

Well, this morning we're going to bring to an end our study in spiritual warfare. And we've been hearing an awful lot about our infernal foe these past few months. It's a sobering thing to consider. that you and I face a real enemy, a personal enemy who's out to get us. One whose capacity for malice has no end and one whose capacity for mercy has no beginning. He is only evil and there is no goodness in him. I was remarking to the staff this week in a staff meeting that if the Lord gave the devil free reign this morning, none of you would have survived to reach this meeting. The devil is a murderer and he lives to murder God's people, and the only thing that keeps him back from that goal is the tender mercy of God, our Father, who restrains him, and Christ who has chained him after Calvary. And yet he remains the enemy of our souls. And there is no enemy like him, his cunning, his malice. Hugh Latimer, the martyr under Bloody Mary, he described the devil as the busiest pastor in all the land. I'm seeking to pastor your souls to heaven, but the devil works night and day without resting to shepherd your souls to darkness and hell. And he's no less cunning today than he was the day he tempted Adam and Eve to exchange paradise for an apple. But he's even more skillful. His capacity to tempt, to entice, has only increased in the intervening years. He's seen the type of you and me before. In his black book, he's seen 1,000 pastors like me and 1,000 men like you and 1,000 ladies like you. And he knows our personality types, our strengths, our weaknesses, our vices, our virtues. He's been observing our habits, cataloging our ways, scheming and plotting how best to bring you down. Think about that for a second this morning. He knows just how to use your strengths against you, and how to exploit your weaknesses against you. He knows how to stir up your vices, to inflame your lusts, to stroke your pride, to provoke your insecurities, and to discourage your zeal. Like a skillful fisherman, he knows well what kind of lure will attract each fish. And he knows well what kind of lure will attract you, will attract me. And he knows well how to hide the hook in that bait as he presents it to you. We've been considering all these things in recent weeks, and as I catalog them before you, you perhaps might feel a little bit frightened, and I want you to feel a bit frightened of the devil, because I want that fear to drive you to God and faith. You can't stand against the devil by yourself. You need a refuge, and you have a refuge, but God is no rhino. He is not a refuge in name only. And you must make refuge of him and take refuge in him if you're going to stand against the devil. Otherwise, you'll be hooked and landed before you even know what a worm is. And so this morning

I want to leave you, not just with your fear, but to leave you with God under his wings, in his arms, and in his care. And to do that, I wanna turn with you to this great battle psalm of the Bible, Psalm 91. And I apologize, you have the ESV before you. I'm gonna read from the New American Standard. I memorized this psalm in the NASB some years ago, and if I read in the ESV, it'll just corrupt all my memory banks, and I'll be confused. But it's very similar, you can follow along. But the psalmist in Psalm 91, right, he finds himself on the eve of a great battle. It's a terrifying battle. Like some of the brave men of the great generation that stormed the beaches of Normandy. And I can't imagine how those men felt the night before in the Higgins boots on the way to the beach waiting for the machine gun of the Nazis and having to make their way up the beach. And the terror they must have felt. Well, the Psalmist is in such a situation. He's imagining himself tomorrow in this great battle, in the midst of almost unimaginable devastation, people are dying all around him, 1,000 on his left-hand side, 10,000 on his right-hand side, and he's terrified, he's frightened. And then after the battle, he imagined himself back in the camp with the wounded, the cries, the injuries, the wounds, the infections, the pestilence maybe spreading through the camp. And he's wondering, is he going to survive? He's wondering how he's going to survive. And so he pens this psalm on the eve of battle, and he's encouraging himself to faith. Remember we said, I think, last week, the strength of faith is never in faith. The strength of faith is in its object. It's not the strength of your faith that saves you, but the strength of your God. And the psalmist here's speaking, he's writing a psalm about faith, but not just about faith as a verb, but the object of his faith and the blessings of faith. So let's work through this psalm together. And the first thing I want you to see this morning as we read the psalm, let me pray before we read it. Let's pray first actually. Oh Lord our God and our Father in heaven, you are indeed our refuge and our strength. Our help in tight places, always close at hand. Your loving kindness extends to the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God and your judgments are like a great deep, and you preserve man and beast, O God, and your children, the children of men, take refuge under the shadow of your wings. And this afternoon, as I direct my brothers and sisters here to take refuge under the shadow of your wings, draw near to them, draw near to me, O God, and help us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. So the first stanza of this psalm sets before us the God that faith embraces. the God that faith embraces. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. Notice what he's doing here.

