***Finding My Secret Place***

**Meeting God in the Psalms: Psalm 91 October 24, 2021**

***He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.  
I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress,   
my God, in whom I trust.”*Psalm 91:1-2**

**Reading Psalm 91:**

A. My profession of faith: God is my “secret place” (vv. 1–2)

B. How I will experience God’s presence and protection (vv. 3–8)

A′. Thinking about my faith: My covenant God is also “Most High” of creation (vv. 9–10)

B′. How I experience God’s supernatural protection (vv. 11–13)

C. God’s promise of salvation (vv. 14–16)

1. Psalm 91 pairs with Psalm 90 to prepare God’s people for their wilderness experience

2. Look for hints of this psalm’s Christological “sieve”

3. Be ready to ask the “Word of Faith” question

4. Listen to the three voices in this psalm of trust

5. Watch for the different names of God

**Trusting in the wilderness faithfulness of God**

1 *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High*

*will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

*2 I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress,*

*my God, in whom I trust.”*

Psalm 91:1-2

1. These four names of God take us from creation to covenant

2. This psalm is the experience of a pilgrim people

3. The “fortress” is where David found refuge from Saul (2 Samuel 22:2, 24:23; Psalm 31:3)

**The first cycle of God’s benefits**

3 *Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare*

*and from the deadly pestilence.*

*4 He will cover you with his feathers,*

*and under his wings you will find refuge;*

*his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

*5 You will not fear the terror of night,*

*nor the arrow that flies by day,*

*6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,*

*nor the plague that destroys at midday.*

*7 A thousand may fall at your side,*

*ten thousand at your right hand,*

*but it will not come near you.*

*8 You will only observe with your eyes*

*and see the punishment of the wicked.*

Psalm 91:3-8

1. This is a very personal experience of God’s *‘emet* faithfulness

2. Problem: Is the eschaton realized or inaugurated? Are these benefits for all Christians now?

(These are Pastor Elly Achok Olare’s thoughts on this question. See his full response below.)

-- Jesus is the one who steps on the serpent – we read this psalm through the Jesus lens

-- the testimony of Scripture and history is that God saves through not from  
 (see Psalm 23; Romans 8; 1 Peter 4:12-13, 5:10-12; Jeremiah 29:10-12; Lam. 3:21-23)

3. Key question: In our season of anxiety, how am I experiencing the refuge of God?

**The second cycle of trust and benefits**

9 *If you make the Most High your dwelling—*

*even the Lord, who is my refuge—*

*10 then no harm will befall you,*

*no disaster will come near your tent.*

*11 For he will command his angels concerning you*

*to guard you in all your ways;*

*12 they will lift you up in their hands,*

*so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.*

*13 You will tread upon the lion and the cobra;*

*you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*

Psalm 91:9-13

1. “If” might better be translated “because” (see ESV and NKJV versions)

2. God’s supernatural protection requires a supernatural perspective (see 2 Kings 6:17)

**God gets the final word**

*14 “Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him;*

*I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.*

*15 He will call upon me, and I will answer him;*

*I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.*

*16 With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.”*

Psalm 91:14-16

1. We are learning more about God’s *hesed* love

*7 The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.*

Deuteronomy 7:7-9 (see also Deuteronomy 10:4-16)

2. God keeps this promise by sending Jesus

*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. 5 Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. 6 And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.*

Romans 1:1-6

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**Resources for the Psalms**

Please be sure to have a copy of the [Bible Project’s poster](https://bibleproject.com/downloads/posters/) on the Psalms.

I appreciate the [*bibestudytools.com*](https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/christ-centered-exposition/psalms51-100/the-city-of-god.html)study of Psalm 87 in the “Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary” series. I’ve attached this study to my notes.

Dr. [Ron Allen has a wonderful study](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/OTeSources/19-Psalms/Text/Articles/Allen-Ps87-BS.pdf) of Psalm 87 in “Biblioteca Sacra”.

James E. Smith’s *Wisdom Literature and Psalms* (College Press, 1995) has been a very helpful resource.

The *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1991) has a helpful commentary on the Psalms.

I can see Dr. Ron Allen’s influence in the study notes on the Psalms in the *Nelson Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 1997). This is a NKJV text Bible which gives a wonderful new translation to read.

Spurgeon’s “The Snare of the Fowler” sermon on this text is at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0124.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0124.htm)

Reformed Blogmatics has an interesting take on Psalm 91 and prayer at [*https://www.scottrswain.com/2020/03/19/prayers-for-a-time-of-pandemic/*](https://www.scottrswain.com/2020/03/19/prayers-for-a-time-of-pandemic/)

John Samson’s blog has a wonderful interview with Pastor Elly Achok Olare at <http://effectualgrace.com/2017/03/07/psalm-91-and-the-word-of-faith/>

# Psalm 91 and the Word of Faith

Posted on [March 7, 2017](http://effectualgrace.com/2017/03/07/psalm-91-and-the-word-of-faith/) by [John Samson](http://effectualgrace.com/author/john-samson/)

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Pastor Elly Achok Olare has become a very precious friend of mine in recent months. He and I share a very similar background in that we both were at one time pastors in the word of faith movement. I was recently asked a question about Psalm 91 and its proper interpretation and poised the same question to Pastor Elly who serves in Mumias, Kenya, Africa, asking for his thoughts on the matter. Here is his reply:

Hello there, I was just asked this: One of the most important verses that the word of faith movement refers to is Psalm 91 which they feel gives them authority over the devil. For example, the verses on trampling over the scorpion, the adder and the lion. They will refer to this verse as God giving them authority over Satan, and if they see that Satan is causing ill health, death, etc., then they see it as they have power over Satan rightfully given by God in this verse. How would you answer that? just wondering what sort of answer you would give for this question?

Dear friend and fellow combatant in the faith once and for all time delivered to the saints’

Pastor John, you have put before me a question whose difficulty is only matched by it’s huge importance to our faith and churchmanship. I shall not pretend to have answers to that question which would even start to satisfy a curious mind. However, as you have placed a demand on me so I shall happily contribute my two cents on the matter. As I read the question, I recalled Luther’s appreciation for the aptitude and succinctness of his opponent Erasmus in “identifying the real issue, the matter upon which the debate turns”. In a real sense the question that was posed to you and which you now share with us is such a one in the whole matter of the Word of Faith/prosperity Gospel heresy.

Allow me dear friend to observe two quick points before I attempt my response.

First; I believe that for those already schooled in the foundational doctrines of Grace, having known Christ aright, and been taught of God, the explanation which shall proceed is the “bread of children”. It will be nothing more than a tying of loose ends, and a confirmation of those things which the Holy Spirit has already testified to in the heart. To borrow the words of scripture “a savor of life unto life”. However seeing how diametrically opposed this soul destroying system of the Word of faith or prosperity Gospel; so called, is to the Gospel of God’s Grace in the face of Jesus Christ, it will take a little more than explanation to wrestle such an enslaved mind to submission to the true doctrine of Christ.

The second point I would beg your indulgence upon is to wonder at the strange, albeit wonderful providence of God, in that when I happened upon this question of yours, it was during a short break during our Wisdom Training Center diploma class lectures. Would you believe what the subject was? PENTECOSTALISM, CHARISMATICS AND WORD OF FAITH THEOLOGIES, being part of our course module on cults and religions of the world. I thought that was a strange providence. I had my students engage with this question and therefore in a subtle way, their own contributions will also show in this response.

**FIRST THINGS FIRST: OUR EXEGETICAL TAKE ON PSALMS 91**

As with all heresies the first mistake is always incurred at the point of hermaneutics. The tendency is to ‘copy & paste’ texts of scripture from the written pages straight to application in our own lives, experience and expectations. However as we read and re-read this passage, we could not escape the subtle yet compelling feeling, that we were looking at one of those special texts. The language employed is too grand, too pure and altogether too exalted to attach primarily and directly to any ordinary human being-even if that human being is a believer in Christ.

