

A Psalm in the epidemic

Trust triumphs over fear

*«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.”» (Ps. 91:1-2 ESV)*

Psalm 91, also called the **“Triumphal Hymn of Trust”**, is a gem. It has breathed encouragement and peace into millions of believers in the midst of trial. According to some commentators, it was **written in the midst of an epidemic of pestilence** (2 Samuel 24:13). The circumstances were similar to those we are experiencing today. Its message, therefore, is very relevant to our current epidemic situation.

We live days of anxiety and uncertainty. The whole world is in fear. Suddenly we have become aware of the fragility of life. What will happen tomorrow? The strength in which contemporary Man believed they were safe has turned into weakness, there are cracks in the rock and we feel vulnerable. People look for a message of serenity and tranquility. Where to find it?

The message of Psalm 91 is summed up in one sentence: **trust triumphs over fear**. The psalmist gives three key phrases that summarize the “journey” from anxiety-fear to confidence:

- «My God»: What God is for me
- «He will deliver you»: What God does for me
- «I will trust»: My answer

1. «My God»: the character of God

The psalm begins with a dazzling description of the character of God. Up to four different names are mentioned in the opening two verses to explain who and how God is. What a formidable entrance gate to trust! According to the psalmist, God is the Most High, the Almighty, the Lord (*Yahweh*) and the Sublime God (*Elohim*).

Awareness of God's greatness is the foundation of our trust. We could paraphrase a popular proverb and say *“tell me what your God is like and I will tell you how is your trust”*. In the hour of fear, the first step is to lift up your eyes to heaven, look at God and contemplate His greatness and sovereignty. By so doing, the psalmist experiences that God is *his shelter, his shadow, his hope and his*

fortress. The portrait of God in “four dimensions” brings forth a quadruple blessing! Knowing how God really is is indeed the starting point in the journey towards trust.

Notice, however, that the psalmist refers to Him as **MY** God. That little word, “my”, opens a unique perspective and changes many things: the God of the psalmist is **a personal, close God, who intervenes in his life and cares** about his fears and needs. That is one of the most distinctive features of the Christian faith: God is not only the Almighty, the Creator of the universe, but also the intimate Father, the Abba (“dad”) who loves me and guards me (Gal. 4:6). This is our great privilege: God takes care of us, as a Father does with his son, because in Christ we are made adoptive children of God. The psalmist describes this experience with a beautiful metaphor:

«He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge.» (Ps. 91:4 NIV)

2. «He will deliver you»: God's providence

«For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence, His faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear... nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday... no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.» (Ps. 91:3-6, 10 ESV)

We come to the heart of the psalm: **God's protection in practice**. The awareness of God's greatness must be followed by the awareness of God's providence. This is a crucial, key point in the experience of faith. It will become an insuperable source of peace and serenity if we understand it well. But if we misunderstand it, we are likely to fall into mistakes and extremisms, or feel frustrated with God.

The devil tries to manipulate with the psalm. It is very significant that the devil tempted Jesus (Matt. 4:6, Luke 4:10-11) with a double quote from this psalm: «For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you... they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone» (Ps. 91:11-12 NIV). Misusing the promises of divine protection is a temptation also today. Beware of super spirituality and super faith. It can be a way of tempting God, as Jesus' forceful response to Satan teaches us: «You shall not tempt the Lord your God» (Matt. 4:7 NKJV). Trusting God does not exempt us from acting responsibly and wisely.

Having said that, we cannot minimize the mighty protection of God on those who trust Him:

«Because he loves me, 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.» (Ps. 91:14-15 NIV)

An all risk policy? The key word is “to deliver”. What does the sentence “*God will deliver you*” actually mean? The same expression is used in Joseph's life: «God delivered him out of all his troubles» (Acts 7:10 NKJV), and yet the patriarch had to go through many valleys of shadow and death. God **did not prevent him** from the trial, but He **rescued him** from it. As Spurgeon said, "it is not possible for those who are loved by God to be free from all evil". **Faith does not guarantee the absence of trial, but it does guarantee victory over trial.** The apostle Paul develops this idea in a majestic way in the hymn of Romans 8:28-39: «**In all these things (trials) we are more than conquerors** through Him who loved us, Christ» (Rom. 8:37 NIV).

Thus, **faith in Christ is not a vaccine against all evil, but a guarantee of total security**, the security that «if God is for us, who can be against us?» (Rom. 8:31 NIV). **This psalm is not a promise of complete immunity, but a declaration of full trust.** This trust in God's protection is expressed in three ways.

In every trial,

- **God knows**
- **God controls**
- **God cares** (for me)

Nothing happens in the life of the children of God without His knowledge and His control (1 Cor. 10:13). Chance does not exist in the believer's life. The majestic providence of our personal God –the Abba- shines brightly in the darkest moments: «A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you» (Ps. 91:7 NIV). Nothing will happen to us if He does not allow it, as we see so vividly in Job's experience. Most remarkably this promise is ratified by the Lord Jesus Himself:

«Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows» (Matt. 10:29-31 NIV, see also Luke 12:6-7).

3. My answer: «I will trust»

After contemplating the character of God -what He is to me- and His providence -what He does in my life- the psalmist exclaims firmly: «My God, in whom I trust» (Ps. 91:2 NIV).

This is a logical sequence. Trust is the answer to some evidence. The psalmist has known God personally, intimately: «For he acknowledges my name» (Ps. 91:14 NIV). Such knowledge leads him to fall in love with Him: «He loves me» (Ps. 91:14 NIV), and to a close relationship with Him. Here we have the core of the Christian faith: it is the trust that springs from a love relationship, the certainty that the beloved will not fail me because «He (God) is faithful».

Our life is not at the mercy of a virus, but in the hands of the Almighty God. Therein lies the certainty of our faith and the foundation of the trust that overcomes all fear. **There is no place for triumphalism, but there is certainly triumph.** It is the triumph that Christ assured us with His victory over evil and the evil one on the Cross. It is the same Christ whose last words on Earth were:

«And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.» (Matt. 28:20 NIV)

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The web **Christian Thought** gives information about the literary work of Dr. Pablo Martínez and his father Rev. José M. Martínez. Through this work the Christian thought of the authors flows covering a wide range of subjects; theological, psychological and ethical issues are considered from a biblical perspective with a relevant and practical application to current problems.

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