He's describing the blessing of a man taking faith in God. He's speaking in the third person. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. Now in verse two, he himself takes faith in God. I will say to the Lord, my refuge, my fortress, my God in whom I trust. He's encouraging himself to believe in God here, that God's faith embraces. He's like the woman with the flow of blood who encouraged herself, if you just reach out your hand, she said, and touch the hem of his garment, you'll be healed. She encourages herself to believe before she believes. And the psalmist is doing that right here. And he reminds himself of God's character. What is the God that faith embraces like? Well, he's most high, he's most strong, and he's most near. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, El Elyon, he's a God who towers above every threat you face, especially the devil. Don't just look at the threat, look at the God towering above him and you'll see that your God is very, the height of him cuts every threat you face down to size. He's El Elyon, the most high, that he reigns in a posture of unassailable sovereignty. He who sits above the circle of the earth and all of its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a curtain. and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in, the most high God. And the psalmist reminds himself that he's most high, but he's not just most high, he's also most strong. He who dwells in the shelter of the most high will abide in the shadow of the Almighty, the Almighty El Shaddai, the God who sustained Abraham all his life long, the God who brought Naomi home empty, but he brought her home, remember? Don't call me Naomi, call me, Mara, which means bitter, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. He sent me out full, but he brought me back empty. And she's thinking about the emptiness there, but the writer of Ruth is reminding us she's speaking better than she knew. Yes, she went out full, and yes, God emptied her, but he emptied her to bring her home. And that's the essence of the Almighty. It's not just that God is very strong. As if God could pick up a world, like a bodybuilder could pick up an acorn, you'd say, oh, how strong the bodybuilder is. No, all might describes God's strength, not just in abstract, but God's strength on your side, coming to your aid, bringing you home in all of your ways. He's most high, he's most strong, and he's most near. We dwell in his shadow. He's not far removed. Plummer, the great computer in the psalm, says, the whole nature of God, including his holiness, justice, goodness, truth, power, and wisdom, and presence, and all his perfections, form a covering for the soul, against which all assaults are vain. Most high, most strong, most near. And the psalmist reminds himself of that. And then he says, I will say to this God, you're my refuge, you're my fortress,

my God and whom I trust. He's encouraging himself to faith and he's reasoning himself to confidence. Verse three, why am I trusting God? For it is he who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions and under his wings you may seek refuge. His faithfulness is a shield and a bulwark. It's amazing the confidence here. It comes from the deliberate attack of men laying snares for me, but it also comes from the almost random attack of disease stalking me in the darkness. He protects me from both. And he finishes with God, who's most tender and most tough. He's tough like a mother hen, sorry, tender like a mother hen. He will cover you with his pinions, maybe an eagle. Under his wings you may seek refuge. As Jesus says, how I long to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks under my wings. The tenderness of a mother hen gathering her chicks under his wings, yet the toughness of a battle shield. His faithfulness is my shield and my bulwark. The shield when the enemies are in my face, and the bulwark when they're far away, firing arrows at me, near and far, God's faithfulness, his character. That sometimes, Christian, the only shield you'll have in life is the character of God. But isn't that the only shield you need in life? His faithfulness. He'll never let you down. He'll never break his promise. He'll never abandon you. He'll never forget you, he's faithful. His amen-like character is the word in the Hebrew. So the God faith embraces, firstly. In the next paragraph, we see the protection faith enjoys. You will not be afraid of the terror by night or of the arrow that flies by day. of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, of the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side and 10,000 at your right hand, but it shall not approach you. You'll only look on with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. If you have made the Lord my refuge, even the most high, your dwelling place, no evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent. Protection from the perils of warfare. And he's listing them here. Invisible danger, you'll not be afraid of the terror by night. Notice how there's a contrast. Things you can see, things you can't see. Night, day, darkness, noon, right? So that's a merism in the Hebrew. Two operatives that are all inclusive. Alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. It isn't just saying God is the beginning and the end. He's also saying God is the God of everything in between. Right? When God made the heavens and the earth, top and bottom, he's not just saying he made the top and the bottom, but everything in between. If someone knows the A to the Z of piano playing, like our glorious accompanist this afternoon, you're not just saying they know the beginning and the end, but they know everything in between, right? And so the

