

Psalm 91 Devotional

Verses 5-8

Psalm 91 teaches us to put our full confidence in the Lord, the Most High, the Almighty. Verses 5-6 address some of the fears that were common three thousand years ago, and yet we can still relate to them. During Coronavirus, people like you and me are full of fears. It may not be the fear of a literal arrow (v. 5), a weapon of ancient warfare (Even in recent times, warfare and pandemics have overlapped. During the Spanish flu of 1918, the disease overlapped a time of war – the Great War. We can count our blessings). During this pandemic, however, we may resonate with the psalmist with his striking image of “pestilence that stalks in darkness” (v. 6). Though we may know how the Coronavirus spreads, it has sometimes crept in unawares despite the best quarantine efforts, e.g. due to some people being symptom-free and unintentionally passing it on. What can bring us comfort is that the Bible teaches that plague and pestilence are not outside of the Lord’s control. We will not die if the LORD wants us to remain alive. Nothing dies or “falls to the ground” apart from the will of God the Father (Matthew 10:29-31).

Sometimes, as the Psalmist says, the curses “will not come near you” (v. 7). Sometimes here on earth, God’s people are afforded special protection. My family has been reading through the account of the Exodus for our family devotions. God’s people, the Israelites, had to endure the first three plagues: water turned to blood, frogs, and gnats. However, the LORD then made a *distinction* between His people and His wicked enemies. Before he sent the fourth plague of flies on the Egyptians, the LORD instructed Moses to say to the king of Egypt: “But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. Thus I will put a *division* between my people and your people.” (Exodus 8:22-23). Ultimately, the curse of death did not come near the people of Israel. They watched as a thousand fell at their side, ten thousand at their right hand. God’s people were spared the death of the firstborn that fell upon their wicked neighbors. The curse did not come near them if they put the blood of a blemish-free lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their houses (Exodus 12:7). This Passover lamb foreshadowed a more significant Mediator. If we put his blood on the doorposts of our heart, we too may be spared. “...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

What of the idea of God repaying or “recompensing” the wicked (v. 8)? What do we do with verses like these in light of Jesus’s command to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44)? Sometimes, during severe oppression, it is important to recognize that the LORD is just. This was important for the Israelites during their suffering in Egypt (see this theme also during the time the Jews were in Babylonian captivity, e.g. Jeremiah 51:56). It is a comfort to know that the LORD will one day right all wrongs. We should long for “righteousness and peace” to “kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10). However, we must remember that the LORD takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and neither should we. He wants all of us to turn from our wicked ways and live (Ezekiel 33:11). When the LORD sent the seventh plague of hail, it is interesting to read that some “among the servants of Pharaoh” “feared the word of the LORD” and put their slaves and livestock inside (Exodus 9:20). At this time of pandemic when fear surrounds us, let us model the fear of the LORD to our neighbors and point them to the Mediator who is “able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him” (Hebrews 7:25).

Reflection questions:

1. What fears are you struggling with in the midst of this pandemic?
2. How can you, like the Psalmist, put your full confidence in the LORD?
3. How can God's repayment of evil be of comfort?
4. How can you reflect God's saving mercy in Jesus Christ to neighbors in the midst of this pandemic?