**The Resurrection of Our Lord (Easter Sunday)**

**April 4, 2021**

**Text—Psalm 91**

If you did not happen to already be acquainted with Psalm 91, which was our psalm text for this morning, there are two reasons why it still might have sounded familiar to you. The first is that our Hymn of the Day, “On Eagle’s Wings,” is a paraphrase of Psalm 91. This is a well-known hymn that we often sing at Trinity several times a year, so its words are probably familiar to many of us here. The chorus is not taken directly from the psalm, but all four verses are. So even if you had never sat down to read Psalm 91 before, you most likely at least had some idea of what it says.

The other reason why it might sound familiar to you, at least one section of it, is because it is quoted in the New Testament at a very significant point. It is the only portion of Scripture that has the dubious distinction of being quoted not by Jesus or an apostle, but rather by Satan. Verses 11 and 12 of Psalm 91 read as follows: “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” That kind of sounds familiar, doesn’t it? And it should; it’s the passage of Scripture that Satan quotes to Jesus when he’s trying to get Jesus to jump off the roof of the temple. This happened when Jesus was out in the desert being tempted by the devil, at the very beginning of his ministry. Satan brought Jesus to the roof and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,” and then he proceeds to quote those verses of the psalm. So Psalm 91 plays a significant role in Scripture and even in the life of the church today, which is why we probably at least some passing familiarity with it.

And why should this psalm not be one of the more famous ones, up on par with Psalms 22 and 23, for example? If you read it, you see that it’s a very encouraging and joyful song. It tells us that God is our refuge and our fortress, who delivers us from the evils of this world. The weapons of those who seek to harm us, pestilence and famine, terror and destruction: God protects us from all of it. Thousands of others may fall at our side, but we ourselves will be spared; danger will not even come near us. He will command his angels to protect us and bear us up on their hands, so that we do not even strike our foot against a stone. We will tread on fierce beasts and venomous snakes. And finally, at the end of the psalm, God promises that he will answer when we call on his name, because we love him and trust in him, and he will give us long life and show us his salvation. This psalm is appropriately called a song of victory, because that’s exactly what it promises for those who believe in the true God and make him their refuge against evil. It is a triumphant declaration that no harm will come to God’s chosen people, that he will protect and spare them from anything that would cause them grief or suffering.

Well that’s all well and good. It sure sounds nice. But how does that play out in our real lives? Are we Christians really spared from everything that would cause us harm? Does God always answer our prayers for deliverance? I think we’d have to admit that no, he really doesn’t. Certainly, we have been blessed beyond measure by our Lord, but in this life, we still struggle. We still fear. We still suffer. All kinds of things can happen to us that would seem to belie the promises made in Psalm 91. We get sick, and our loved ones get sick. We have problems at work or school. We struggle in our relationships with our family and friends. We sometimes have trouble making ends meet. Eventually, we all will die, if not by some disease or accident, then certainly by old age. And that’s just us; what about all the Christians in the world who have much more significant problems than we do? Those who are poor and starving, those who are persecuted, those who are forcibly separated from their families and churches. What does Psalm 91 mean for them? What does it mean for anybody who lives on this earth, anybody who suffers the effects of the sin that plagues us? How can we reconcile the promises that God makes in this psalm to what we see in our real lives now?

If anybody could ask those questions appropriately, it would be Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was the almighty and eternal Son of God, so if anybody should expect to be well treated, it was him. But, as we all know, that’s not how it went. When Jesus came to earth, he was not hailed as the king of the universe, but was rather despised as a poor peasant nobody from the most backwater town in Judea. The only people who liked him were the poor and outcast of society; the rich and the elites wanted nothing to do with him. They saw him as a threat to their power, so they opposed him at every turn. Eventually they conspired to have him betrayed, arrested, and convicted of blasphemy, and then they beat him, paraded him through the city streets, and nailed him to a cross and lifted him up to die. What did Psalm 91 mean for Jesus at that moment? How could Jesus say things such as “He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge?” How could Jesus proclaim, “no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent?” How could Jesus conclude that God’s promise at the end of Psalm 91 was for him: “When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.” Some long life that God was satisfying Jesus with! Dying in one’s mid-thirties in the most agonizing way possible is not what most of us would have in mind as a fulfillment of God’s Word in Psalm 91. And yet that’s what happened to Jesus. So, we have to ask the question: what did Psalm 91 mean to him?

