



WHEN SICKNESS COMES KNOCKING

I think it's safe to say that, as a society, we are more obsessed with physical health than ever before. It was heading that way anyway, before C-19 and the 'slogans of the moment' (stay safe, etc). But over the past few months, it's skyrocketed. Now please understand: I'm not knocking leading a healthy lifestyle, nor am I trying to encourage you to be stupid or endanger either yourself or others. But at the same time, I would like to suggest that, for Christians, the most important thing is not our physical health or safety. Nor is it our financial prosperity, our family situation, or even our relationship status.

And this is important to remember as we look at a psalm which could, at first glance, be taken to refer to our physical wellbeing – and has been interpreted that way by many a preacher, especially over the past 6 months.

Psalm 91

Well, it's a great psalm, a beautiful psalm. But it's a potentially dangerous one too, if misunderstood. You see, there are 2 ways of reading this psalm: the wrong way, and the right way. In fact, I'll go further: there's Satan's way, and God's way. And that's how we're going to tackle it this morning: we're going to look at how Satan wants us to read it, and then how God wants us to read it.

1) How Satan Wants Us To Read It. How does Satan, the enemy of our souls, want us to understand this psalm? Like this:

- Trust God and there'll never be anything to be afraid of or anxious over.
- Trust God and nothing bad is ever going to happen in your life.
- Trust God and He will answer every single one of your prayers with a 'yes.'

Sounds pretty kosher, doesn't it? In fact, some of you might be thinking, "Steve, what's so wrong with that? How can you say this is how Satan wants us to read it?"

Simple. The Bible says so.

Take a quick look at Luke 4:9-12. When tempting Jesus in the desert, Satan tries to persuade Him to do something spectacular, to wow the crowd, and avoid the cross. I.e. "Not that way, Jesus – *this* way!" And he twists this Scripture, in the way I've just described. The logic goes like this: "If You really are the Son of God, You're not going to suffer; You're not going to die. You're supposed to be ... safe."

And here's why that is so, so dangerous: if you head out into this week thinking "I'm a child of God, He loves me, so nothing bad is ever going to happen," what happens if and when it does? You'll either judge yourself (or others, if something happens to them), or worse, you'll judge God. And that's exactly what Satan wants. How many people have you met who say, "Well I thought becoming a Christian was going to make things better / easier / happier"? Maybe you've said it yourself. And in the process, we've convinced ourselves the Bible says something we want it to say.

And something it *doesn't*.

So that's how Satan wants us to read Psalm 91, i.e. the *wrong* way! Now let's think about the *right* way ...

2) How God Wants Us To Read It. How does God, the great 'mother eagle' of vs3-4, expect us to understand this psalm? Like this:

- Trust God and you will know a future that nothing can take away.
- Trust God and nothing will be able to hurt you – unless *He* allows it to.
- Trust God and He will get you through this – even if His answer to your prayers is sometimes 'no.'

Now depending on what you've been taught, some of you may be a little uncertain. You may be thinking, "Steve, how do you know that's the right way to interpret it?"

Again, the answer is simple. The Bible says so.

Jesus' life is the ultimate fulfilment of this psalm – has to be, because Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment of every Scripture, right? And yet, He lived in relative poverty and died in terrible agony. How then is this a fulfilment of Psalm 91? Because Jesus recognized that this psalm isn't talking about the immediate – *this* life – but the ultimate. E.g.:

Luke 21:16-18.

John 16:32-33.

Matthew 26:42.

I.e. in order to know victory, you have to be willing to go to war, have to be willing to fight, have to be willing to die. The Christian life is not about temporary safety, it's about eternal security. Or 'long life', as Psalm 91 puts it.

That is how *God* understands this psalm. And so should we.

Look At Things His Way

So, 2 different approaches, 2 different interpretations of Psalm 91. One will leave you disappointed / confused; the other will equip you to weather the storms of life.

A final thought: when reading the Bible, many of us practice what scholars call *eisegesis* – Greek 'to bring in.' So, we'll read our own definitions of happiness, or prosperity, or safety, into the Bible, and expect God to deliver. And then, when things seem to go wrong, we'll say, "But I thought You were supposed to look after me, God?!" It's a bit like picking up a Domino's Pizza menu and expecting to find spring rolls or crispy wonton on the list of starters, or marching into Burger King and demanding to know where the chicken vindaloo is (that's not a dare, by the way). Instead, we need to practice *exegesis* – 'to bring out.' We need to read *God's* definitions of happiness, prosperity, and safety out of the Bible and into us. And then it'll make more sense.

So how do we apply all this to our present climate? Or to the health issues we may be facing now, or may face in the future (because we all will)? Back when he was 4, Josh presented me with this little nugget:

"Dad, bad stuff just happens sometimes."

And from an earthly perspective, that is how it seems. Because there may be a reason for it, in the colossal tapestry of life (as Paul says in Romans 8:28). But we probably won't be able to work it out 'til later. Much later. As in the *eternal* later.

Besides which, God doesn't call us to understand, anyway. He simply calls us to fix our eyes on the future, and trust Him in the meantime.

And sometimes, that's all you *can* do.