

Series: Transition

March 22, 2020

Title: Shelter

[Slide 1]

Text: Psalm 91

A Shelter in the Storm

"Shelter"

Shelter: It's a word we hear a lot these days. 6 counties in the Bay Area of San Francisco have ordered their 7 million residents to "shelter in place." Every one of them needs to find a shelter. The mayor of New York has warned that the same thing might happen in his city in the near future. The federal government has already issued firm guidelines for those over 60 to do the same.

Shelter: the word comes from an old spelling of the word "shield." In ancient warfare, soldiers linked their shields to make a "sheltron," a "roof or wall formed by locked shields." (en.wiktionary.org) Inside that moving defensive structure you were *sheltered* from the arrows and swords of the enemy.

Shelter: So what is your shelter? In a world being ravaged by covid-19, where can you and I find that wall of shields that will keep us safe in body and soul?

See the Storm:

Finding shelter begins with "seeing the storm." I remember being on a sailing trip with Suzanne on Lake Champlain on a hot summer day, when my phone rang. It was my daughter. She had one question: There's a big storm coming. What's your plan?" I answered: "I don't have one."

Out on the lake all I could see was blue sky. But she was looking at the radar and could see a huge line of thunderstorms approaching from the west. It was time to look for shelter. We turned the boat toward the nearest marina and picked up a mooring as the first gusts of wind swept across the water. All night long the thunderstorms rampaged down the mountains and across the lake. We bounced up and down in our little boat, but we were safe.

The same question my daughter asked us that summer day needs asking now: "What's your plan?" You may not see the storm yet, but it's on the radar! It's just a matter of time before it sweeps down on us. And when it does, it will be too late to plan and make necessary arrangements. Think of those 7 million Bay Area residents who woke up to the command to shelter in place. No more business as usual.

The time to see the storm is now.

A Shelter in the Storm:

God's Word has some important things to say about finding shelter. One of the earliest stories in the Bible is about Noah and his family, not to mention a whole lot of animals, finding shelter from the great flood. The scripture tells us that Noah spent a long time building the ark, collecting food, and then finally boarding his family and the animals. He didn't know when the flood waters would come. He simply knew that he had to be ready.

The night before God delivered Israel from Egypt brought a very different kind of storm – something more like what we are facing today. God instructed Moses to tell the Israelites to shelter in place if they wished to be safe from the final plague that was about to strike Egypt. They were to make specific preparations: kill a lamb for their final meal in Egypt, smear its blood on the lintel and doorposts of the door to their house, then *stay inside no matter what* until the order came to move out.

Like the Israelites, we need to make our homes a shelter. The time to do the work is now. When the storm of the covid-19 virus sweeps through our communities, we will have a place to be safe.

The Shelter of the Most High

A shelter for the soul:

The CDC can give us all kinds of helpful advice about creating a safe place for ourselves and our families during this epidemic. It can urge us to practice "social distancing," self-quarantining in the event that we feel ill, and sheltering in place. But it cannot provide for us a shelter for our souls. Only the God who created us can do that.

In Psalm 91 we read these words:

[Slide 2]

Psalm 91:1 NIV

*Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

God alone is a shelter from the fiercest storm. He becomes our shelter when we say with the writer of the psalm:

[Slide 3]

Psalm 91:2 NIV

*I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."*

That stormy night on Lake Champlain I never worried about the boat or our safety. I put my trust in the mooring that held us firm against the wind and waves. The same is true when we put our trust in God as our shelter. We can rest in His presence – “in the shadow of the Almighty”!

A shelter from the chaos of our world:

The psalm writer goes on to describe how God will protect us from the chaos and destruction around us:

[Slide 4]

Psalm 91:3-8 NIV

*Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.*

*He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

*You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,*

*nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.*

[Slide 5]

*A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.*

*You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.*

God is a strong enough shelter to protect us from whatever this world throws at us: the snare, the pestilence, the terror of night, the arrow that flies by day, the pestilence that stalks in darkness and the plague that destroys at midday.

The Shelter of the Most High:

That is why it is so important that we make the LORD our shelter, that we put our trust in Him when fear and confusion stalk us, and when our world unravels.

Our greatest enemy in this crisis is not a tiny virus, after all. The greatest enemy is in a sense ourselves. We can refuse to see the seriousness of the moment and act in foolhardy ways, endangering ourselves and others. Or we can become so paralyzed with fear that we fail to do the things we need to do to find shelter and move forward.

But if we let God's faithfulness be our shield and rampart, if we put our trust in Him as our refuge and fortress, then our hearts and minds will be clear to follow His direction to safety. He will give us the strength and fortitude to do things we thought we could never do. He will give us the patience to endure all of the massive disruptions we are experiencing. He will show us how we can be a light to those around us.

A Personal Savior!

No testing God!

The psalmist promises that God's angels will care for us at God's express command:

[Slide 6]

Psalm 91:11-12 NIV

*For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;*

*they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.*

Do those words sound faintly familiar? None other than Satan quoted them to Jesus when he dared Him to jump off the highest tower of the Temple.

Remember what Jesus said in response?

[Slide 7]

Matthew 4:7 NIV

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

This is good counsel as we face our fears today. God's promises are not an excuse to put God to the test. Psalm 91 isn't some magic formula. The disease is real, and it will infect us if we do not take precautions. Binding it in Jesus' Name is not going to make it go away! God is calling us to take all of the necessary precautions to prevent exposure to the virus for ourselves or others.

Making God our shelter means trusting Him, not testing Him.

A personal Savior:

Psalm 91 concludes with God speaking to us:

[Slide 8]

Psalm 91:14-16 NIV

*"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.*

*He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.*

*With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."*

We have a personal Savior Who loves us and appreciates our love for Him. We shelter in that wonderful relationship. We call; He answers. When we're in trouble He delivers us. He shows us His salvation.

So, this is the time to see the storm and find Him as your shelter. Make sure that you take every care and every fear to Him! Put your trust in Him. Set aside time every day to shelter in place with Him. Find a friend who will shelter with you. Don't test God by doing foolish things that put you, your family, and your community at risk.

We have a personal Savior who will see us through!