

PSALM 91 & 1 Timothy 6:1-16

LISTEN TO THIS STORY FOUND IN A PUBLICATION CALLED THE "SUNDAY SCHOOL TIMES". IT SAID:

"ONE MORNING I WANTED TO FEED THE BIRDS. IT WAS GRAY AND COLD AND THE GROUND WAS COVERED WITH SNOW.

I STEPPED OUT ON THE PORCH AND FLUNG THEM HANDFULS OF CRUMBS AND CALLED TO THEM.

BUT THERE THEY SAT, COLD AND HUNGRY AND AFRAID. THEY DID NOT TRUST ME.

AS I SAT AND WATCHED AND WAITED, IT SEEMED TO ME I COULD GET GOD'S VIEWPOINT MORE CLEARLY THAN EVER BEFORE.

HE OFFERS, PLANS, WAITS, HOPES, LONGS FOR ALL THINGS FOR OUR GOOD. BUT HE HAS TO WATCH AND WAIT -AS I DID FOR MY TIMID FRIENDS."

PSALM 91 IS A CALL TO TRUST IN THE LORD OUR GOD AT ALL TIMES.

IT ALSO USES THE IMAGERY OF A BIRD, MOST LIKELY AN EAGLE TO SHOW US GOD ABILITY TO PROTECT.

MUCH LIKE YOUNG BIRDS TAKE SHELTER UNDER THE WINGS OF THEIR MOTHER, SO ALSO GOD WILL SHELTER US.

IN FACT, "REFUGE" IS A KEY WORD IN THE PSALM. AND WHEN WE THINK OF THE MEANING OF REFUGE THE IDEA OF SHELTER OR PROTECTION COMES TO MIND.

TO TAKE REFUGE IN GOD IS TO PUT OUR TRUST IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS, STEADFAST LOVE, AND WISDOM.

IT IS TO AFFIRM THAT NO DANGER OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES CAN SEPARATE US FROM GOD'S LOVE, NOT EVEN DEATH ITSELF IS STRONG ENOUGH TO DO THAT.

IT IS ALSO TO SAY "IN GOD WE TRUST"- **MORE** THAN IN MATERIAL WEALTH, OURSELVES, FRIENDS, FAMILY, COUNTRY.

AND EVEN MORE THAN IN POLITICAL, SOCIAL, OR SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS AND CONNECTIONS.

D. L. MOODY PREACHED ABOUT TRUST, SAYING: "TRUST IN YOURSELF, AND YOU ARE DOOMED TO DISAPPOINTMENT; TRUST IN YOUR FRIENDS, AND THEY WILL DIE AND LEAVE YOU.

TRUST IN MONEY, AND YOU MAY HAVE IT TAKEN FROM YOU; TRUST IN REPUTATION, AND SOME SLANDEROUS TONGUE MAY BLAST IT.

BUT TRUST IN GOD, AND YOU ARE NEVER TO BE CONFOUNDED IN TIME OR ETERNITY."

THIS, UNDERSTANDABLY IS NOT EASY TO DO WHEN LIFE EITHER DEALS US A GREAT REWARD, OR A TERRIBLE BLOW.

AFTER ALL, REWARDS TEND TO BE SEEN AS SOMETHING WE EARN. AND WHEN IT COMES TO TRAGEDY, IF WE CAN FIND NO ONE IN PARTICULAR TO BLAME, WE OFTEN BLAME GOD.

BOTH RESPONSES ARE COMMON FEATURES OF HUMAN NATURE, WHICH TEND TO PULL US AWAY FROM TRUST IN GOD.

YET THE PSALM CALLS US BACK TO GOD AS OUR REFUGE, AND AS THE ONE WHO CAN TRULY LIFT US UP, AND HOLD US IN THE PALM OF HIS HANDS.

THE PSALM PROMISES GOD WILL ANSWER THE CALL, SAVE, AND EVEN GRANT LONG LIFE TO THOSE WHO KNOW HIS NAME AND LOVE HIM.

YET EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT MOST OF US THAT HOW GOD FULFILLS THIS PROMISE IS NOT ALWAYS CLEAR TO US.

INDEED, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN DEATH COMES TOO SOON OR REFUGE SEEMS NOT TO BE FOUND.

THIS IS WHEN TRUST IS PUT TO THE TEST AND WE MAY STRUGGLE TO PERSEVERE IN FAITH.

DAVE PETTIGREW WROTE A SONG CALLED "UNDERTOW", BASED ON BEING CAUGHT IN OCEAN WAVES, AND JESUS SAVING PETER AFTER HE FAILED TO WALK ON WATER.

ONE PORTION SAYS: "I'M GETTING CAUGHT IN THE UNDERTOW, I'M GETTING PULLED DOWN BY THE WAVES...."

IT IS TIMES LIKE THAT WHEN WE ARE OVERCOME BY FEAR, ANGER, OR APATHY, WE ARE REMINDED THAT IT IS IN GOD WE CAN TRUST.

THE CHORUS OF "UNDERTOW" DESCRIBES TRUSTING IN JESUS THIS WAY:

"I'M GOING DOWN TODAY, I'M GETTING CAUGHT IN THE UNDERTOW, THE DARKNESS PULLING AT MY FEET.

