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Psalm 91 "Abiding Safely in His Presence" July 22, 2018

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 91.

Psalm 91 through about 100 or so have very short or no introduction at all, and so we are left to kind of go at it on our own. We don't really know the occasion for which it is written, who might have written it. We don't have a background to really look at. But we know a couple of things about the author of this Psalm. Number one, he had a very close relationship with God. In fact, the message is about abiding or how close of a relationship do you have with God. And what can it do for you if you have it, and what can it fail to do for you if you neglect it. In fact, the last three verses have the Lord responding in the first person to the fellow who has made Him his hiding place.

We know for sure that Satan knew this Psalm. He quoted it -- well, he misquoted it in giving it to Jesus during His temptation in the wilderness there, in Matthew 4 before He began His public ministry. But it is a challenge, to us to ask ourselves, do we just know the Lord or are we really living in Him? I guess that's the question that He would ask. Lots of poetry, beautiful words, but more importantly, great concepts and promises of God to those who would find their rest in Him.

Verse 1 says this: "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." God would have you and I to live close Him. Close in proximity, but more so close in our awareness of His presence, and then close in our response to His direction and guidance. Paul wrote to the Colossians that his life was hidden in Christ and one day when Christ would appear, that he would also appear in glory.

In a broad sense, all of us live in God's presence. I mean, no one really escapes it. When David wrote Psalm 139, he wrote, "Where can I go from Your spirit and where can I flee from Your presence? If I go to heaven, You're there. If I make my bed in hell, You're there. If I take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, even

there Your hand will lead me and Your right hand can help me." In other words, I can't really get away from You.

The problem is, though we live in God's presence, that isn't always people's experience. The Athenians in Mars Hill when Paul ended up in Corinth there and traveling towards Corinth in Acts 17, he met with a bunch of philosophers who are up on a hill who had an altar to every god except for one. In fact, they were worried they'd maybe had left someone out, and so they had just built an altar to the unknown God. And Paul used that as an occasion to share with them. He said, That's the God I know, the One who made you. Doesn't really need anyone. Doesn't dwell in a temple made with hands, and yet holds your very breath in His hands. He is the One who has come to save by causing His Son to be raised from the dead. Paul didn't get much fruit in Athens, but he addressed this issue that even they, these idol worshippers, were aware of an oversight, though they were oblivious to what that meant to them.

In verse 9 here the Psalmist will tell us that we have a choice to make. In fact, he writes there, "Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place." That though we are all in God's presence, it is beneficial for and advantageous to those who acknowledge Him and then move themselves under His care. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians in Chapter 3 about their new life in Christ, he said of them in Chapter 3, verse 17, "That you would allow Christ to dwell in your hearts by faith, being rooted and grounded in His love." And this word dwell, "katoikeo (kat-oy-keh)," means to make yourself at home, or if you will, to settle in. It doesn't mean you moved in for a while, it means this is your permanent place of residency. And that's the word that he used to describe the believers who born again now, has to begin to walk with God, and he said, I'm praying that God would find a permanent place in your life in terms of influence. It's a beautiful word, and it is certainly the subject that you find here as well.

I've been in places that I didn't feel particularly at home. Haven't you? We had two uncles when I was growing up that couldn't have been more different. One was very wealthy. He was a paleontologist for Shell Oil. He lived in a showcase home in Houston. We would go to visit him periodically, but before we would even drive into his driveway I would get the lecture from my father. "Don't touch anything, don't run in the house, no playing, do not ask how much things cost, and don't put your feet on the table." I hated going there.

We'd be there for a week and it felt like prison. Nice enough guy. Not home. My other uncle was a vagabond. I think he owned a condo just so he'd have a mailing address. He built boats for a living. He sailed seven of them to Tahiti and sold them, and then would just fly home. The guy was as fun to be around as anyone I'd ever met. We'd go to his house, we could get in the garage with the tools, we could eat out of the refrigerator, and you could put your feet up on the table. It didn't matter if you threw a football and broke something. He'd just laugh with you and thought that was the funniest thing ever. I loved going over there. It was animal house to me, but it was home.

Some of you might feel uncomfortable here. This isn't home. Oh, you're here, but you feel out of place. You hope the walls will stay up. You're out of sorts. It's uncomfortable. And the minute you can get out of here, you will. You're hoping I'm short, and I promise to go long today just for you. No, I won't do that. But that's kind of the way God's calling is to us. We can know the Lord, but then there's that intimate place of fellowship with God where we are not only aware of His presence, but we place ourselves under the care of His goodness and of His love.

