

Psalm 91; Isaiah 8:11-15; The Fearful find a Fortress I. The Presence of Fear II. The Picture for the Fearful III. The Promise to the Fearful

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, are you afraid? Most of us are afraid of something. Kids tend to be afraid of what is unknown- and what I cannot see. Adults tend to be fearful of what they know- or what might soon be. But because of the ease of communication, we are living in an incredibly fearful time! The media feeds this fear. The stock market posts the largest one-day point drop in history. Coronavirus cases are on the rise in your state. Add to this- daily concerns like an uncertainty about future plans- the need for good schools and teachers- personal trials and family conflict- there is no shortage of things to fear! So we are going to take a short break from the BC to consider what is called the Psalm of Consolation- Psalm 91 – where the Fearful find a Fortress. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ provides the solution to our fear which faith in the LORD more than fear of the things of this world.

I. The Presence of Fear

We begin by considering the presence of fear. Now the fact that we live in a fear driven society is easily evident when you turn on the evening news. But this is really nothing new- how quickly we forget the fear after the World Trade Centers were hit- or the fear of the Spanish flu or the H1N1 virus- or whatever the latest sickness is sweeping the world. There was a general fear evident during the 2nd World War- and Assyria came to attack Jerusalem! Jesus said as much in Mt. 24- as long as this world endures there will wars and rumors of war- earthquakes and famines- and I will add- sicknesses and pandemics- but do not be alarmed- these things must take place- Jesus said! Well, what kind of situation does the Psalmist find himself in. He is in the midst of battle as v. 5 says- the arrows are flying by day. Picture being a foot soldier in an army of old- you are standing there with your division- surrounded by friends- and your enemy lets loose a barrage of arrows. People are falling down left and right- each being taken down by a deadly dart. Thousands as v. 7 says- all around you people are injured

and dying- and you start to think- I am next! But not only arrows- a deadly pestilence is also nearby in v. 6. Now the Psalmist is at home- in his camp. Some sickness or disease has spread throughout the city. People are falling like flies- the dead bodies are piling up- and it seems certain- the whole city is going to be wiped out by this next virus! Sound familiar? A wasting destruction stalks in the darkness- unseen and undetected until another one falls prey- like Ebola! It seems to come without warning- nothing you do can stop it! Another one falls. When the Black Plague struck Europe, 25 million people died- about 1 out of 3 people living at the time died. Where is God in all of this- is my family next? As you can see- there is nothing new under the sun! Speaking of the sun- it was striking people down at none day- v. 6 concludes. The heat of the day was causing sunstroke- the workers grew weary and died. And the night- it was no better- as the terrors struck a night in v. 5. The fear of the heat and the fear of the cold- destruct during the day and at night- where is our comfort in times like this? If you did not know that God was in control- I think you can easily understand why so many people live in fear! There is no shortage of things to be afraid of! But as our Psalm continues, we will find a uniquely Christian response- one in which we learn how to confront this fear- to address it- and even to overcome it! Earlier we read from Isaiah 8- do not call conspiracy everything they call conspiracy- do not fear what they fear- do not live in dread! Rather, fear the Lord- regard Him as holy! Do you catch the switch! The solution to anxious fear is to rightly fear God! The antidote to dread is faith! In order to calm your anxiety, we are given a picture of who God is and He promises! Since Jesus has conquered sin, death and hell- what can man do to me? Why should I fear the things of this world- because I am so firmly in the hand of my Father that nothing can touch me apart from His will! The faith Jesus gives us is the radical solution to the fears that grip man!

II. The Picture for the Fearful

So our Psalm continues by drawing us a picture- what is God like! How does He function – what character traits does He reveal to His people! Those who trust in Him have a wonderful picture in these