This Psalm as with many others, is very Christological. Its application has to pass through the ‘sieve of Christ’, and the redemptive motif which burdens the Old Testament.

In my view, a failure to grasp this will derail any attempt at making sense of the Psalm. The word of Faith movement is a utilitarian system and we expect that they shall latch onto such texts to vindicate their un-biblical presuppositions.

It is noteworthy that at the temptation of our Lord in Luke 4:1-4, Satan appeals to some texts in this passage-verses 11 and 12 in particular,and applies directly to our Lord. Note the words of the tempter “if you are the Son of God”, as If to say “give proof of it in fulfilling this psalm. The tempter knew that the Son of God was the subject of that particular Psalm, it anticipated him and so as if to verify that He is The Son of God he tempts Him in this way. In the second place, observe that Our Lord does not rebuke Satan for applying this psalm to Him, He only rebutted thus “It also written…” We must observe in passing that the tempter here in the Lucan account dangles before our Lord exactly what the word of faith dangles to millions today, material gain and self aggrandisement. It was the same trap set for our first parents-lust of the flesh and a pursuit of materialism. The Lord would not be drawn in and in this, He unlike the first Adam, overcame the tempter.

This Son of God is the figure who dwells in the secret place of the most high. He is the one who is presently and for all eternity sitting at the right hand of majesty on high – Acts 7:56. Jesus Christ is one who staked His legitimate claim to that inner sanctum of glory, when he prayed thus “give me the glory which I had with you from the beginning” – John 17:5

It is this Lord whom the Father will “when He calls upon me, and I will answer Him”, the Psalm paints a further picture, “I will be with Him in trouble; I will deliver Him and honor him” – 91:15. Perhaps these are glorious foretastes of the humiliation and subsequent exaltation of our Lord – Philippians 2:6-11. Surely it is He who in the days of His flesh offered prayers and supplications with “strong crying and tears”, to He who was able to save Him” and was heard ” – Hebrews 5:7.

It is only about him might the words appropriately and legitimately apply when the psalm says “He holds fast to my love” – 91:14 and “I will set him on high, because he hath known my name”.

Even on the best of believers, these lofty appellations would scarcely fit. But on who else has the heavenly Father said “this is my well beloved Son, in him I am well pleased” but the Lord Jesus Christ? Who is it that the Father in heaven “hath highly exalted and given him a name that is above every other name”?

In holding this psalm to be first and foremost Christological, we do not stand in isolation. Augustine, Ireneous, Tertulian and other church fathers thought similarly. However the testimony of the fathers,helpful and illustrative as they often are,is not the ultimate standard for Truth.

There is further evidence in the sacred record itself. When our Lord met the disciples on their way to Emau; that they may yet the more be convinced of His authenticity, proves Himself the subject of scripture “beginning with Moses and the prophets ” – He showed them those things which were written of Him.If we are to accept as plainly indicated in the manuscripts that this psalm 91,from which the word of faith would wish to establish their authority, is a Psalm of Moses, then Phillip’s words to the skeptical Nathaniel would lend further evidence of the Christological thrust of this psalm “we have found Him of whom Moses wrote about “-John 1:45.

The word of faith proponents must hear again the words of our Lord when He lamented thus to the Jews of His day “ye search the scriptures, thinking in them ye will find life, yet the same scriptures testify of me” – John 5:39.

This brings us to the second consideration, which is really a deduction, and it might best be framed as a question

**IN WHOM DOES THE AUTHORITY OVER SATAN AND EVIL VEST PRIMARILY?**

The question has been anticipated partly in the preceding discussion. Yet more could and should be said. Seeing the Christological Implications of this psalm, we must then conclude that the one who will trample on the Lion and the Cobra – 91:13 (both representations of Satan – 1 Peter 5:8, Revelation 12:9) is not primarily the believer who presumes upon himself the exclusive prerogative of Christ. Rather, it is the same of whom it was promised to Eve “thy seed shall crush the head of the serpent”-Genesis 3:15,the same whom Paul identifies as Christ Jesus our Savior – Galatians 3:16. The Apostle writes that He exercised this authority to secure the ultimate victory on the cross and rendered Satan and His minions eternally defeated (Colossians 2:15). It is to him that this authority in question vests primarily. The believer in Christ benefits while in him, that is to say united to Christ in living union, so that His victories are his by extension.

The word of faith errs when they claim that this authority is resident on the believer to exercise as he wills. We insist that this is the sovereign prerogative of the Lord Christ. Careful note ought to be taken to see that when the Lord rose from the dead and announced His exaltation to His disciples in Matthew 28:18, the Lord did not say, all power in heaven and on earth has been given to us, but rather “to me” is what the savior says.

Even the sinless angel, the leader of the angelic host of heaven, the great Michael in disputing with Satan over the body of Moses-Jude 1:9 ,says to Satan “The Lord rebuke you”, as if to say “the one with authority even over you Satan Compels you now by His own authority”. Again this altercation reveals the exclusive exercise of sovereign authority and power by our blessed Lord and savior Jesus Christ. This authority and power is not resident in us to turn on and off like a switch bulb, if that were the case, why do we need to pray?

Hence the faith declarations common place in the word of faith theology, I once heard one of them teach that when we discover the ‘kingly authority of the believer’, we need not pray but simply give decrees to our situations. This is in my view the dethronement of the enthroned Christ-to whom we no longer need to rely in prayer, and enthroning mere man – who is now an authority unto himself. But to enthrone man in the place of Christ is; to borrow a popular Swahili proverb, like crowning a chicken with a King’s crown, the head just cannot hold the crown. This incongruous coronation brings us to a third point in this discussion.

**THE DOCTRINE THAT NEVER MATCHES EXPERIENCE**

On this point the disingenuity of the word faith theology ought to be apparent. Not one of the faith preachers ever attempted to walk on water and defy the laws of nature. There is yet to be produced a single case of a truly dead person brought back to life, never mind the hype that surrounds these ‘super apostles’. We are yet to see a man so full of faith he resisted death. One asks why has this authority not been useful? Our Lord certainly and beyond question demonstrated His authority in many ways. We know that the leading word of faith preachers struggles with various health issues just like the rest of us. Benny Hinn has been known to struggle with a heart condition, the great founder and proprietor of TBN indeed died of a cancer, Creflo Dollar one of the foremost leading lights of this movement has recently in their own clever, non-committal way admitted to having been diagnosed with a cancer. The great healing evangelist, Oral Roberts can hardly stand on his two feet because the forces of death (which we also call ageing) are working on his mortal flesh in his final days on this earth. Where is this authority we ask? Why does it not succeed ? The answer is that we all who participate in this fallen world, are bound to suffer decay and death, the curse that was pronounced upon this earth by reason of that treasonous act by our first parents is running its full course on all inhabitants of earth.

One of the most painful moments of my life was that crisis of faith experience when it seemed no matter how hard I believed, confessed positively, and sowed the so called faith seed, my circumstances did not seem to change. It was made worse by the many testimonies which were narrated by preachers, which often made me wonder whether I was a Christian at all. The life of faith they portrayed before us was utopian. However, as I indicated earlier, what they desperately kept from our view is that these same men, suffered various ailments. They had good personal doctors who saw to their health and kept them in good physical condition.

Perhaps this facade should have been apparent when we began to see the faith healers host TV programmes on TBN and other ‘Christian’ channels to discuss health, medicine, fitness, healthy eating and treatment options for various ailments, (not that there is a problem with these, but just to observe that their vaunted faith is not all they rely on).

Back in the day when Pentecostalism was born, in the earliest parts of the century, many considered medicine to be a betrayal of faith. The leading light at the beginning of this faith healing movement Charles Parham, on several occasions taught against going to hospital and taking medicine. As would be expected people died in adherence to this teaching, Parham himself died of an ailment later-lonely and depressed. While we decry the folly of this belief, we must however challenge the present day faith healers to not bestride the fence, you either believe in faith healing completely or you don’t. But like the fore-bearers of the movement generally overtime reckoned with its failures, leading to ‘compromises’, so also the present day movement has come to this sad but predictable fate. However because it is a hugely profitable industry, the faith preachers will not let go of this discredited belief. They will do their best to hold it up as working when in reality it is not working at all.

