

Unshakeable Faith

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Date: 13 July 2025

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[0 : 00] Now, I don't know how you find Sundays. Sundays can be sometimes a little bit tricky for Christians.

! There is perhaps the spiritual reality that we sing great and glorious and wonderful truths of God, but we're coming in after a week where we maybe feel slightly cold or slightly distant or slightly shut off from God.

Then there's the practical realities that we face and the suffering that we experience. We come today carrying our own share of burdens, of worries, of anxieties, of cares, of things that occupy our minds that we run over in our brain time and time again, thinking about. And we need a place to rest secure as we carry these things. We need a place of refuge and safety which is going to be secure and strong to hold us firm and hold us fast despite what is going on in our lives. A place that means we're ultimately safe and secure, unshakable with whatever comes our way. So many of the things that we often turn to only offer temporary relief. Some don't even ease our cares at all, yet this psalm points us in another direction. It points us to a place where things come our way but we're not ultimately consumed or destroyed by them. And that's what the psalm offers us tonight as we gather around

God's Word this evening. A promise of safety and security as we take refuge and shelter in God. Now we're going to look at this psalm through three headings. First of all, Strong God, and then Weak Saviors, and then Strong Saviour. So first of all, Strong God. And as we come to this psalm, it is replete with the dangers that we face, that we come across, but also the promises of who God is right in the midst of our trials. If we look to verses 1 to 2, He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, My refuge and My fortress, My God in whom I trust.

It's an image of being under His protection, under His loving care, the loving care and protection of Almighty God. It's in two different pictures, God as a refuge and God as a fortress. A refuge being a safe place where we can come and find shelter and find safety amidst the storms of life.

[2 : 57] But then also a fortress, an impenetrable wall around us. Football fans will know of the saying, teams lower down in the division when they play at home, if they play really well together at home, it's like they make their home a fortress.

Teams from higher up the division come and they try and they break down the defense, but they can't. It's an impenetrable fortress. A fortress, you imagine strong city walls which are tall, which are thick, and if you're facing threats of an invading army, it's good to know the strength and the might of your city walls to make it hard to break down. And that's what exactly what God is said to be like.

Not just a shadow to hide in, but a refuge, a place of safety. Also a fortress, mighty walls surrounding you. Then we have in verse 4 this wonderful picture of God as a mother bird almost sheltering her chicks with her wings. He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings, you will find refuge. His faithfulness is a shield and a buckler. There's a story that goes around of a forest fire, and in the aftermath of the forest fire, the flames are put out, and the firefighters are going through this forest to search and to make sure the fire is completely out.

And this one firefighter comes across this debris in the distance, and as he draws closer, he finds that it is the charred remains of a bird. Arriving at the carcass, he moves it, and as soon as he moves, the birds out from underneath come fluttering these little chicks who scurry away down the hillside.

Even as we reflect on these promises of who God is to us in the midst of our suffering, these are the promises that we must take shelter in, that we must cling to, that if we come to trust in God in the face of our sufferings, we need to know that the walls around us are not made of paper-mashy or Play-Doh.

They are impenetrable walls. We are hiding in the one whose arm is strong, whose strength covers us, and how necessary it is to lean on this promise of who God is in the face of all you experience. [5 : 42] As you're faced with a barrage of experiences, deep and profound suffering, spiritual attack, doubts, fears, anxieties, and pain, you need to know that what you're putting your trust in, what you're relying upon is ultimately not going to let you down. Come what may.

We see in our psalm that the psalmist, yes, is confident in God's deliverance, but he's aware of the snare of the fowler and deadly pestilence, verse 3, the terror of the night, verse 5, the potential of devastating death of your fellow soldiers in verse 7.

But he finds refuge in the Lord in the midst of these things. And as we come to this psalm, we come to the testimony of the entire Bible, namely that suffering is real and painful and hard, not something just to get over. It's not something which we just need to cheer up and have a different perspective of. Some people, well-meaning, I'm sure, can say things in the middle of suffering that are ultimately unhelpful, trite sayings perhaps, of cheer up or every cloud has its silver lining or these types of things. We can often contribute to this as well, kind of belittling our sufferings. In church, you know, someone comes to us and asks us, how are you doing? How's your week been? And so often our stock answer is, well, I'm fine, regardless of whether we are fine or not.

The Bible doesn't sugarcoat our lives. The Bible doesn't give us trite sayings and pithy sayings which do more harm than good. It doesn't tell us just to get on with us. It meets us in the midst of our sufferings, but crucially helps us to orient our lives to where God is in the midst of our suffering. Because that's often the hardest thing to see when we experience suffering.

We see it all throughout the Bible, whether it's Job losing everything or Naomi in the book of Ruth losing her husband and her sons, or at times family dysfunction in the story of the patriarchs, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Bible doesn't get squeamish about these things, but puts it right out in the open. But it helps us see where God is in the midst of it.

[8 : 04] And as you come here tonight, you might come with a whole host of challenges which meet you in day-to-day life. Financial worries, grieving the loss of a loved one, battling with your own mental health, relationship breakdown. Maybe you're having a difficult time at work.