verses. As we see in v. 2- we live by faith! We trust in God- in Him as my God! So we find a picture- for all our visible learners- we see what God is like! First of all, our God is revealed as a shelter and shade. He is a refuge and fortress in v. 2. Children, think of the sturdiest castle you have ever seen a picture of. With its tall towers and solid stone wall. Well, for those who trust in God He is to them a strong tower of defense- a source of complete protection- so that no enemy can touch and no arrow can find! Firm and strong! But also loving and tender- as v. 4 says- He will cover with his pinion and shelter with His wings. The pinions are the long feathers of a bird's wing. So we have a mother bird protecting her young- sheltering them from the storm and the sun- keeping us close to His side! So there is a loving, tender embrace! Children, when you fall and get hurt- where do you run? You go to mom for a hug and kiss- to make everything better- right! Well, here our God gives a picture of His love- covering us with His loving wing and defending us with His mighty arm! He is our shield and buckler as v. 4 concludes- these are the defensive armaments of a soldier. The shield would cover his whole body- while a buckler was a smaller shield held in place by a strap on the shoulder. So here the soldier is doubly or fully protected. It is interesting to note that this image is also used in Eph. 6:16. When you take up the whole armor of God- it is the shield of faith that is used to extinguish the fiery darts of the devil. So the shield of faith is used to defend from Satan's arrows. When you put these images together, you find that God is a shelter, rock and refuge for His people. No matter what is going on out there- when you are here with Him- nothing can overtake you! He is as v. 9 says- a dwelling place- a refuge! In Christ you are hidden- like being placed in secret room that no one knows about! Evil cannot find you! Or in a safe vault- no one can steal you! So complete is the protection that God gives His people, we can say with Psalm 62- He is my rock and defense- I shall not be moved! When I was younger, I remember trying to go to sleep when my parents were not home. I knew that I was safe- but I had this irrational fear that kept me awake. But as soon as I heard the garage door open, I knew my parents were home- I was safe

and protected- someone was watching out for me- and soon I was asleep! The picture given here is similar- we are at home with our God- He is with us- watching over us- so we can dwell safe and secure!

III. The Promise to the Fearful

As our passage concludes, there is a change of voice in v. 14 -16. This Psalm concludes with promises from God- promises that He gives to those who are afraid. Notice how the Divine “I” runs through these verses. I will deliver Him, I will protect Him, I will answer Him, I will rescue Him, I will satisfy Him. These are promises that God gives to those who love Him- who trust in Him and who call on Him. There is the promise of protection- that even when trials comes those who live by faith will be protected. Now this does not mean that nothing bad will ever happen- that we will not experience troubles. Rather it is through the trials and storms that His protection is seen. So this promise need to be kept in context- it is not a promise for a life of ease. But rather deliverance through the trial- and ultimately victory over the trials. In the lion’s den, you are kept safe! As we saw back in v. 13- God’s people will face lions and snakes- but ultimately in Christ we will trample these foes. It is also important to remember that this promise of protection does not give us the right to test or tempt God. Perhaps you have heard of the religious heresy that handles snakes. Those who receive this promise do not deliberately put their own lives in danger. That is what Jesus taught in Luke 4:12- during His temptation by Satan- the ancient snake actually quoted from this very Psalm! Jesus- why don’t you jump off the top of the temple- because you know God’s angels will lift you up- right! Well- Jesus rightly responded- you shall not put the LORD your God to test. So these promises of protection do not give us licence to put our own lives in danger. But there is a promise of ultimate victory that cannot be missed. Note that lions and serpents will be trampled underfoot! As you know, the Devil is called both a roaring lion and the ancient snake or serpent. In refusing to listen to Satan’s temptation, Jesus actually did crush the head of the lion and snake! Not in tempting God- but by obeying God and submitting to His plan was deliverance and ultimate victory achieved! So it is for us- when we trust in God- when we submit to His plan and will for

us- it is in this submission that victory is found! As our Psalm ends in v. 16- with long life- or with eternal life we will be satisfied- His salvation will be shown to us! For those who trust in Christ- who live by faith and not by sight- who know and believe the promises of God- these are promised blessings that no foe in this world can take away! Let's read from Rom. 8:37-39. We could add no stock market crash and no pandemic- can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord! For those in Christ- we know that our prayers will be heard and answered according to His good will- as v. 15 says. We know that all must work for our good- as Rom. 8:18 affirms. And this blessed truth- these wonderful promises are the only failsafe remedy to calm our worries and quiet our anxieties! We will be kept from evil- or that evil will be worked for our good- and the Evil One will not have victory over us- because we are in Christ!

To conclude, imagine that you lived in Egypt during the last Plague as the angel of death killed the firstborn. The fear and dread that filled the Egyptians was audible! But that fear had moved to faith in the Israelite camp. Why- because they were under the blood- the Passover Lamb had died for them! What caused some to fear- caused other to have faith in God- because of what He had done and what He had promised! Yes, trials and sickness will come. But we are in Christ! In Him we already have long life and salvation! Our Father hears our prayer and will provide us for what we need as long as we are called to live on this earth! This Psalm brings our God into view once again- be reminded of His power and promises! See who He is as our fortress, defended and savior! Jesus Christ provides the solution to our fear which faith in the LORD more than fear of the things of this world. So do not fear what the world fears- rather place your faith in God who is my refuge and fortress- He is your God- the One in whom you trust!