

Psalm 91- 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen.

This morning I'm preaching on Psalm 91, which while there is speculation as to who wrote it, the truth is that nobody really knows.

However, because of verses 5, 6 and 7, for example, which appears to remind us of the plagues inflicted on Egypt by God, and the thousands of Egyptians who died when the angel of death passed over Egypt, while at the same time God saved the Jews from the plagues and from death, that some people think that it may have been Moses who was the author, but as I said, no one really knows.

The first and second verses of psalm 91 remind me of when I was a child at home, because I had a very large picture above my bed of the Archangel Michael, and indeed I slept in the shelter and shadow of Saint Michael in my childhood, and he did become my guardian angel.

Although I still have a very high regard for him, I now turn to God through our Lord Jesus Christ for my shelter and protection, as clearly does the unknown author of psalm 91.

I, and I'm sure like the unknown writer of the psalm, derive great comfort and a true sense of security, living within the ultimate shelter and protection of the Most High, Almighty, Lord and God, for his shelter is the shelter of infinite love and security.

The author's use of the four statements about God was very important to the Jews at that time, because they were surrounded by pagan gods of all descriptions.

The Most High meant that there was no God higher than their God, Almighty meant that there was no God greater than their God, Lord meant that there was no God more powerful than their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is indeed the one and only true God whom we worship today.

Now the second verse of our reading reinforces the first, because when we live under the infinite protection of God, we can say with confidence that the Lord is our refuge and our fortress in whom we can trust.

And one of the key words here is the word 'trust', because it is trust, and the equally good word faith, which allows us to live and prosper in the shelter and shadow of God.

Although the Archangel Michael couldn't give the level of protection that our Lord can, nevertheless as a child I trusted him, and actually he never let me down, probably because he himself was also under the protection of the most high God.

The opening two verses of psalm 91 contains everything we can ever want or need from God, that is, that we are under the protection of the Most High and Almighty God, because with that knowledge we are able, and without anxiety or fear, to go out into the world and introduce our Lord to others, so that they too may enjoy his protection and shelter.

Going back to that key word 'trust' it is also the key word for us Christians, because in the Oxford dictionary faith is defined as, "Complete trust or confidence in." In our case the complete trust and confidence in Christ as our Lord and Saviour.

We are all Christians through faith in Jesus Christ, or in the complete trust in Jesus Christ who died to cover our sins and who rose from the dead to be our advocate in heaven before God so that we too may live.

Verse 3 reads, "He will keep you safe from all hidden dangers and from all deadly diseases".

Does that mean that we do not have to worry about the coronavirus; of course it doesn't, the sun shines on the righteous and the unrighteous alike.

No, that verse and the following verses, are alluding to the time when God inflicted plagues and torments on the Egyptians but protected the Israelites from all danger.

It demonstrates **not** that God will single us out for protection while leaving others to their own devices, but that if it is God's will to protect anyone then he can, but by and large he does not show favouritism, and we are to look after ourselves.

But that does not mean that God has abandoned us, not at all, he has given us extensive knowledge in the areas of surgical techniques, medicines, hygiene and many other wonderful gifts, to help us thrive and look after ourselves.

In verse 4 God reiterates his defence of us when he makes the analogy of a hen protecting her chicks, which of course the agricultural people of Israel would have had perfect empathy with, having probably witnessed it daily in their lives, for them, this analogy of God's protection could not be clearer.

Now verses 5 to 10, as I have already said, reminds the Israelites of what God can, and will do, if the situation demands it, in that case releasing the Israelites from tyrannical slavery by the Egyptians.

I also strongly believe that God still shows partiality when the situation demands it today, as he has always done, God is still in charge.

For example, although we didn't know about the atrocities the Nazis were inflicting on people at the time, at the end of the war it became all to clear what they had been doing, and God was determined to bring it to an end.

Which through the efforts of the Allies is exactly what he achieved; and indeed there have been more recent atrocities in Yugoslavia against the Muslims, and the people responsible there have also been brought to account.

God does still take an interest in what is going on in his world, God is still in control, despite what some people may think, that's why we as Christians can, and always have been able, to trust and rest in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 14 to 16 are different to what has gone before, previously it has been ordinary folk and possibly priestly folk who have been speaking to us through the first 13 verses of psalm 91, but the last three verses are spoken by God.

In my Good News Bible Verse 14 is very clear, it starts, “God says.” But our reading starts, “Because they have set their love upon me.” The word 'me' is of course God.

Jesus said as recorded in Matthew's gospel, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Jesus also said, “I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it.”

So while God was speaking to the Israelites through psalm 91 in their generation, he is now speaking to us through psalm 91 in our generation. So what is he saying to us that might be different to what he said to them?

The answer to that is of course nothing has changed, however, our understanding of what God said, and indeed is still saying to us, has changed significantly, it has changed because Christ has fulfilled, has illuminated, what God said to us in the Old Testament.

Christ came into the world to give us a better understanding of God's nature, to give us a better understanding of scripture, and of course above all to enact a new covenant of faith and trust in him, our Lord Jesus Christ, and that through that faith and trust in him we may have eternal life with him.

Through Jesus Christ we have been given a clearer understanding of what God meant when he initiated psalm 91.

Now verse 14, of our psalm says, “Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name,” or as my Good news Bible says, “save them.”

I've already said that God can and does protect or save us in this life of ours, but we now have another understanding of what God's protection or deliverance means, an understanding that the Israelites did not have.

Indeed as John said in our opening Prayer today, when he said, “Give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit; and, as you know our weakness, so we may know your power to save.”

The question is save us from what, or save us to what, it is of course to save us from death, and to save us to eternal life.

That for me is the most significant part of the message of verse 14 which the Israelites did not understand because God hadn't revealed it to them, but through Jesus Christ it has now been revealed to us, God saves us through our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life for those who believe and trust in him.

Verse 15 reads, “When they call to me, I will answer them, I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them.

St Paul wrote a similar message in Romans chapter 10 verses 12a and 13 “The same lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

For me the underlying message of psalm 91 is that God has always been, and still is, in charge, and that he does take an active interest in all that is happening here on earth.

And that if we turn to God in love and obedience and have faith and trust in the Most high, Almighty, Lord and God, then he will be our shelter and our refuge, and now we know that he will also save us to eternal life through our lord Jesus Christ.

And for me St Paul summed it up very clearly when he wrote to the Romans at the end of Chapter 8, these remarkable words:

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

As we sit let us pray

Grant us gracious Lord that we may love and seek you always and everywhere.

Thank you Lord Jesus for all the benefits which you won for us while suffering on the cross; for all the pain and insults which you bore for us in your love for us.

O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother help us to get to know you more clearly and to follow you more closely Day by day.

We ask this for your dear names sake.

Amen