Jesus said to the disciples in John 14, "A little while and the world will see Me no more, but you'll see Me. And because I live, you'll live." But He spoke about the ability of the people who would follow Him to see Him, even in the midst of a world that does not. The intimacy that God wanted to have with us.

John was in his 90s when he wrote those three little epistles of the back of your Bible, and the book of Revelation as well. And he kind of hijacks the word "abide." The Greek words for abide is "menó." Or if you want to mispronounce it, me no, Him yes. It's a good way to remember it. But John is alive, towards the end of the first century. Three generations of Christians have come and gone. Jesus has been out of sight to the world for over 60 years. But John can only find his comfort in abiding in Christ, so he writes about it a lot. "No one has seen God at any time, but if we love one another, God abides in us," he writes. "If we keep His commandments, He abides in us," he writes. If we confess that Jesus is the Son of God, He abides in us. And he just goes out of his way to just talk about this relationship where we find our home in the Lord. But the Lord finds home in my life. He's not just welcome to save me. He's welcome to rearrange the furniture and pick what room He wants to sit in and where He

wants to go around the house. And John goes out of his way, and he uses that word time and time again in his epistle.

If I abide in Him, according to verse 1 here, my life will be overshadowed by His love. His care will follow me wherever I go. Every circumstance I face, His overwhelming presence will keep me in a way that God would keep me were He here physically. And He is; I just don't see Him. I have to see Him by faith.

Verse 2 says, "I will then say to the Lord," when I made Him my dwelling place, my abiding place, my home, "He's my refuge and He's my fortress and He's my God. In Him I'll trust." Those are pretty powerful declarations. A refuge is a place that you go to be safe and secure. God will give you that refuge if you know Him. Refuge from fear, refuge from strife, refuge from worry. He's my refuge. A fortress, at least in the use of the word, is a place of defense. The enemy can't get to you unless he destroys the fortress, and that's going to be kind of hard when your fortress is Almighty God. If I find my home in Him, He'll be my refuge, my security, and my defense. He'll be my God, in whom I trust. That's abiding.

When you get to Proverbs Chapter 30, and you'll find several examples of this through the book of Proverbs, the Lord will make these little three and four verse little declarations that are used poetically to illustrate truths that, we can live by; that we can see clearly in the words that are chosen. But in Proverbs 30 there's a verse that says, "Four things are little upon the earth, and yet they're exceedingly wise." And the first two that are listed are listed as those small things upon the earth that find their wisdom because they take the direction of the Lord clearly and take it to heart. And the first one that he uses is the ant. Small, but wise. How big can an ant's brain be anyway? But the Lord says of the ant, he is small -- smart enough to know that summer doesn't last forever. Winter is coming. He can't swim, can't forage, so he does the smart thing. While it's sunny and warm, he lays up food for the coming winter. He plans ahead. He makes sure that he doesn't find himself in that place without. And the Lord makes a comparison to the ant being smarter than man. Man knows he's going to die. It's inevitable, and yet most folks make no plans at all, make no provision for that day. Yet the Lord would want His to make provision. He's the Lord; I'm going trust in Him, then I'm going to be fine. He's abiding.

The second example that he uses there in Proverbs 30 is the rock badger. In fact, it says the rock badger is a feeble folk, but they make their homes in the crags. And he uses this example. The rock badger is sometimes called a coney or a hyrax. They are particular to the Mid East. They aren't found anywhere else in the world but there. They are the size of an overgrown guinea pig, and yet they hop like rabbits, and they got really sharp-looking teeth, at least the ones I've seen. The Lord said they are feeble. In fact, they have no natural defense against an animal that is bigger than them. Their defense is where they make their homes: In the crags on the hills. You'll see them 100 feet up a sheer cliff, in a little hole in the rocks, happy as a lark. Nobody gets to them. No one can even -- even the eagles fly by, they just pull back. The eagle can't get to them. They're just absolutely at home in what they -- where they make their beds, if you will. Same kind of an example. The Lord wants to be my fortress. He wants to be my Lord. You know, if we -- push comes to shove, you and I have no natural defense against the enemy. Sin will overtake us. The devil is stronger than us. We're sitting ducks. And unless we take the cue from the small and defensive coney, we'll sit in the secret place of the Most High, where we can be safe and secure and protected from the enemy. I'll say to the Lord, You're my God. You're the one I follow. You're the one I rely upon. That's different than just knowing Him. That's knowing Him.