You will notice it’s often the ‘man of God’ who runs into these extravagant miracles by faith, and the more he recounts them in preaching the more expensive ‘faith seed’ is sown. Then he grows richer and richer on the backs of those who struggle to replicate his ‘experience’. What many don’t stop to observe is that they themselves (recipients of this message ) with their giving, seeds of faith and all sorts of giving, are the ones who in fact create and sustain the experience of the preacher, which is later sold to them as a target to pursue. Sadly the jets Creflo Dollar and Kenneth Copeland and others fly, did not fall from the skies, people’s money bought them. The seemingly good health these big guns enjoy are so managed by top notch doctors paid by monies collected as faith giving.

So while the pew men and women chase the dream, the mega star preachers are in fact living the dream. Many preachers in my day realized you will never make it to that level unless you learned to manipulate the ‘church levers’.

Here in my small town in rural western Kenya,i have attended several meetings at which the faith preachers have invariably called for ‘sacrificial faith seed’ in order to provoke an extraordinary miracle. I have seen men and women sell the valuables, including land to bring money at the ‘feet of the apostles ‘.

Prophetic declarations have gone forth in behalf of these sacrificial givers, God; ostensibly through the ‘man of God’ promising a car, a house or some big thing within a number of days,weeks or so. I have been heart broken every time I meet these people who parted with their hard earned resources, struggling to make ends meet.

To know that there will be another faith preacher who will come and sell the same dream and ask for yet more faith giving and these people will be worse off. I have also observed that the preachers keep coming back each time better off than the first time they came. One of them once told this kind of testimony “last year when I came to you I was driving that old cheap car, today you see my car packed outside, top of the range” and the people will clap and be happy for the man of God, then they will leave the meeting even more persuaded that the message works. They will hardly stop to realize it’s they who created that ‘miracle’ and will create another one for the ‘man of God’.

I say having been a faith preacher for many years, I have understood that the system does not work for the honest.It is a system that must be worked with disingenuity and clever craft, then packaged in the name of God for sale value. I am sure there are many in there who struggle in honest belief that the system is Biblical. But these many will have a mark on them, they will not make it big. Then there is a group in there who may be so persuaded of the reality of this experience that they are unaware of the unbiblical ethical issues as they work the system.

It helps a great deal to bear in mind that in this world we shall suffer many things, including poverty, sickness and yes ultimately death. We like the rest of creation “groan in pains” – Romans 8:21-23, awaiting our final redemption.

For many who suppposedly made a choice to follow Christ because of felt needs, and the promise of a better life now, the word of faith holds out a false hope, an illusion that will ever be tantalizingly within reach, yet never grasped in reality.

**DEFLATING NEWS? WHY BECOME A CHRISTIAN AFTER ALL?**

Now this may be heavy news for some, and they may ask “what then was achieved by Christ in His suffering and death? and is it not written “by His stripes we are healed? “-Isaiah 53:5/I Peter 2:24. Is there no warrant for wealth and health by reason of II Corinthians 8:9 “for our sakes He became poor that we might become even rich”? These texts and a plethora of others like them have been called to service, to establish the validity of the word of faith, health and wealth Gospel .

Themes of heaven and earth are confounded, and clear lines ever blurred in this movement. In fact a true believer in the word of faith movement may as well abandon the pursuit of heaven as they live their best lives now.Many readers will remember this is the mantra that propelled the so called ‘America’s pastor’ Joel Osteen to stardom and raving success. That clearly satanic invitation to “live your best life now” has become the inducement for the millions who read Osteen’s books and hear his sermons.

At the heart of this debate is the question; how much of Christ’s redemptive benefits might the believer legitimately expect in the here and now? We grant that it is written that by His stripes we are healed, and that John’s wish for the readers of his letter is that they may prosper and be In health, even as their souls prosper. But the honest inquirers will concede that this high bar is not our experience, the best of us has been unable to attain to this. So is it lack of faith? Or is it as Benny Hinn says; limited proclamation of the healing message? According to Hinn, if the healing message would be preached as incessantly as the salvation message, we may see large scale healings like we see large scale ‘salvations’. People are struggling to vindicate a failing system, yet I believe the answer to this conundrum lies elsewhere, it lies in the revealed will of the “God who can” (to borrow a phrase from Rev. Geoff Thomas), and again we do well to frame this next section as a question;

**IS IT REALIZED BENEFITS OF REDEMPTION OR IS IT INAUGURATED BENEFITS OF REDEMPTION?**

I have substituted in this headline, for purposes of simplicity, technical terms for non-technical ones. Theology has a debate between what is generally referred to as “realized eschatology as opposed to inaugurated eschatology”. In the place of the word “eschatology”, I have used the word “benefits”.

The question properly before us; the resolution of which will go a very long way to vanquish the word of faith movement is this; Do we immediately in the here and now come into enjoyment of all redemptive benefits, or are there parts or some that are deferred until we get to glory? Let us put the question another way; did Christ’s work of redemption immediately roll back all the effects of the fall of man for anyone who becomes a believer? Bringing man Immediately to his pre-fall status, absent the negatives which came with the fall? or do we as participants in this world; in the here and now partake of its cursedness as we hope for a latter day when all things will be made new?

In its general tenor and thrust, the word of faith or health and wealth gospel propagates the former, namely, that we immediately come into these benefits here and now. They will contend that as sin robbed us of original authority granted in Genesis 1:28, so redemption “buys back what was lost”. That image of God in man which was blurred with sin, is by faith in Christ cleaned and thus we retrieve our god-status as Creflo Dollar would say. With this God status we can then create our own world (with the creative power of our words and the sheer daring force of the imagination), in a world suffering the effects of the fall. In simple words, the believer in Christ is an alien in this world who plays by a different set of rules, He lives in heaven’s perfection in the here and now.

**The Testimony of our Lord disowns the word of faith claims**

When he came preaching our Lord said, ” repent and believe the gospel for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” – Mark 1:14-15.In Mathew 12:28-31,He told them the casting out of demons by the finger of God was evidence that the Kingdom of heaven had broken into this earth.

Yet when He had performed a spectacular miracle by feeding 5,000 men with five loaves and two fish, the people seized Him and deigned to make Him king, but he escaped that trap. He understood that the same tempter who had tempted Him with worldly power and success “and left Him for a while” (Luke 4:13), was back in another guise. He was indeed a king, but His kingdom was not of this world, its ultimate reality had not been realized just yet, but awaited consummation in a time to come. When He made the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, this strange King was riding not on a full grown, glorious stallion, but a lowly young colt.

He was sending a message that this kingdom was going to be defined by meekness and lowliness in the here and now,but gloriously explode in full bloom and influence in the hereafter. Before Pontius Pilate, He made a good confession, indeed He was a king, but His kingdom was not of this world. The character of the new Messianic Kingdom confused and confounded many, like it does the people in the word of faith movement. They sought a mighty physical kingdom which would bring them sensual relief and material prosperity-many of them were disappointed in the Savior. We read of this silent hope of the disciples when our Lord was raised from the dead ” have you now come to bring back the kingdom to Israel?”- Acts 1:6, and so many were which did not see a King in the King, nor a mighty savior in the redeemer. How? they wondered, would this be a savior if he leaves us to languish and groan under the Roman yoke? So also many question today, why have a savior if he cannot take care of my needs? How is it that we are children of royalty yet not live large and sumptuously?

This omnipotent King and Savior is the one who tells us of his earthy life “foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the son of man hath no where to lay his head”. His life was so ordinary that when they came to arrest Him at the Oliver, He had to be identified from the crowd.