psalmist, it's a poetic metaphor, it's called emirism. When they speak of noon, nighttime and noonday, darkness and light, It's a merism, two opposites that hold everything in between in their hand, and the psalmist is doing that here. You'll not be afraid of the terror by night, or of the arrow that flies by day, of the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, or the destruction that lays waste at noon. Invisible danger, the terror of night, the things that keep you awake at night, the worries, the anxieties that claw at your soul. You'll have confidence there because of your faith in this God, most high, most near, and most mighty. The arrow that flies by day, visible danger. Arrows flying in battle. Pestilence stalking in the darkness. You can't see it, it's invisible. It's a virus, a bacteria stalking. You're frightened. Like during COVID and the late unpleasantness and not knowing where the virus was, who had the virus, how would you get it, what would it do to you? And you can't see it, and it's not irrational. It's not somebody aiming an arrow at you and firing, that's bad. In a unique way, but so is an unseen danger like a disease spreading through a campus also has its unique way, the randomness of it. No one is safe. The mighty warrior and the weak butler in the camp, all can get the disease, and it's terrifying, but they're kept safe. I'll be kept safe, he says, by my faith in you. More about that in a second. A thousand may fall at your right hand, but it shall not approach you. Unimaginable destruction, people dying left and right, and the psalmist is confident that God has got me. Now it sounds too good to be true. We'll get there in a second. "'You will only look on with your eyes "'and see the recompense of the wicked. "'Why? "'For you have made the Lord my refuge, "'even the most high, your dwelling place. "'No evil will befall you, "'nor will any plague come near your tent.'" That sounds like too good to be true. Because I look about this room and I see many of you have experienced deep, ravaging, agonizing evil. So what's the psalmist saying here? He's saying here, I think, it's an Old Testament echo of Romans 8, 28, that all things will work together for your good. No evil that is unintended for good shall enter your life. No evil can get into your life without passing through the shield of God's protecting faithfulness. In Psalm 32, many are the sorrows of the wicked, but he who trusts in the Lord, loving kindness shall surround him. That before anything touches your life, Christian, There's a shield of loving kindness ahead of you, behind you, beneath you, and above you, all around you. And nothing can get at you unless it gets through the sentinels of God's loving kindness, his faithfulness, as your shield and your bulwark. That's how God measures your trials. And that's the essence, because many Christians die in battle. But do they really die? Jesus says, he that believeth in me shall not see death. As we've