He says in verse 3, "Surely He will deliver me from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He'll cover me with His feathers under His wings. I'll find refuge; His truth will be my shield and my buckler." In the days prior to hunting fowl with guns, birds were caught in traps.

I remember as a young kid my neighborhood friends and I trying to catch birds with an orange crate and a stick on a string, and chicken feed. And we had a hard time catching them. We caught a couple and then we didn't know what to do with them, so we let them go. But here poetically the Lord says of our protection that He will protect us from the traps and of the snares that the enemy sets for us. And that's an interesting picture, because you don't want to be trapped, right? Trapped means you weren't aware that it was coming. The enemy has plots to destroy your life. If you are in fellowship with God, you won't fall for his trap. If you're abiding in Him, you won't fall into his snare.

Paul writes to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians, I think Chapter 2, "Be careful and aware, lest Satan get an advantage

of us, because we're not ignorant of his devices." Here we're told if we will make the Lord our hiding place, then we will find ourselves protected from the snare of the enemy, from him being able to take us into bondage. The very fact it's a snare or a trap suggests you don't see it coming. You can fall into lots of problems in the world from sin, but if you're walking with God you'll be spared from those because you won't react or respond. God has warned us. Now He'll be our hiding place.

The words "perilous pestilence" is directly translated "an evil plague." But usually it is used to speak of sin or the destructiveness of sin in our lives. Stay in fellowship with God, you won't buy into the lies of the devil; won't fall in the sin that will ruin you. You'll see it, but you won't react to it. Without Him, you're the subject of your flesh. You're the -- all of the ugly desires of the enemy will come your way. But walk with God and you're protected.

Now maybe some of you this morning in church are not really in fellowship with God. You're not hiding in Him by faith. You're not, responding to His direction, and so you're always a sitting duck. The enemy has a way of just slowly taking you out; right? God would like to, verse 4, cover you with His feathers and take you under His wing. Beautiful, poetic words. But, you've seen the chicks on a farm before. If there's any sense of danger at all, they scurry quickly to the mother hen, who ruffles her feathers and makes room for them, and they're hidden out of trouble and out of sight of trouble. I like that picture. I'd like to run and sit right behind the Lord in just about everything I do.

Jesus used the same poetry on Palm Sunday when He stopped to weep over the city, and He said there in Luke 13, "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you as a chick would gather her brood under her wings, but you weren't willing. O Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets, and you who kill those and stone those who are sent to you. How often I wanted to gather your children together, just like a hen with her chicks. But you didn't want to come." They wanted nothing to do with Him, and so they left Jesus weeping. And I'll tell you this: If you are here this morning and you know the Lord, but He's not your hiding place, I suspect you leave Him weeping over you. Because He'll tell you what to do to be safe in this world, He'll tell you how to live to get through with joy, but if you ignore Him, though you have the information it does you no good, because He hasn't become your place of hiding.

God would rather spare you. He would rather be verse 1 and verse 2 in your life. He would rather protect you. His truth, if you will embrace it, will be a shield and a buckler. It's a great bunch of words. He'll be body armor for you spiritually. And all of the dangers and temptations and trials, He'll protect you from. Don't go there. All right, Lord. If you say don't go, I don't go. Don't pursue this. Don't make this your God. If you'll listen, you'll find life.

In the first couple of verses, and we've mentioned it to you a couple of different times, the Psalmist uses four names for God which describe to us why he can look to Him as his place of hiding and his place of rest. He uses the term "the Most High." The words in Hebrew, El Elyon. It translates "possessor of everything." God is the one who -- everything is in His hand. It belongs to Him. I think 36 times in the Old Testament you will read El Elyon. And then it is always tied in the fact that since it all belongs to Him, He oversees it all. He uses the term for the Lord in verse 1, the Almighty, El Shaddai. And Shaddai is a Hebrew word that means to provide. God doesn't just own everything, He supplies everything. He's a living God and He's a giving God, and He will provide for you out of His endless resources all that you need. So go abide in Him. Listen to Him. He calls him the Lord, Jehovah or Yahweh. He's made promises that He will keep. You can depend upon Him. He calls Him God in verse 2, Elohim. It's interesting the word "Elohim" is usually plural followed by a singular verb. Now, in English that wouldn't be very good grammar to say "we is returning home," but God is three persons in one, and you read it a lot. God is -- in fact, Elohim is found in Genesis chapter 1 as the Creator of all things. It's 2700 times in the Old Testament. He's the one who created it all. He's powerful enough and strong enough to keep it all. He owns it all. And He'll give it all to you, who want to walk with Him. Possessor, provider, promise keeper, powerful.