Sam brings us to a place where we come in the midst of these things, but we are not ultimately ruined by these things because it orientates our life towards God.

Secondly, we're going to just briefly look at weak saviors. So, we've had strong gods and now weak saviors. So, this psalm is calling us to take refuge, shelter in God, but so often that's not where we go.

So often we can go to God substitutes to find a sense of comfort or hope or peace in the midst of what we're going through. And I'm just going to focus on one weak savior in particular, and that's self-reliance going forward in your own strength, taking refuge in yourself, finding safety and security in your own ability and mental state to press on and to keep going, to remain that mentally strong person you want to be. It's an incredibly popular one now, nowadays, self-reliance.

We have books and podcasts galore on self-help. There are life hacks. There are things we can look to as a form of self-sufficiency to be our security, to be the thing that we hold on to and think that is going to be what will hold me in these days.

[9 : 51] For some of us, it might just be productivity, keeping busy, getting the to-do list done. If I could just get enough things done, then I'll be happy with my life because I'd be able to work my way out of situations. Or organization, if I could just structure and organize my life in such a way, then I'll be fine because I make my time work for me. Or financial freedom, if I could just earn enough money to have financial freedom and security, then I'll be truly secure. You perhaps build up as much as you can in your own wealth, neglecting to be generous to others or to the work of the church because, well, you're too focused on growing your own wealth. Perhaps it's possessions, retail therapy.

You're down about something and you need a pick-me-up. And so you go and buy something to make you feel better. Or comfort eating or comfort drinking to mask the pain. You're spawned by binge drinking.

And with all of these things, the common thread in all of them is control. If we can just manage our lives in a certain way, if we could just control our lives, then we'll be fine.

But the problem with control and self-rule and autonomy is that it's an age-old lie that started in the Garden of Eden with the serpent selling Adam and Eve a lie that God and his rule were not good.

But true freedom, true joy, true happiness is found in self-rule, in living a life separate from God. And these things never deliver what they promise for two reasons. One, because we find out very quickly we're actually not in control of everything. And second of all, there will become a day where our attempts at self-rule will ultimately be brought to nothing. So first of all, we're not actually in control. The kind of common saying is, if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. And there's a degree of truth in that. Now, the Proverbs tell us, many are the plans in a man's heart, but it's the Lord's purpose that prevails.

[12:17] Part of learning this is just lived experience in life. There's so much outwith our control. There's so many things that we don't plan for that happen. Things that we would never have wanted to happen that did come and happen to us. Wonderful things that we never dreamed might happen come our way.

Part of it's learned experience, but part of that is just learned wisdom from the Bible. Obviously mentioning that the lie that the serpent made to Adam and Eve, what is the immediate result of their apparent freedom? The freedom and joy that they were hoping for just evaporates before their very eyes. Instead of freedom and joy, shame and guilt engulf them. Or in the Exodus story, Moses and Aaron come to Pharaoh to demand to Pharaoh, let my people go that they may worship me. And Pharaoh thinks he's in control of the situation. He goes, who's the Lord? Who is the Lord? And then of course, through the 10 plagues and the Exodus of God's people, Pharaoh is humbled. For as much as we think we're in control, experience would teach us. Reading our Bibles will teach us it's all a facade. We're not in control at all. There are things that we've had to go through that we wouldn't have wanted to go through in a million years. And then there are wonderful things in our lives that we never saw happen. It's coming. God is in control. He rules and he reigns over all things in all wisdom and power and might. And this power struggle that we seem to have with God with our lives, it's really summed up well in Psalm chapter 2, where the nation's leaders and rulers are plotting and scheming against God to overthrow God and against his anointed.

And God's response is just to laugh. He's not threatened. He's not troubled. He's not worried by this at all. Friends, there's only one space on the throne and it's currently occupied.

[14:36] The problem is all of these things that the psalmist says you'll be shielded from as a believer, yes, they'll still come. But because you're rooted in God, these things won't ultimately ruin you. But if you're building your life on you and on your way, your life and your way, your whole world will come crashing down if you aren't able to sort it, if your own self-sufficiency isn't the answer.

If you build your life on wealth, what happens when the economy is shot? If you build your life on escapism, either through binge eating or binge drinking, what happens when you return to your senses? All attempts at trying to hold complete control over our lives will leave us hollowed out and burnt out. The second thing is to say that there'll come a day when our attempts at self-rule will be ultimately brought to nothing. And this is really just to say there's coming a day where we're going to be before the God of all the universe. The notion that we are in control of our own lives will one day completely cease to be. One day for everyone, Christian or not, we will be before him and all sense of self-sufficiency will be stripped back and will be completely removed from us.