said before, all death can do for the Christian. Can't destroy him. Death for the Christian is reduced to the humble office of a doorman whose only role when you come to die will be to open up the door of heaven and let you in. He who believes in me and keeps my word, Jesus says, will not see death. Everybody else might see the shadow of death, but what you see will be life. He will make known to you the path of life. In his presence, there's fullness of joy. At his right hand, there are pleasures forevermore. As the psalmist says, it was good for me to be afflicted. Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep your word. So when such afflictions come, whether the Lord makes use of the devil like in Job's life, or Saul like in David's life. When such afflictions come, are they really evil things? As Thomas Watson said, When you feel the rod on your back, Christian, his rod and his staff, they comfort me. When God puts the rod on your bottom, don't see the rod, but the hand of the one who holds it. It's the hand of your father. And the worst he ever does is spank his children into heaven. And are such spankings evil? Even though sometimes the rod might be the devil, God might use the devil, as he used in Job's life, to bring great pain and agony and desolation, and yet God would only use the devil, though he may use him to tear us down for a moment, but his goal is to build us up forever. And so are such afflictions really evil? And in that sense, we can say with confidence, no evil will befall me, no true evil, no unintended for good evil, no evil that is not wrapped up in the sovereign hands of Almighty God, who has promised good to me, who knows the plan, who thinks of me to give me a future and a hope, and to bring me to that future, and to watch over my going out and my coming in between here and there. So that's the kind of providence I'm seeing here, protection from the perils of warfare. Bithner, an old commentator, said, the man who has made God his refuge is always safe, day and night, at every hour, from every danger. Tholak, another old commentator, said, whatever species of weapon the tempter may use against the children of God, whenever and wherever he may come, the protection of the Lord is all sufficient, and you need not seek for any other. Protection from the perils of warfare. Protection also from the perils of the highway, the next stanza. For he will give his angels charge concerning you to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands that you do not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent. You will trample down. He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. What a little word that is, all. But what a vast meaning. What ways are you walking this week? Through what dangers are you traveling? What fears are you facing? God says to you, my angels, I

have given them charge concerning you, my child. And they will keep you in all your ways. There's never a moment when you're out of their hands. Personal care, tender care, in their hands they will bear you up. Particular care, that you don't dash your foot even against a stone. Not even the smallest insult will be allowed to happen to you unless it's for your good. Trivial injuries. The stone. Mortal enemies, the lion and the cobra. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion, the serpent you will trample down. Even there, there's a merism. The serpent, you walk into it. The lion, he comes hunting for you. Two different dangers, you see. And the angels guard you from all of them. And of course, behind this psalm, from the rest of the Bible, we're meant to see that old serpent, the devil. who walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour. And the psalmist says, you can resist him not because you have the strength in yourself, but you can resist him because you have the strength and the care and the protection of God. Like a secret service detail going with you as you walk into this world. God is on your side. His angels are your detail of protection. You can be confident that you are more than a conqueror. You won't just survive. You'll tread upon them, trampling them underfoot, a picture of complete destruction. I was walking this morning and there were several dead snakes that had been crushed by some car, squashed flat. That's the picture of what you can do to the devil when he tempts you. Don't ever let the devil come and say, you have to obey me. This lust is too strong for you. No, it's not. You're a child of the most high God, a son of the mighty. You have the power in Christ to say no to sin and yes to righteousness. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave himself for us. You can say no, Christian, you must say no. The God faith embraces, the protection faith enjoys, protection from the perils of the battle, the warfare, protection from the perils of the highway. And lastly, the assurance faith receives. Verse 14, because he has loved me, therefore I will deliver him. I will set him securely on high because he has known my name. He will call upon me and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and honor him. With a long life I will satisfy him and let him see my salvation. Notice the seven full blessings. The hand of God, I will set him securely on high. The ear of God, he will call upon me and I will answer him. One of my elders in my last church, he's a dear man, great brother, very busy entrepreneur. He was all over the world all of the time. He was on the phone to China and always on his cell phone. But when you called him,