John Avanzini the word of Faith teacher has falsely alleged that Christ wore ‘designer suit’, what terrible recklessness on the part of Avanzini!!! He is the one who promised his disciples, those who have come to faith and a living Union with Him “in this world you will have many troubles, but be ye of good cheer…I have overcome the world”. He said to His disciples He would admonish them to “carry their own crosses daily and follow Him.”

By any interpretation and stretch of the imagination, it is very hard to see how carrying the cross would be driving a Mercedes or living in a beach house palatial home. He would warn those who would follow Him to count the cost. Yet in all these the savior held in the face of His people joys and fulfillment in a world to come. The character of this kingdom was that it was a present day reality in a spiritual sense, yet will be manifested in all its manifold splendor and joys in the here after. He thus urged upon His people to look beyond the now and see the eternal bliss.

“Beloved, now are ye children of God, though it does not appear, but when He appears (in that future glory, we shall be like Him” – I John 3:1-3

This Jesus is markedly different from the one forged in the word of faith, they have invented another Jesus, another Gospel and another Spirit” – 2 Corinthians 11:4.

**The Apostolic witness rebukes the word of faith movement**

May we observe that none of the apostles of our Lord died a peaceful death, yet even they lived this side of the cross with all redemptive accomplishments done by the Lord. The present day word of faith believer would shriek” that is not my portion”, or “I resist that fate in Jesus name” or words like these. But the Apostles understood clearly what their Lord had promised them in this world must be endured, yet they overcame because of the hope held out in the hereafter. They loved not their lives unto death ,is the testimony of heaven on the men of faith, hardly can that be said of our fun loving, self aggrandising word of faith super stars. Perhaps we should say of them “they truly loved their lives, even unto unwilling deaths”.

We must accuse the Apostles of Christ of faithlessness, If we are to accept the wealth and health Gospel. That standard of faith was apparently higher than our Lord himself could attain, and definitely too high for the Apostles who trail blazed the Gospel to the whole known world, with stupendous results of signs and miracles (Acts 19:20).

Take Apostle Paul for a case study to begin with. He struggles with what he calls “a thorn in the flesh” – II Corinthians 12:7-10, which he identifies as a messenger of Satan, sent to buffet him.

Whatever one’s view is of this thorn, we can all be sure it was most unpleasant for the Apostle. It had a connection to the prince of darkness himself. But why does the Apostle not take authority over this messenger of Satan? Surely the great Apostle understood his identity and power as a believer! But he prays to the Lord to be given relief, He like the Angel Michael we read about, knows only the Lord can rebuke Satan. Anyways relief does not come; at least not in the way the Apostle would have liked or prayed for. The thorn will remain. This is unheard of in the faith movement, denied prayers? If we pray in faith and maintain a positive confession, says the faith movement, then we cannot be denied. So we must accuse the Apostle here of slack in faith if the faith movement is right. But in the Apostle’s distress, the Lord promises that His grace will be sufficient for him. On knowing God’s will for him to remain in the bodily discomfort, the apostle says “I will now boast in my weaknesses.” This language is unacceptable for the faith movement, but that is very Christian for the Apostles of Christ.

Paul praises the Galatian brethren, because they never looked down upon him, nor questioned his apostolic credentials on account of the bodily ailment that befell him en route to another destination-Galatians 4:12-14. The sickness held him down in the province of Galatia and because it (the illness) he preached the Gospel. God was in the sickness, in the words of our savior, it was not unto death, or for lack of faith or failure to take authority, but that the glory of the Lord should be revealed in the saving of souls in Galatia. The Apostle whom God used tremendously tells of his colleague Trophimus – “Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick. 2 Timothy 4:20. Why did the apostle not simply take authority and rid his companion of the painful disease?

He speaks to Timothy in view of his constant stomach pains to take a little medicinal wine.what an advise coming from the apostle, did he not know it is not God’s will for young Timothy to suffer sickness?

The Apostle Paul certainly had many sick companions and he speaks most tenderly of their undesirable circumstances. Of Epaphroditus he recounts how the comrade was “sick, nigh unto death…but the Lord had mercy on him’- Philippians 2:26-27. Neither Paul nor the sick brother took authority over Satan or this sickness, but ” the Lord had mercy” is what the text declares, on both Epaphroditus (in granting him relief) and Paul (in relief from sorrow for his ailing brother).

Enough of those Biblical illustrations of the scripturalness of suffering on this earth. Paul also looked beyond the horizon and saw the land of Immanuel, where in dwelleth righteousness. The city of God in which there shall be no pain or sorrow. So he said “the present momentary afflictions work for us a far greater weight of glory…while we look not at the things which are seen, but those which are not seen. For those things which are seen are temporal, and those not seen are eternal” – II Corinthians 4:16-18.

To the Romans he enjoined the believer (there he calls us the first fruits of the spirit) with the rest of creation in groaning with pain, until that day when the believer is separated by the “redemption of our bodies”, obviously a reference to the day of the resurrection when we shall be clothed in immortality and incorruptibility – I Corinthians 15:35-58.

So the believers’ view is that we have been redeemed fully, all the benefits of redemption fully paid for by Christ. However the enjoyment of those benefits have in the wisdom of the ineffable one been staggered, some granted now (Ephesians 1:1-14) and others for future glory. The Christian then is one who waits for the future glory. John speaks of this to his readers when he says “beloved now are we children of God, though it does not appear (it doesn’t look like it yet),but when He appears we shall be like Him”-I John 3:1-3.Later n the revelation given to him by the Lord Christ, he says in 21:4-5, “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful”.

This is what caused the worthies of our faith listed in the biblical ‘hall of fame’ of Hebrews 11 to say they were” strangers and pilgrims in search of a better city, whose maker is God”. In view of those celestial joys, they despised the momentary afflictions.

The text says they determined not to look back from whence they had been saved. They recalled that Israel in their wilderness pilgrimage, were often tempted with the memories of onions and spices of Egypt. But the men of faith loved not the world, or the things of the world, that the love of the father might remain with them” -1 John 2:15.

The word of Faith paints a rosy, glittering picture of what we can have in this world, all we can be…but we remember the Lord’s solemn warning “Remember Lot’s Wife” – Luke 17:32, when she turned to look at the glitter and allure of Sodom, she became a pillar of salt.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

In the end, it all boils down to the love of the world and a low appetite for the heavenly hope. The word of faith theology is a man centered system where the ultimate goal of Biblical revelation is the good of man and not the glory of God. It appeals to the crudest and oldest human failings-greed and covetousness. This most basic of fallen human disposition finds ready fuel in the ‘spirit of the age’, materialism and hedonism coached in Christian lingo. American dream dressed in Gospel language. So its success because of this will continue to grow as we also watch the growth of capitalistic greed and egalitarianism.

May the Lord protect His chosen people from this deadly scourge. For the glory of His name and the sanctity of the authentic Gospel of God’s saving Grace in Jesus Christ our savior. Amen

# Prayers for a time of pandemic: Psalm 91

at Reformed Blogmatics, [*https://www.scottrswain.com/2020/03/19/prayers-for-a-time-of-pandemic/*](https://www.scottrswain.com/2020/03/19/prayers-for-a-time-of-pandemic/)

The title for this post is one I never imagined writing. But recent days have brought about many firsts for many of us.

In response to the spread of the Coronavirus across the globe, a group of ministers led by Rev. Chris Hutchinson has called upon churches to pray on Friday, March 20, 2020. They have asked us to pray that the Lord would slow the spread of the Coronavirus, that he would strengthen the hands of those serving in the medical community, that he would bless the efforts of those researching vaccines, and that he would comfort, strengthen, and heal those who suffer in various ways from Covid-19 and its effects (economic, psychological, social, etc.). For more information and the latest developments, follow [#UnitedExtraordinaryPrayer](https://twitter.com/hashtag/UnitedExtraordinaryPrayer?src=hashtag_click) on Twitter.

I thought I’d publish a few resources to serve this concerted prayer effort.

