOICE IS FEELING.

 You see, what God did made Paul truly see! He knew then what Job had gone through. In complete contrast to what matters in this world - the power and prestige - he found his true worth in weakness and poverty.

 It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, exactly because if you depend on what you have that’s your sole worth. This is why in Matthew 19:22 the rich young man went away sad, because Jesus exposed just how much his material wealth meant to him.

 If there is one witness that should convict us in the church it is that some of the very people who are dismissed by those in the “know” as the “poor,” so to speak, are the very ones who put us to shame. You can write them off materially; you can write them off mentally; you can write them off in terms of all the social graces; you can write them off in all kinds of ways; but they’ve got angels looking after them. Whenever God has moved in a most powerful way in church history it has so often been the poor who were set free. If anything, those who had become so entrenched in the institutions of the church; those who seemed so ‘right’ had to be converted before they saw that too.

 Congregation, our second voice is simply the voice of believing response. These are the words of those looking to the Lord.

 Ah - that’s us! The voice which we hear in the verses 2 and 9 is right in here – in our hearts! THE SECOND VOICE IS FEELING.

 Listen to verse 2: “I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” This is what we should be saying. But when we become so wrapped up in looking after ourselves, and feeling good about ourselves, are these our words? Do we really believe **God** is our be-all and end-all - the centre of our whole being?

 You might wonder how I get this from these words. To you it might seem verse 2 is nothing more than a type of spiritual insurance policy. Isn’t it just the type of safeguard you took out when you joined this church?

 “Of course I trust in God – we read the Bible and pray at home, we support missions and other charities, and I’ve kept this church going too! We live the right kind of life, mix in the right kind of company and, besides, I’m usually here!”

 “And I have to say, with verses 9 and 10, the Lord’s looked after us pretty well. We’re blessed, I know that. Look, I know about God looking after me.”

 “Besides, isn’t that what the third voice in the psalm tells me? When it’s God’s voice, I can see he’s looked after me! It’s plain to see!”

 Dear friend, I wonder if that is God’s voice you’re hearing? Are you really hearing the voice of the faith he has placed in you?

 I mean, how can you really distinguish it from all those other voices in this world that we heard about earlier on? Have you really been hurt so that you know the difference? And do you really cry out in anguish when you’ve sinned against God?

 Like David in Psalm 32, did your bones waste away when you didn’t talk to God? Is his hand heavy upon you when you step just one step away from him?

 Think about it. Who is he to you?

 THE SECOND VOICE IS FEELING. But it’s not feeling as the world shows. This is no euphoric moment that is gone as quickly as it came. This is the commitment that comes with love for him. And this is why THE THIRD VOICE IS FAITH. You see, this is not the faith we have in ourselves to believe in God. Rather, this is the faith that **God** plants in us to believe and to live his way. Indeed, it is him in us! God with us is God in us!

 This is why in the verses 14 till 16 we hear the words of the Lord himself. Those words are about us. And what the Lord responds to from that second voice is not to someone who’s comfortable but someone who’s actually quite uncomfortable.

 Listen to what he says there: “I will deliver him,” “I will protect him,” “I will answer him,” “I will be with him in trouble,” and “I will rescue him.” In fact, we can never be at peace while we’re on this earth. The words of the Lord are for someone who’s actually very, very disturbed!

 Congregation, we shouldn’t think that what we have on this earth is meant to prove we have God on our side. Health and wealth are not a pat on the back from God. The psalmist spoke often enough about how rich the wicked were to disprove that.

 The voice of the Lord, though, is exactly that - it’s the **voice** **of the Lord**! It’s his voice which we must hear. The voice that ends Psalm 91 by saying that he will show us his salvation.

 But do we hear him? And do we show him? Are our lives the most intense sensitivity to what God tells us in his Word? Or are we too busy talking of ourselves?

 Perhaps we don’t openly brag about ourselves, but deep down that’s our agenda. And we’re wealthy and healthy enough to quickly cover over that ugliness with a bit more money or practical help. But inside we’re not happy at all! For all the outside appearance the inside is really quite a mess.

 Mind you, you could be honest about that. You could agree with the second voice and say that God’s the only One who’s got it together. You could even look at the person who showed us perfectly what the second voice sounds like. You could say the same as him - he who said to those who wanted to be Christians that they had to give up everything just like he gave up his very life!

 You know I could only be speaking about Jesus Christ. No one can ever sound so much like the second voice as he did. His cry from the cross in Luke 23:46, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,” is the second voice down to a tee!

 It is by faith in him, the only Saviour, that we can say the same thing! It is when the Lord Jesus is our king that we have that voice, the voice so different than any other voice, and the only voice that has to be heard today.

 Dear friend, the hardest thing isn’t saying that Jesus is your own Saviour, it’s actually proving that **he** is **your** Lord everyday - and in every possible way! Then however long our lives are, we are proving that the third voice is right - he is showing you his salvation. Then whatever will come to pass in this new year can only help draw you closer to him. May his Word and Spirit so help that to be!

 Amen.

PRAYER:

Let’s pray…

 O Most Loving Saviour God, As this human period of time ticks away we look to you who controls the divine time line, and realise again how much we have in you alone.

 O Lord, please keep us and guide us. In all that we say and do may it be about you.

 In the precious Name of our Saviour and Lord, we humbly pray, Amen.