you know, it was funny, I was joking with one of my elders one night. We were having, with him and some of the elders. I said, I think in my whole time, eight years of Christ's covenant, I can count it in the fingers of one hand when I actually called you and you answered the phone. If someone put a gun to my head and said, call this man, and if he doesn't answer, we're gonna pull the trigger, I would just say, there's no point calling him, just pull the trigger. Put me out of my misery. But when you call upon me, God says, I will answer. He will call upon me and I will answer him. The hand of God, the ear of God, the presence of God, I will be with him in trouble. It's amazing how witness is a comfort. Like when there's thunder, my little rat terrier Baxter instinctively comes to my side and sits down. And you put your hand on his back and rub his ear. And a dog with little shadows of us in him finds comfort beside his master's side. And God says, you'll not have to come to me in trouble, God says, because I'll already be with you. I will be with you in trouble. the hand of God, the ear of God, the presence of God, the deliverance of God, I will rescue him. The glory of God, I will honor him. Literally, the Hebrew is, I will glorify him. I will fill him with my glory, is the idea in the Hebrew. As Jesus says in John 17, the glory which you have given me, Father, I have given to them. The thought of that, Christian, that there's coming a day when you will look so much like Jesus that the angels will cover their eyes when you walk past. The same glory, we will see him and be like him. The same glory that pulsates and radiates from the Son of God will radiate from you and through you. It'll not be yours in origin, it comes from him. but it'll be yours in all of the glory when God makes Christ the firstborn among many brethren and you stand saved to sin no more in the Father's presence. The hand of God, the ear of God, the presence of God, the deliverance of God, the glory of God, the satisfaction of God. With a long life I will satisfy him and some of God's children die young. But don't forget, they don't really die at all. They're living on forever as God makes known to them the path of life in 10 billion years time. You and I, Christian, will be sitting in the new heavens and the new earth, I think. I can't imagine this world continuing that long. We'll be sitting in the new heavens and the new earth, talking about these days, trying to remember what it was like sinning against God. I was talking to someone this week who had some miscarriages. We had six miscarriages, Catherine and I, during our life, during the six children being born, and I often think about meeting them in heaven. and my son or my daughter coming to me and saying, let me get this straight, you sinned against him? You deliberately sinned, you broke his law? Yes. How did you do that? It's hard to explain, son, daughter, you never really experienced life with a fallen human nature, it was complicated, but at this



moment right now, I can't imagine how I sinned against him, but I did to my shame, and he forgave me to his glory and mercy, and at great cost to himself. The satisfaction of God and then the salvation of God, I will let him see my salvation. That's the last word over your life, Christian. The last word over your life won't be sin, it won't be failure, it won't be Satan, it'll be salvation. Saved by God, saved for God, and saved to be with God forever. But you look at verse 14, we'll end here. Because he has loved me, therefore I will deliver him. I will set him securely on high because he has known my name. And you think, Lord, I'm gonna be the devil's whisper in your ear. That's only true for those who love God. But do you really love God? You who seem to love your sins so much, you seem to love the world so much, you seem to love my temptations so much. Do you think you really love God? And if not, are these promises for you? Always remember, Christian, we sing the Psalms first in Christ, and he sings the Psalms with us. That when we say, answer me, O God, according to my righteousness, and we think, I can't say that, O God. Our brother, Jesus, comes alongside us and puts his arm around us. And he says, I've got this part of the harmony. You can sing it in me. Because I can sing it for you. Because your son has loved you, Father. Because he has known your name and because by your grace I've believed into him. All of these promises are true. And it's because it's true of Christ that it's true of you this morning, Christian. Not that we love God enough to earn his smile or to earn any of these blessings, but because Christ has loved him enough. And he loved you enough to die in your place and for your sins. And because this psalm is Christ's psalm. It's a messianic psalm. It's first and foremost for Jesus. But it's for you and me as we climb into the heart of Jesus and become one with him. As Jesus says, what's mine is mine. And what is yours is mine. So fret not. Though your enemies are mighty and many, your friend is one and he is three, and he is mightier still. Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we thank you for this word. Thank you, Lord God, for these brothers and sisters who patiently listen to me, oh God, stretch their lunch hour when some of them have to get back to work. We pray, O Lord, that your word will return not void to you, but full of faith and hope and love as it excites us to trust in you, the God who is most high above our troubles, most mighty to keep us through our troubles, and most near to us in our troubles till the day breaks and the shadows flee away. Amen.