First and foundationally is Psalm 91.

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” 3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. 4 He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. 5 You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, 6 nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. 7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. 8 You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. 9 Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place– the Most High, who is my refuge– 10 no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. 11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. 12 On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. 13 You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot. 14 “Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. 15 When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. 16 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

I will refrain from offering extended commentary on this psalm but will note a couple of points.

First, the psalmist lives in the real world, where trials always seem to travel in hordes. The psalmist lists “deadly pestilence” (vv. 3, 6) among the manifold trials that afflict God’s people. There is the “the terror of the night” and “the arrow that flies by day” (v. 5). There is “the pestilence that stalks in darkness” and “the destruction that wastes at noonday” (v. 6).

Nevertheless, second, the psalmist encourages God’s people that, in spite of the manifold trials that assail them, they need not fear. Why? Because the manifold trials that afflict us are no match for the God of many names who stands with us and helps us. The one who trusts in God, dwells in the shelter of “the Most High” and abides in the shadow of “the Almighty” (v. 1). The God of the covenant is “my refuge,” “my fortress,” “my God,” “in whom I trust” (v. 2). His “pinions” and his “wings” are a source of refuge; his “faithfulness” is “a shield and buckler” (v. 4). Our God, to whom all these names apply, is all these things to us; and no trials that come upon us can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 8:31-39).

And so we pray with confidence, knowing that he will “answer” us (v. 15). Contrary to the claims of today’s false prophets, we do not know whether God will answer us by delivering us from the deadly pestilence that stalks us (through healing) or through the deadly pestilence that stalks us (through death and resurrection). But, in Christ Jesus, we may pray with confidence that God will “deliver” us, “protect” us, “be with” us, “rescue” us, “honor” us, “satisfy” us, and “show” us his salvation (vv. 14-16). These are the strong verbs that belong to the people who belong to the Lord.

In addition to Psalm 91, below are a few prayers composed and used by the church for occasions such as this.

The first prayer comes from the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England (1662).

O ALMIGHTY God, who in thy wrath didst send a plague upon thy people in the wilderness, for their obstinate rebellion against Moses and Aaron; and also, in the time of king David, didst slay with the plague of pestilence threescore and ten thousand, and yet remembering thy mercy didst save the rest: Have pity upon us miserable sinners, who now are visited with great sickness and mortality; that like as thou didst then accept of an atonement, and didst command the destroying Angel to cease from punishing, so it may now please thee to withdraw from us this plague and grievous sickness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The second prayer comes from the Book of Common Prayer of the Reformed Episcopal Church.

O MOST mighty and merciful God, to whom alone belong the issues of life and death; In this time of grievous sickness we flee unto thee for relief. Deliver us, we beseech thee, from our peril; give strength and skill to thy ministers of healing; bless the means of cure; and grant, that, perceiving how frail is our earthly life, we may apply our hearts unto that heavenly wisdom which leadeth to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The third prayer comes from the The Liturgy of the French Protestants at Charleston (via Rev. Tommy Shields).

O LORD, we are consumed by Thy anger, and by Thy wrath we are troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee; our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance. Our days are passed in Thy displeasure, and we spend our years as a tale that is told. Thou hast dealt justly with us, O Lord, in all things; for we have not obeyed Thee. Thou hast seen that our wickedness is great, that the thoughts of our hearts were evil continually, and Thou hast sent forth sickness and tribulation among us. The King of Terrors is in the midst of us. O God, remember mercy, and withdraw from our land this awful scourge. O Thou at whose word, in the time of David, seventy thousand perished by the pestilence, and Who in Thy compassion didst stay the destroyer and spared the reside of Thy people, have pity on us! O say to this angel of death, “It is enough!” and of Thy mercy spare us. But whatever the future may have in store for us, whether of good or evil, give us grace to praise Thy compassion with humility and fear, and to bless Thy name forever and ever, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

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| The Snare of the Fowler |  |

A Sermon [(No. 124)](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/c03.htm)  
at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0124.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0124.htm)

Delivered on Sabbath Morning, March 29, 1857, by the  
REV. C. H. Spurgeon at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens.

"Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."—Psalm 91:3.

A picture containing text, clipart

Description automatically generatedf Moses wrote this Psalm he might represent the fowler as being in his case the king of Egypt, who sought to slay him, or the Amalekites, who pounced upon Israel in the plain, when they little expected it. If David penned it, he might have compared Saul to the fowler, for he himself says, he was hunted like a partridge upon the mountains. But we believe, if the verse be applicable to either of those cases, it was intended by the Psalmist not to have a private interpretation, but to be applicable to all time; and we believe it is spoken concerning that arch-enemy of souls, the great deceiver, Satan, of whom we just now sang,

"Satan, the fowler, who betrays  
Unguarded souls a thousand ways."

"The prince of the power of this world, the spirit which still worketh in the children of disobedience," is like a fowler, always attempting to destroy us. It was once said by a talented writer, that the old devil was dead, and that there was a new devil now; by which he meant to say, that the devil of old times was a rather different devil from the deceiver of these times. We believe that it is the same evil spirit; but there is a difference in his mode of attack. The devil of five hundred years ago was a black and grimy thing well portrayed in our old pictures of that evil spirit. He was a persecutor, who cast men into the furnace, and put them to death for serving Christ. The devil of this day is a well-spoken gentleman: he does not persecute—he rather attempts to persuade and to beguile. He is not now so much the furious Romanist, so much as the insinuating unbeliever, attempting to overturn our religion, while at the same time he pretends he would make it more rational, and so more triumphant. He would only link worldliness with religion; and so he would really make religion void, under the cover of developing the great power of the gospel, and bringing out secrets which our forefathers had never discovered. Satan is always a fowler. Whatever his tactics may be, his object is still the same—to catch men in his net. Men are here compared to silly, weak birds, that have not skill enough to avoid the snare, and have not strength enough to escape from it. Satan is the fowler; he has been so and is so still; and if he does not now attack us as the roaring lion, roaring against us in persecution, he attacks us as the adder, creeping silently along the path, endeavoring to bite our heel with his poisoned fangs, and weaken the power of grace and ruin the life of godliness within us. Our text is a very comforting one to all believers, when they are beset by temptation. "Surely he shall deliver them from the snare of the fowler."  
First, *a few words concerning the snare of the fowler;* secondly, *the deliverance;* and, thirdly, *the certainty* *of it;* dwelling upon that word *surely*, for it seems to be the diamond wherewith this precious golden promise is embellished. "*Surely* he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."  
I. First, then, THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER. It is an illustration too suggestive for me thoroughly to unravel. I must leave it for your meditations at home to enumerate the divers ways in which a fowler attempts to take his birds, and then you will have suggested to you the divers means which the evil spirit employs for the destruction of souls. Allow me, however, just to begin, and pass over two or three points connected with the fowler and with the evil one.  
1. First, *the fowler's snare is intimately connected with secrecy*. "Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird." Therefore the fowler carefully covers up his trap; or, if the trap itself be uncovered he doth well beguile the bird, so that it is utterly ignorant of his intention to take it in the trap, little thinking that the food laid there for its banqueting is really placed there for its enticement and destruction. The fowler, when he goes after his birds, is very careful lest they should discover him. We hear, for instance, that in the taking of wild ducks, in Lincolnshire, a man will hold before his mouth a piece of turf, in order that the smell of his breath may not be perceived by the birds, who are exceedingly wary. The temptations of the world are of this secret sort to a Christian, though not to the wicked man, for the wicked man sins with his eyes wide open; dashing into the net knowing it is a net, laying hold of iniquity with both his hands, even when destruction stareth him in the face. He will commit a sin that he knows is condemned even by the law of the land; he will rush into a crime, concerning the guilt of which no doubt can be entertained. Not so the Christian: he is taken by secrecy. "Ah!" says one, "if I thought such-and-such a thing were really wrong; if I were perfectly convinced of its wrongfulness, I would give it up." It is just there the difficulty lies. So would the bird say: "If I thought that really were a trap, I would not enter it; if I were perfectly persuaded that net would entangle me, I would not fly to such-and-such a spot; I would not approach there at all, it I were sure it would be my destruction." How many a professor there is who asks the question, "May I go to this place? May I go to that place?" and some of us answer "No," and we are called Puritans for it; but let those who have attempted to keep their godliness intact, while they pursued the pleasures of this world, stand up and make the mournful confession, that the healthiness of the two things can never exist together. We must either serve God wholly, or serve the evil one wholly. "If God be God, serve him; If Baal be God, serve him." One, or else the other. Many a man has been entrapped into sin by Satan; not knowing that it was evil! Some one has hinted to him in business, for instance—"You may very safely do such-and-such a thing; all the shopkeepers in the street have done it; it is not actually dishonest; it improves the article, it really does; and although you can thus sell an article at a dearer rate than you ought to sell it, yet you need not tell the public; and if the article is all the better for it, it is quite fair and safe that you should adulterate it." And so the good easy man, not opening both his eyes, I think, but shutting one of them a little, lest he should see too well to be able to fill his pockets in the dark, is a little taken aside; and by-and-by he is led to discover that the act which he has done is the taking of him in the snare of the fowler, for he has been sinning against his God, and his God therefore punishes him for it with many stripes, and lays his rod upon him. I do not think that a Christian is so often betrayed into a sin that is palpable and known, as he is into a sin that is secret. If the devil comes to my door with his horns visible, I will never let him in; but if he comes with his hat on as a respectable gentleman, he is at once admitted. The metaphor may be very quaint, but it is quite true. Many a man has taken in an evil thing, because it has been varnished and glossed over, and not apparently an evil; and he has thought in his heart, there is not much harm in it; so he has let in the little thing, and it has been like the breaking forth of water—the first drop has brought after it a torrent. The beginning has been but the beginning of a fearful end. Take care, Christian, of things that are secret; take care of the common doings of the world, which are well enough for them, perhaps. We would not deny them their pleasures, for they have no others; but they are not good for you, for you have a finer life—a life of a finer texture and order than can exist in the haunts of ungodly persons. Remember, you are not to be a judge for others. Some men, especially those who are unconverted, can, without being led into sin, indulge in many gayeties and merriments; but the Christian is like the Englishman, who can not hope to survive long where the jungle fever reigns. The native can live there, but he can not. And so you who are twice-born men will find your piety ruined, by that which, to a worldly man, does not lead him into greater evil than that which he would naturally commit. You are to have a stricter rule on yourselves than others, and are to be more stern in your piety than the world would have you be; for sin is usually hidden, and the snare is not often made apparent. "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

