

May 22, 2022 The Place To Be Psalm 91

An old hymn begins... “There is a place of quiet rest/
Near to the heart of God/ A place where sin cannot molest/
Near to the heart of God./ O Jesus blest Redeemer/ Sent from
the heart of God/ Hold us who wait before thee/ Near to the
heart of God.” Such is the teaching we find in Psalm 91, in its
first 5 verses. It is the place to be. If you want to sense peace in
the midst of the confusing, chaos of the times we have lived
through and are living in, it is the place to be. If you want to feel
secure in times when everything seems threatening, it is the
place to be. If you crave assurance that no harm will befall you,
no matter what it is that seems to be happening, it is the place
to be...Near to the heart of God.

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, will
rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” As you must know by now,
I love the old KJV of the Bible. While it has a limitation as all
translations do, after all it is in the English of the Shakspearian
era. English has grown over the past 500 years. Some words
have completely changed their meaning in that time. Never the
less, you have heard me say many, many times, it remains the
most accurate word for word translation of the Hebrew and
Greek of the original manuscripts into our language. “He who
remains in the secret place of the Most High will abide in the
shadow of the Almighty.” (KJV)

Now, as you hear the words it may well be tempting
to say the words are so similar who cares? But that is the very

point. In the attempt to make the meaning clear to people of our time, the newer translations are often similar, but leave out important detail. “He who dwells in the secret place” is not the same as “He who dwells in the shelter.” The KJV makes the point that to the average human being it is not obvious and not even easy to dwell in the “secret place” of the Most High.

As you know, I was not raised in the church. My parents were good parents. They loved me and my brother. They sacrificed that he and I might have the best chance possible a good life. They saw to it we had the necessities of life, and they often went without themselves in the attempt to guarantee that we enjoyed life. One day I woke up to the fact that there was something missing in my life. I had no clue what it was. How would I ever find it. How would I solve the riddle? As I look back the one thing I understand very well, is that to dwell in the shelter of the Most High, you have to understand it is a “secret place.” It is not grasped just by breathing and taking nourishment. Someone has to show you the way. And frankly that does not happen outside the community of faith we call the church. I will be the first to admit that sometimes tragically it does not happen inside the church. But it never happens by just eating and breathing and growing and thinking in the wider world.

Someone showed me the way. Opened the way to the secret place of the Most High, to me. Took me by the hand and led me. Taught me. Introduced me to the Bible. Hear me. Not religion. Not even the church. God’s word in the Scriptures.

Needless to say, it changed my life. I have no doubt that Mrs. Brown, was used that precious day, and led that precious day, by the Holy Spirit, to help me find peace, assurance, faith in Jesus, faith in the Most High God. She showed me the way to the secret place where a person can indeed, dwell in the shelter of the Lord. She changed my life. That is the reason I am who I am today. That is the reason I have Barbara at my side today. As Paul wrote in Romans 10:14 and I am quoting the NIV for its clarity in modern English, “How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one, of whom, they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?” That is how I found the secret place of the Most High. The Lord God uses, sends, anoints someone to show us the way by opening the Scriptures to us.

So what do we have here? “He who dwells in the shelter (the secret place) of the Most High, will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” Another problem. Not so much a problem as something needing greater clarity again. When I read the word rest I immediately think of myself sitting in a very comfortable chair with my feet up. Or lying on my bed eyes closed at the edge of another 5 minutes of sleep, or seeking an afternoon nap. To be at rest is not a bad thing. In fact we know that after a busy day it is a necessity...especially at my age. Rest is good for us. Rest is a blessing. But the KJV uses another word. “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.”

You know another old hymn that begins with the prayer, "Abide with me." It does not mean, rest with me does it. It means remain with me. Continue with me. Dwell with me. In fact the Oxford dictionary uses those three words as its first meanings for the word abide. Remain. Continue. Dwell. In other words while rest is a part of the meaning of peace, and it is peace we need and so often lack, the promise of Psalm 91 verse one, is that the person who shelters in the secret place of God, the revealed place of God will remain, continue and dwell in the shadow of the Almighty. And there can be no argument that that means we will experience a blessed kind of rest in the midst of circumstances that tend to foster, agitation, fear, hopelessness, grave concern.

And in Psalm 91 verse two, that abiding, remaining, continuing, dwelling in the shadow of the Almighty leads to a profession of faith. "I will say of the Lord," that is, God Almighty, Jesus my Saviour, the Holy Spirit my comforter, this one Lord "is my refuge, and my fortress, my God in whom I trust." And it is interesting to take note the NIV and the KJV at that point are word for word the same.

I am mindful of a chorus I learned in California when I was studying for my doctorate at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena. It goes like this: "You are my hiding place/ You always fill my heart/ With songs of deliverance/ Whenever I am afraid/ I will trust in you...I will trust in you...Let the weak say I am strong, in the strength of the Lord...I will trust in you." Refuge. A place to hide. A fortress that cannot be torn down or

attacked easily. A place of safety. In the shadow of the God who saves. Saves us not just from our sins, but from the onslaughts of circumstance, from temptation, from fear.

Psalm 91 lists some of the things that result from abiding in the shadow of the Almighty. “He will save you from the fowler’s snare.” He will save you from the traps that would rob you of the freedom to fly. I don’t mean in an airplane. I do mean the ability to realize your potential and enjoy the life you have been gifted with. It says, “He will save you from the deadly pestilence.” What a relevant illustration of the grace of God. We are still here. Don’t be careless. Wear masks in the midst of crowds, and when you are not sure of the circumstances of those you are gathering with. But know that your safety is in part the fact that you remain in the shadow of God, the presence of Jesus, the holiness of the Spirit. “He will cover you with HIS feathers.” It calls to mind an anthem Sherry taught us as a choir...Cover me. The prayer. Cover me.

It should come as no surprise the Psalm ends with the promise of deliverance, honour, satisfaction, long life here on earth, and salvation. Dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, abiding, remaining in the shadow of the Almighty, covered by the saving blood of Jesus....it is the place to be.

Let us pray;

Lord cover us. Shelter us under the umbrella of Your saving grace. Fulfill in us and in our living the plans that You

have for us. Enable us to serve those to whom You lead us. In calling us to abide in Your shadow, Your word reveals to us that you have long term plans for us. Eternal plans. Help us to remember there are limits to our time here, but that our eternal work is already unfolding and will not be over when earthly existence is. Lead us and guide us we pray that we might be worthy servants of the cause of Jesus. Amen