Well, when Jesus was hanging on that cross and dying, what it meant to him was a promise. A promise that no matter how things looked in his life right then, deliverance from his suffering was coming. God would continue to be his Father who loved him, who would rescue him from all the sin and evil that had now befallen him. And God did exactly that. On the third day after Jesus was crucified, he rose again from the dead. God raised him up from the death that had claimed him, and granted him eternal life on his throne in heaven, ruling over all of creation. God raised him to a life in which the promises he made in Psalm 91 were fulfilled. Jesus no longer needs to fear the terror of the night or the arrow that flies by day. Because he has made the Lord God his dwelling place, no evil will be allowed to befall him; no plague will come near his tent. God has delivered Jesus from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He has satisfied Jesus with long life; actually, not just long life, but everlasting life. God has done everything for Jesus that he promised he would do by raising him from the dead. Jesus knew that his Father was faithful and that he would keep his promises, even while he was suffering on the cross, and so he did not allow his adverse circumstances to make him doubt God’s promises. He knew that Psalm 91 would soon be fulfilled in his life, and that was what gave him the strength to do what was necessary for the salvation of humanity.

In the same way, we Christians today who experience the sins and sorrows of this world can have absolute certainty that Psalm 91 is for us as well. The Lord God is our refuge and fortress just as he was for Jesus; he will answer us too when we call to him. In this life, we may suffer greatly, but we know that this life will not last forever. We know that because Jesus has risen from the dead, we who believe in him will rise too. Jesus suffered greatly in this life and was killed, but in the end, he was raised by his Father to eternal life. And he has promised that those who believe in him will not only walk in his path of suffering and death, but they will walk in his path of glorification and life as well. This is our hope in the midst of all the terrible things that happen in this world: that no matter how bad things get, it will not last forever, and that Jesus will give us eternal life in the kingdom of God. Psalm 91 promises that God will indeed protect us and answer us in trouble, and we can have total confidence that he will keep this promise. Jesus trusted in his Father’s Word to him, and in the end his faith was vindicated. We too can have that same trust and hope, knowing that because Christ is risen, we too shall rise with him on the last day.

When Satan quoted Psalm 91 to Jesus, he was trying to get Jesus to take what rightfully belonged to him, but before it was time for him to have it. God had already appointed the time when Jesus would be crucified, and when he would rise again to take possession of the glory that belonged to him. Satan tried to use the promises of Scripture against Jesus, to get him to do something that would completely derail God’s plan of salvation for his people. Thankfully, Jesus would have none of that. He responded to Satan’s twisted use of Scripture with a Bible passage of his own, and the devil’s temptation was thwarted. Jesus understood that he had to wait to experience the glory and the salvation that Psalm 91 promised him as God’s Son. He had to go through pain and suffering first, but in the end, he would be raised, and he would receive the honor that belonged to him by right. Jesus trusted that his Father meant what he said, and he was willing to wait until the proper time, even though he had to suffer first to get there.

We ourselves might wonder sometimes what’s taking God so long, why he isn’t fixing our problems when he has promised so many places in Scripture that he’s going to take care of us and protect us. We may look around at all the trials and tribulations of this life and think that God has forgotten us, or that he doesn’t care what happens to us. But nothing could be further from the truth! God keeps his promises, and he has promised us so many places in Scripture that he will save us from all sin and evil when the time is right. The most difficult part has already been accomplished: Jesus has suffered and died on the cross and risen triumphantly from the grave. Now, all that is left is for Jesus to return, and on that day God will finish what he has started. On that day, he will fulfill the promises of Psalm 91 for us, just as he did for Jesus. We will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. He will deliver us from the snare of the fowler and the deadly pestilence. We will not need to fear the terror of the night or the arrow that flies by day. No evil will be allowed to befall us or plague come near our tent. His angels will guard us in all of our ways and bear us up, lest we strike our foot against a stone. We will tread on the lion and the adder and trample them underfoot. God will answer us when we call to him, and he will satisfy us with infinitely long life in his kingdom. All of this is coming; we just need to be patient and wait for the proper time. God kept his promises to his Son Jesus, and he will keep his promises to his sons and daughters who yet remain on earth as well. Though there will be times when it seems ridiculous for us to be singing Psalm 91, we will keep on singing it, because we know that its promises are true, and they will be fulfilled on the last day. The resurrection of God’s Son Jesus Christ from the dead has seen to that. All of us who trust in him will receive the same blessings as Jesus, and we will indeed rise again from the dead just as he has. Hold fast to him, then, and he will deliver you, just as the psalm promises. He has never broken a promise yet, and he isn’t about to start now. Alleluia, Christ is risen! Amen.