2. In the second place, *the snare of the fowler is generally noted for its adaptation*. You do not find a fowler setting the same snare for one bird as for another; he knows his bird and he adapts his bait to it. He would be an unwise fowler who should go to work with the same machinery to catch the lark that flies on high as the duck that swims along the stream. The fowler is wiser than that: he adapts his snare to the condition of the bird which he desires to take. Satan the fowler does just the same. There is one man here; he tempts him to drunkenness. Perhaps that would naturally be his sin, if left without grace in his heart; and Satan, knowing it to be his weak point, attempts to overcome him by surfeiting, gluttony, and drunkenness. Another man is utterly impervious to any temptation to that bestial habit; but, it may be, he is easily taken in another snare—the snare of lust; therefore Satan adapts his temptation to the hot blood of the man who naturally would be inclined to live a life of sin. Another one perhaps eschews every lascivious and sensual habit; then Satan comes to him, and adapts his temptation to the shape of pride. The man is naturally a melancholy man, full of solitude; Satan gets him, if he can, to wrap himself up in a solitary dignity, to say, "I am holy." "Lord, I thank thee, I am not as other men are." Or if a man is not naturally inclined to a very high degree of pride, Satan takes him with sloth. The man likes an easy life; Satan therefore adapts his bait to him by letting him sit still, fold his arms, and so perish by slothfulness: and mark this, he who sitteth still in the frost, when the snow is on the ground, in the depths of the wild regions of the frozen zone, must as surely perish by his idleness as if he drove a dagger to his heart. Satan knows that, and so adapts his bait accordingly. O! how often it happens, beloved, that you and I condemn a thing in another person which we allow in ourselves, perhaps without knowing it. We say of such a one, How proud he is! Well, our pride is not exactly of that shape; we have got another shaped pride, but the same article; labeled differently, but the same thing. Satan adapts the pride to each particular case. We are rich: he does not perhaps tempt us to the pride of riches, but he tempts us to the pride of mastership, and makes us harsh masters to our servants. Or if he does not tempt us to that pride, he perhaps enchants us with the pride of generosity, and we are apt to boast of our kindness and of what we have given away. He will always adapt his trap to his man, and his bait to his bird. He will not tempt you all with the same temptation he would tempt me with; nor me with the temptation with which he would naturally assail another. "The snare of the fowler." A cunning enemy we have to deal with; he knows our weak points; he has been dealing with men for these last six thousand years; he knows all about them. He is possessed of a gigantic intellect; though he be a fallen spirit and he is easily able to discover where our sore places are, and there it is he immediately attacks us. If we be like Achilles, and can not be wounded anywhere but in our heel, then at the heel he will send his dart, and nowhere else. He will find out our easily besetting sin, and there, if he can, he will attempt to work our ruin and our destruction. Let us bless God that it is written, "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

3. In the next place, *the fowler's snare is frequently connected with pleasure, profit, and advantage*. In the bird's case it is for the seed scattered on the ground that he flies to the snare. It is some tempting bait which allures him to his death. And usually Satan; the fowler, uses a temptation wherewith to beguile us. "O!" says one, "I can not give up such-and-such a thing, it is so pleasant. Sir, you never knew the charms of such-and-such a pursuit, otherwise you could never advise me to relinquish it." Yes, my friend, but it is just the sweetness of it to you that makes it the more dangerous. Satan never sells his poisons naked; he always gilds them before he vends them. He knows very well that men will buy them and swallow them, if he does but gild them beforehand. Take care of pleasures; mind what you are at when you are at them. Many of them are innocent and healthful, but many of them are destructive. It is said that where the most beautiful cacti grow, there the most venomous serpents are to be found at the root of every plant. And it is so with sin. Your fairest pleasures will harbor your grossest sins. Take care; take care of your pleasures. Cleopatra's asp was introduced in a basket of flowers; so are our sins often brought to us in the flowers of our pleasures. Satan offers to the drunkard the sweetness of the intoxicating cup, which rejoices him, when his brain is rioting in frolic, and when his soul is lifted up within him. He offers to the lustful man the scenes and pleasures of carnal mirth, and merriment, and delight, and so he leadeth him astray with the bait, concealing the hook which afterwards shall pain him. He gives to you and to me, each of us, the offer of our peculiar joy; he tickleth us with pleasures, that he may lay hold upon us, and so have us in his power. I would have every Christian be especially on his guard against the very thing that is most pleasing to his human nature. I would not have him avoid every thing that pleases him, but I would have him be on his guard against it. Just like Job, when his sons had been feasting in their houses. He did not forbid them doing it, but he said, "I will offer a sacrifice, lest my sons should have sinned in their hearts, and should have cursed God foolishly." He was more careful over them at the time of their feasting than at any other season. Let us be the same. Let us remember that the snare of the fowler is generally connected with some pretended pleasure or profit, but that Satan's end is not our pleasing, but our destruction.