Verse 5 says, "We won't have to be afraid of the terror by night, the arrow that flies by day, the pestilence that comes in the darkness, the destruction that comes -- lays waste in noonday. A thousand will fall on one side, 10,000 on your right hand; it won't come near you. Only with your eyes you're going to look, and you're going to see the reward of the wicked." It's an interesting picture how secure you can be if the Lord is your hiding place in this world. God put you in a world that doesn't want anything to do with Him. He

wants you to live in a cocoon, I guess, in one way. He doesn't want you -- you're in it, you're to be a witness and light to it; He doesn't want you to be a part of it. So to those who abide in Him, God promises His continual oversight. And it doesn't matter when things come. The terror is said to come by night, the arrow comes in the light of day, the pestilence comes in the darkness where you can't see, the destruction comes at high noon. The Lord is not going to vacate His throne. He'll protect you at every step of the way, provided that you make Him your refuge, you open your Bibles, you begin to walk in the ways of the Lord. The fallout around you is disastrous. In the world a thousand will fall in one direction, 10,000 will fall on the other hand, but you have immunity.

Look, we live in some pretty weird times, don't we? Tremendous fear. People are not feeling very safe. Sin is rampant. If it isn't terrorism, then it's racism; if it isn't racism, it's political infighting. There's no justice, there's no decency. And here you are, living in this generation, protected by God. It will destroy those who try to live it without God. You'll see it in every direction. Your friends, your family, your workmates, lives falling apart. Doesn't have to be like that in your life. God has promised to see you through. Doesn't mean you'll be protected from every battle, but you can be delivered from them. No fear. You can have rest. You have a future. And as I see around me those reaping corruption as the world just looks to a life in the flesh, I find myself protected by God. It doesn't touch -- when I see it, it doesn't come near my dwelling. Good promise. "In the world you'll have tribulation. You be of good cheer. I've overcome the world."

And He offers this divine protection, verse 11, "I'll give My angels charge over you, protecting you in all of your ways. They'll bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against the stone." I love the fact that God has sent angels to watch over us. In Hebrews 1, I think verse 14, they're ministering spirits sent on behalf of those who are inheriting salvation. Angels have always been around. They watched over the birth of Jesus. They're watching over you and I today. You have an assigned angel. Maybe you have more than one. Some of you need a half a dozen. I think looking back over my life, my angel should have gotten hazard pay for my teen-age years. And then you need them again when you're older. Now you can't walk so good, you drive into things, and you forget where you're going. And the angels,

they pretty much work from cradle to grave, I think, with us. We're told in Hebrews not to neglect to entertain strangers, because sometimes we might find ourselves inadvertently entertaining an angel. God watches over us. That's His protection. To those who abide in the Lord, we have His care.

Which brings us to the last three verses where the Lord makes this promise, "Because he has set his love upon Me," and like verse 9, because he's made Me the Lord. Verse 14, "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I," first person, "will deliver him; I'll set him on high, because he's known My name. He's known who I am. He'll call upon Me and I'll answer. I'll be with him in trouble. I'll deliver and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and give him and show him My salvation." Maybe not long life in this life, but you'll have eternal life. But notice it's the motivation from verse 14. The response of the Lord to those who would make Him Lord is that He would bless, because you have set your love upon Him. You see, you have a choice to make. He will deliver you, set you on high. He will answer you, and He will be with you in trouble. He'll deliver and honor and give you long life, show you His salvation. How many benefits are there to abiding in the Lord? Plenty. Why would you settle for anything less? But that's the battle. He needs us to make Him the Lord.

Some of us show up at church, take off, and that's it, and His -- that's His involvement in our lives, the 30 minutes you listen to me. Really not good enough. God has a direction for us. He just wants you to depend upon Him and find He's the One to whom you run, and the Lord to whom you look, and the refuge that you find, and the protection that you need, and the God that you trust in, and the Lord that you follow. He has far more available than we so often will accept. But He's willing.

And notice these last three verses. That's the heart of God speaking to the one who wants the Lord to be His Lord. I don't know what else to add to that. It is the best offer you'll ever be given.