Jesus tells a story of two men who are building a house. Each one builds their house on the rock and one builds their house on sand. And to begin with, to all intents and purposes, both houses look safe and secure. But then the rain comes down and the floods come high and the winds batter against the houses. And the house that is built on the rock, well, that stands secure. No matter what comes its way, it stands firm. But the house that's built on the sand comes crashing down. And Jesus' teaching there is that to build your house on the rock is to hear God's word and to put it into practice, to put your trust in him and follow him. But to build your house in the sand is to hear God's word and actually, ultimately, ignore it. The pursuit of self-control, of self-rule, of control, of life without God is, that is building your life on the sand. The winds get up, the waves rise high, and one day it will all come crashing down. So perhaps you're here today and this is how you've been living your life, intentionally or unintentionally. You think you're in charge of your life, your life, your way, your rules. But please consider the way, the end that it leads to. It leaves you unfulfilled and unhappy and empty in this life, and it leads you with no hope for eternity. And it means that as these trials come, like in Psalm 91, you're unable to stand because the things that you are building your hope upon is being washed away before your eyes.

But rather, I'd want to point you to a strong saviour, which is our third and final point. Now, in this psalm, there are many promises of protection from harm, from even death. And we look at that at

face value, at surface level, and we're naturally very sceptical. I'm very sceptical if it's just a surface reading. How can God promise in verse 14, because He holds fast to me in love, I will deliver Him. I will rescue Him and honour Him and so on. What about Jesus? What about Stephen? What about Peter? Of course, this isn't a literal, physical protection from every harm that comes your way. But it's for those whose hope is in Jesus for eternity, that no matter what comes their way, they are safe and secure for all eternity. When you trust in Jesus as Lord and as saviour, you are trusting in the one who in His death is like that mother bird that I spoke of earlier, protecting and shielding her chicks from the harm of the flames. Jesus is the one who in His death and resurrection took on death and stood in harm's way for us, removing the sting of death and the power of death so that all who trust in Him ultimately might have everlasting life, a hope that does not diminish, fade or spoil. What it means that we take shelter under the wings of God is ultimately our hope is secure, our hope is protected no matter what happens, no matter what comes your way. [19:35] Simon Peter writes in the opening chapter of 1 Peter 1 that our living hope through the resurrection of Jesus is beyond perish, spoil or fade, that not even death can separate us from these things. In fact, death gives way to our eternal hope in Jesus Christ.

Think of all the unpredictability that life can throw at us, whether that is broken relationships, whether that is possessions, how often does the car break down or the wash machine break down, or maybe you're thinking about building finances and wealth and that's your kind of goal and aim in life, how often these things get removed from us out with our control, but there is something not even death can remove. And that is our eternal hope in Jesus Christ. And that's why God is able to ultimately promise shielding and protection. Yes, these things will come, but they do not ultimately destroy you or crush you if you are a follower of Jesus. Because your hope is in Him, your hope is immovable. Life can throw whatever at you and you're ultimately not destroyed. Sad, yes. Dismayed, yes.

But never destroyed, never ruined. It's because of your hope in Jesus that you're ultimately standing before Him as secure and safe.

These things come, but you are not consumed by them. And for all of us here, the psalm is calling us to take refuge in God and find your temporal and eternal security with Him. The promise of verse 15 is the promise for you today. When He calls to me, I will answer Him. I will be with Him in trouble. I will rescue Him and honor Him. When you call out to Him in faith, He will rescue you. He will answer you. He will answer you and He will bring salvation. Have you called out to Him yet?

[22:04] This is for you if you haven't done so before. God's offer of rescue through His Son, Jesus Christ, stands for you. It stands for you too if though you're a believer of late, perhaps you've been looking to other things. Perhaps you've been placing your hope and your confidence and your certainty and your security on other things. If you call on Him in repentance and faith, the promise of this psalm is that He will answer you. He will bring rescue and He will be with you. Because we are not immune from this either as followers of Jesus, as believers in the Lord, we might profess trust in Jesus with our lips, but sometimes our lives so easily just look like a life of self-reliance.

Relying in ourselves, taking refuge in ourselves instead of taking refuge in God. How easy it is to respond to our problems by going into problem-solving mode straight away before we've even thought to pray. How easy it is when problems come to go straight into problem-solving mode and not pray, and just rely entirely on ourselves. How easy it is to have your default mindset as self-reliance, building a life with God apart from Sundays? Does that describe you tonight? The invitation again is clear, call out to Him in repentance and faith, and He will hear you. He will answer you. He will rescue you. He will take you under the shadow of His wings to save you and to rescue you. Friends, call out to

Him tonight and find refuge in Him. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are our refuge. You are our shelter. You are the one we can come to in any and all circumstances and find eternal safety and security. We can find happiness and joy in you today.

That we can face whatever comes at us with confidence and with certainty. Not in our circumstances, but in you who walks with us and who is beside us right to the very end.

Lord, as we go through many trials in this life, may we find refuge in you. Forgive us for the times where we go to ourselves and our own resources and our own wisdom and our own plans. Forgive us for the times we look elsewhere and through the blood of Jesus cleanse us and help us to not go to ourself for safety, for rescue. To not go to other things, but to go to you in repentance and faith with the sure and certain promise that you will hear us. You will answer us. You will respond with

rescue.

[25 : 36] And you will give us life forever. In Jesus' name, amen.