4. In the next place, *sometimes the fowler very wisely employs the force of example*. We all know the influence of the decoy-duck, in endeavoring to bring others into the snare. How very often Satan, the fowler, employs a decoy to lead God's people into sin! You get with a man; you think him to be a true Christian; you have some respect for his character; he is a high professor, can talk religion by the yard, and can give you any quantity of theology you like to ask for. You see him commit a sin; ten to one but you will do the same, if you have much respect for him; and so he will lead you on. And mark, Satan is very careful in the men whom he chooses to be decoys. He never employs a wicked man to be a decoy for a good man. It is very seldom, when Satan would decoy a Christian into a snare, that he makes use of an open reprobate. No; he makes use of a man who is pretendedly religious, and who looks to be of the same quality as yourself, and therefore entices you astray. Let a bad man meet me in the street, and ask me to commit sin! The devil knows better than to set him at any such work as that, because he knows I should pass by directly. If he wants his errand well done, he sends one to me whom I call brother; and so through the brotherhood of profession I am apt to give him credence and pay him respect; and then if he goeth astray, the force of example is very powerful, and so I may easily be led into the net too. Take care of your best friends; be careful of your companions. Choose the best you can; then follow them no further than they follow Christ. Let your course be entirely independent of every one else. Say with Joshua, let others do what they will, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

5. Note, once more, that *sometimes the fowler, when he faileth to take his bird by deceit and craft, will go a hawking after it*—will send his hawk into the air, to bring down his prey. It often happens, when the devil can not ruin a man by getting him to commit a sin, he attempts to slander him; he sends a hawk after him, and tries to bring him down by slandering his good name. I will give you a piece of advice. I know a good minister, now in venerable old age, who was once most villainously lied against and slandered by a man who had hated him only for the truth's sake. The good man was grieved; he threatened the slanderer with a lawsuit, unless he apologized. He did apologize. The slander was printed in the papers in a public apology; and you know what was the consequence. The slander was more believed than if he had said nothing about it. And I have learned this lesson—to do with the slanderous hawk what the little birds do, just fly up. The hawk can not do them any hurt while they can keep above him—it is only when they come down that he can injure them. It is only when by mounting he gets above the birds, that the hawk comes sweeping down upon them, and destroys them. If any slander you, do not come down to them; let them slander on. Say, as David said concerning Shimei, "If the Lord hath given him commandment to curse, let him curse;" and if the sons of Zeruiah say, "Let us go and take this dead dog's head," you say, "Nay, let him curse;" and in that way you will live down slander. If some of us turned aside to notice every bit of a sparrow that began chirping at us, we should have nothing to do but to answer them. If I were to fight people on every doctrine I preach, I should do nothing else but just amuse the devil, and indulge the combative principles of certain religionists who like nothing better than quarreling. By the grace of God, say what you please against me, I will never answer you, but go straight on. All shall end well, if the character be but kept clean; the more dirt that is thrown on it by slander, the more its shall glisten, and the more brightly it shall shine. Have you never felt your fingers itch sometimes to be at a man who slanders you? I have. I have sometimes thought, "I can not hold my tongue now; I must answer that fellow;" but I have asked of God grace to imitate Jesus, who, "when he was reviled, reviled not again," and by his strength let them go straight on. The surest way in the world to get rid of a slander is just to let it alone and say nothing about it, for if you prosecute the rascal who utters it, or if you threaten him with an action, and he has to apologize, you will be no better off—some fools will still believe it. Let it alone—let it keep as it is; and so God will help you to fulfill by your wisdom his own promise, "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

And now, ere I close this point, let me observe once more, the fowler, when he is determined to take his birds, uses all these arts at once, perhaps, and *besets the bird on every side*. So, you will remember, beloved, it is with you. Satan will not leave a stone unturned to ruin your soul for ever.

"Amidst a thousand snares I stand,  
Upheld and guarded by thy hand."

Old Master Quarles says,

"The close pursuer's busy hands do plant  
Snares in thy substance; snares attend thy want;  
Snares in thy credit; snares in thy disgrace;  
Snares in thy high estate; snares in thy base;  
Snares tuck thy bed; and snares surround thy board;  
Snares watch thy thoughts; and snares attach thy words;  
Snares in thy quiet; snares in thy commotion;  
Snares in thy diet; snares in thy devotion;  
Snares lurk in thy resolves, snares in thy doubt;  
Snares lie within thy heart, and snares without;  
Snares are above thy head, and snares beneath;  
Snares in thy sickness, snares are in thy death."

There is not a place beneath which a believer walks that is free from snares. Behind every tree there is the Indian with his barbed arrow; behind every bush there is the lion seeking to devour; under every piece of grass there lieth the adder. Everywhere they are. Let us be careful; let us gird ourselves with the might of God's omnipotence, and then shall his Holy Spirit keep us, so that we shall tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the dragon shall we trample under our feet, and we shall be "delivered from the snare of the fowler."

II. Now we pass to the second point—THE DELIVERANCE. God delivers his people from the snare of the fowler. Two thoughts here: *from—out of*. First, he delivers them *from* the snare—does not let them get in it; secondly, when they do get in it, he delivers them *out of* it. The first promise is the most precious to some of us; the second is the best to others.  
He shall deliver thee from the snare. How does he do that?  
Very often by *trouble*. Trouble is often the means whereby God delivers us from snares. You have all heard the old story of the celebrated painter who was painting in St. Paul's, and who, looking at his work, went gradually back, inch by inch, to get a view of it, so that he might see the excellence of its proportions, until his feet were just on the edge of the platform upon which he stood; and he would have fallen down and been dashed in pieces upon the pavement beneath, but just at that moment a workman who stood there, desirous to save his life, and not knowing how to do it, hit upon an expedient which proved to be a very wise one. Instead of shouting out to his master, "Sir, you are in danger," which would most certainly have sent him backward, he took up a brush and dipping it in a pot of paint, dashed it at the picture. The good man rushed forward in anger to chastise him; but when it was explained, he clearly saw that he had acted wisely. Just so with God. You and I have often painted a fine picture, and we have been walking backward admiring it. God knows that our backsliding will soon end in our destruction and he, by a sad providence, blasts our prospect, takes away our child from us, buries our wife, removes some darling object of our pleasures; and we rush forward and say, "Lord, why is this?"—utterly unconscious that if it had not been for trouble we might have been dashed in pieces, and our lives would have been ended in destruction. I doubt not, many of you have been saved from ruin by your sorrows, your griefs, your troubles, your woes, your losses, and your crosses. All these have been the breaking of the net that set you free from the snare of the fowler  
At other times God keeps his people from the snare of the fowler *by giving them great spiritual strength, a spirit of great courage;* so that when they are tempted to do evil they say, with decision, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" O! that was a noble escape of Joseph, when his mistress laid hold of his garment; that was a noble escape of his, when his soul escaped like a bird out of the snare of the fowler; and I doubt not there are many here who have done deeds almost as noble as that of Joseph, who have had grace within their hearts, so that they have turned away their eyes from beholding folly, and when they have been tempted to evil they have put their foot upon it, and said, "I can not, I can not; I am a child of God; I can not and I must not;" and though the thing was pleasing to themselves yet they abjured it. You remember the case of Mr. Standfast in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Madame Bubble had greatly enticed poor Mr. Standfast with her offers. He says, "There was one in very pleasant attire, but old, who presented herself to me, and offered me three things, to wit, her body, her purse, and her bed. Now the truth is, I was both weary and sleepy: I am also as poor as an owlet, and that perhaps the witch knew. Well, I repulsed her once and again, but she put by my repulses and smiled. Then I began to be angry; but she mattered that nothing at all. Then she made offers again, and said if I would be ruled by her, she would make me great and happy; for, said she, I am the mistress of the world, and men are made happy by me. Then I asked her her name, and she told me it was Madame Bubble. This set me further from her; but she still followed me with enticements. Then I betook me, as you saw, to my knees, and with hands lifted up, and cries, I prayed to him that had said he would help. So just as you came up the gentlewoman went her way. Then I continued to give thanks for this my great deliverance; for I verily believe she intended no good, but rather sought to make stop of me in my journey." Thus God delivers his people from the snares of the fowler, by giving them the spirit of prayer as well as the spirit of courage, so that they call upon God in the day of trouble, and he delivers them.  
And I have noticed one more very singular thing. Sometimes I, myself, have been saved from the snare of the fowler (I can not tell you how exactly), in this way. I have felt that if the temptation had come a week before, my mind was in that peculiar condition, that I should almost inevitably have been led away by it; but when it came, the mind, by passing through some process, had become in such a condition that the temptation was no temptation at all. We were just brought to such a state, that what might have ruined us before, we would not then look at. "No," we have said, "if you had offered me this some time ago it might have been accepted; but now God has, by some mysterious influence of his Spirit, turned my heart in another direction, and it is not even a temptation to me at all—not worthy of a moment's thought." So God delivers his people from the snare of the fowler.  
But the second thought was, that *God delivers his people, even when they get into the snare*. Alas! my hearer, you and I know something about the net; we have been inside it, we have; we have not only seen it spread, we have been in its folds. We know something about the cage, for we have, unfortunately, been in the cage ourselves, even since we have known the Lord. The fowler's hand has been upon our neck; it has only been the sovereign grace of God that has prevented him from utterly destroying us. What a blessed thing it is, that if the believer shall, in an evil hour, come into the net, yet God will bring him out of it! Poor Christian and Hopeful got into the fowler's net when they entered into the castle of Giant Despair; but the key of promise picked the lock, and they escaped. They were in the fowler's net, too, when Flatterer cast a net over them, and left them in the lane; but there came one who, after he had beaten them full sore, took the net off, and then they went on their way, better men than they were before they were in the net. I know one who is in the net now. Some bird, one of God's own ones too, has been taken in the snare, and is now groaning and crying out, because, alas! alas! he has sinned. I have a person here, a good man, a professor of religion, and a truly worthy one! but alas! he has sinned, and at this hour the tears are in his eyes, and he is saying,

"The tumult of my thoughts  
Doth but increase my woe;  
My spirit languishes, my heart  
Is desolate and low."

"Turn, turn thee to my soul;  
Bring thy salvation near;  
When will thy hand release my feet  
Out of the deadly snare?"

O backslider, be cast down, but do not despair; God will restore thee yet. Wanderer though thou hast been, hear what he says! "Return, O backsliding children; I will have mercy upon you." But you say you can not return. Then here is still a promise—"Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler." Thou shalt yet be brought out from all the evil into which thou hast fallen, and though thou shalt never cease to repent thy ways even to thy dying day, yet he that hath loved thee will not cast thee away; he will receive thee; he will admit thee into his dwelling-place, and will even now restore thee to the number of his people, and give thee joy and gladness, that the bones which he has broken may rejoice. "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

There have been very remarkable instances of God delivering his people out of the snare of the fowler, as the following illustration will show:  
"A young lady, who belonged to a church in the city of New York, married a young man who was not a Christian. He was a merchant, engaged in a lucrative business, and the golden stream of wealth flowed in upon him till he had amassed a large fortune. He accordingly retired from business, and went into the country. He purchased a splendid residence; fine trees waved their luxuriant foliage around it; here was a lake filled with fish, and there a garden full of rare shrubbery and flowers. Their house was fashionably and expensively furnished; and they seemed to possess all of earth that mortal could desire. Thus prospered, and plied with an interchange of civilities among her gay and fashionable neighbors, the piety of the lady declined, and her heart became wedded to the world. And it is not to be wondered at, that her three children, as they grew up, imbibed her spirit and copied her example. 'A severe disease,' it is said, 'demands a severe remedy;' and that God soon applied. One morning intelligence came that her little son had fallen into the fish-lake, and was drowned. The mother's heart was pierced with the affliction, and she wept and murmured against the providence of God. Soon afterwards, her only daughter, a blooming girl of sixteen, was taken sick of a fever and died. It seemed then as if the mother's heart would have broken. But this new stroke of the rod of a chastening Father seemed but to increase her displeasure against his will. The only remaining child, her eldest son, who had come home from college to attend his sister's funeral, went out into the fields soon afterwards, for the purpose of hunting. In getting over a fence, he put his gun over first to assist himself in springing to the ground, when it accidentally discharged itself and killed him! What then were that mother's feelings in the extravagance of her grief, she fell down, tore her hair, and raved like a maniac against the providence of God. The father, whose grief was already almost insupportable, when he looked upon the shocking spectacle, and heard her frenzied ravings, could endure his misery no longer. The iron entered into his soul and he fell speedy victim to his accumulated afflictions. From the wife and mother, her husband and all her children were now taken away. Reason returned, and she was led to reflection. She saw her dreadful backslidings, her pride, her rebellion; and she wept with the tears of a deep repentance. Peace was restored to her soul. Then could she lift up her hands to heaven, exclaiming, 'I thank thee, O Father!—the Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord.' Thus did her afflictions yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness, and her heavenly Father chasten her, 'not for his pleasure, but for her profit, that she might become partaker of his holiness.'"  
So God delivered her soul out of the snare of the fowler. She started afresh in the ways of righteousness, serving God with diligence and zeal, and growing up in his fear. By trouble and trial, by some means or another, God will surely deliver his people out of the snare of the fowler, even when they are in it.

III. And now, to conclude, I am to dwell for a moment or two upon that word "SURELY." The assurance of every truth of Scripture is just the beauty of it. If it were not sure, it were not precious; and it is precious just because it is sure.  
Now, it says, "surely he shall deliver thee." Why? First, because he has promised to do it; and God's promises are bonds that never yet were dishonored. If he hath said he will, he will. Secondly, because Christ Jesus hath taken an oath that he will do it. In ages long gone by Christ Jesus became the shepherd of the sheep, and the surety of them too. "If any of them perish," said he, "at my hand, thou shalt require it;" and, therefore, because Christ is responsible, because he is the heavenly sponsor for all God's people, they must be kept: for otherwise Christ's bond were forfeited, and his oath were null and void. They must be kept, again, because otherwise the union that there is between all of them and Christ would not be a real one. Christ and his church are one—one body; but if any of the members of my body were cut off, I should be maimed, and if Christ could lose one of his children he would be a maimed Christ. "We are his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." If, then, the whole church were not gathered in, Christ would be an incomplete Christ, seeing he would want his fullness. They must all be saved, for God the Father has determined that they shall be; nay, the Son has sworn they shall be; and God the Holy Spirit vouches for it they shall be. None of God's people shall be cast away, or else the Bible is not true. The whole stability of the covenant rest in their final perseverance. The whole covenant of grace rests upon this—

"He shall present our souls,  
Unblemished and complete,  
Before the glory of his face,  
With joys divinely great."

And therefore they must be preserved out of the snare of the fowler, because otherwise the covenant would be null and void. If one should perish the oath would be broken; if one should be cast away the covenant would be void; and therefore they must be kept secure.

"His honor is engaged to save  
the meanest of his sheep;  
All that his heavenly Father gave,  
His hands securely keep."

I have no time to enlarge upon that subject, which is big with glory, and might afford a topic for many discourses. I now close up by saying, Men and brethren, is this promise yours? "Surely he shall deliver thee." Are you the men? "How can I tell?" you say. Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you, as a guilty sinner, cast yourself wholly on the blood and righteousness of the immaculate Redeemer? I do not ask you whether you are a Wesleyan, a Churchman, a Baptist, an Independent, or a Presbyterian; my only question is, Are you born again? Have you passed from death unto life? Are you "a new creature in Christ Jesus?" Is all your trust put in the Lord Jesus Christ? Has his life become your model, and does his Spirit dwell in your mortal body? If so, peace be unto you; this promise is yours. You may have been the worst of men; but if you have faith in Christ those sins are all forgiven, and you may take this promise to be yours for ever. But if you are self-righteous, self-sufficient, ungodly, careless, worldly, there is no such promise for you; you are in the snare, you shall be there, and you shall perish, unless you repent; for it is written, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." May God save you from perishing, by giving you an interest in the blood of Christ; and to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever and ever.