BUT YOU ARE HERE RIGHT NOW. I KNOW- YOU'RE NOT LETTING GO."

THE FINAL WORDS OF **PSALM 91** DESCRIBE THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISES EVEN WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS.

IT PROCLAIMS THAT GOD WILL NOT LET GO, FOR HE WILL SHOW US HIS SALVATION.

THIS SALVATION WAS SHOWN IN JESUS AND HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

IT IS AFFIRMED IN SCRIPTURE BY THE WORDS OF PAUL WHO WROTE IN ROMANS 14:8-

"FOR IF WE LIVE, WE LIVE TO THE LORD, AND IF WE DIE, WE DIE TO THE LORD. SO THEN, WHETHER WE LIVE OR WHETHER WE DIE, WE ARE THE LORD'S."

THIS IS A CALL TO TRUST IN GOD AND TO ACT ON THAT TRUST. HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THIS CAN BE DONE:

JOHN WESLEY, WHO IS CALLED THE FATHER OF THE METHODIST CHURCH, WAS ALSO THE SON OF AN ANGLICAN PRIEST.

WHEN JOHN WAS SIX YEARS OLD THE CHURCH PARSONAGE, IN WHICH HIS FAMILY LIVED, CAUGHT FIRE. HIS PARENTS RUSHED EVERYONE OUT OF THE HOME IN TIME.

BUT ONCE OUTSIDE, THEY COUNTED HEADS AND DISCOVERED YOUNG JOHN WAS NOT WITH THEM.

THEN AS THEY LOOKED UP AT THE HOUSE, WHICH WAS QUICKLY BECOMING ENGULFED IN FLAMES, THEY SAW THEIR SON IN AN UPPER STORY WINDOW, ON THE SIDE OF THE BUILDING.

JOHN'S FATHER, A DEVOUT MAN, IMMEDIATELY DROPPED TO HIS KNEES AND STARTED TO PRAY.

HIS MOTHER, WHO WAS A DEVOUT CHRISTIAN, BUT ALSO A PRACTICAL WOMAN RAN TO THE NEIGHBOR'S HOME—

SHE HAD A LADDER PLACED FROM THEIR WINDOW TO REACH THE ONE WHERE JOHN WAS SEEN.

THEN SHE WAS ABLE TO CRAWL OUT ON THE SECURED LADDER AND CALL JOHN TO HER, THUS BRINGING HIM TO SAFETY.

REFLECTING ON THIS INCIDENT, ESPECIALLY AFTER JOHN ACCEPTED JESUS CHRIST AS HIS SAVIOR-

JOHN REALIZED HE LEARNED SOMETHING IMPORTANT FROM BOTH OF HIS PARENTS THAT DAY.

HIS FATHER REMINDED HIM OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL.

AND HIS MOTHER TAUGHT HIM THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PUTTING FAITH INTO ACTION.

TRULY, THERE ARE TIMES- WHEN THE BEST WAY TO EXPRESS OUR FAITH IS TO PRAY, AND TIMES WHEN THE BEST WAY TO DO SO IS TO GET OFF OUR KNEES AND ACT.

SOMETIMES- LIKE WHEN SIX YEAR OLD JOHN WESLEY WAS TRAPPED IN A BURNING BUILDING- BOTH PRAYER AND ACTION ARE NEEDED.

THE APOSTLE PAUL, IN HIS LETTER TO TIMOTHY, WAS SEEKING TO INSTRUCT THE YOUNG MAN ON HOW TO LIVE A PRAYERFUL AND ACTIVE LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN, AS WELL AS AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST.

THE OLDER APOSTLE BROUGHT TO THE YOUNGER ONE'S ATTENTION THE PRIMARY CHRISTIAN VIRTUES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, GODLINESS, FAITH, LOVE, ENDURANCE, AND GENTLENESS.

BUT THEN PAUL EMPHASIZED TO TIMOTHY THE NEED FOR HIM, IN PARTICULAR, TO PUT HIS FAITH INTO ACTION, SAYING:

“FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH. TAKE HOLD OF THE ETERNAL LIFE TO WHICH YOU WERE CALLED...”

AND WHAT IS FAITH? **HEBREWS 11:1** PROCLAIMS: “NOW FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN.”

THIS VERSE TEACHES FAITH IS, IN PART, AN ATTITUDE OF OUR HEART, MIND, AND SOUL

ANOTHER PREACHER ADDED TO THIS UNDERSTANDING BY SUGGESTING THAT:

FAITH IS ALSO---SEEKING TO PUT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD INTO ACTION IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES.

HE FURTHER EXPLAINED THAT FAITH AS PAUL TAUGHT TIMOTHY IS-

“...BELIEVING GOD'S PROMISES AND SETTING OUT TO DO GREAT THINGS IN GOD'S NAME.”

IN OTHER WORDS- FAITH IS BELIEF THAT IS PUT INTO ACTION. IT IS COMMUNION WITH GOD AND LIVING IN THE WORLD AS A CHILD OF GOD.

FAITH IS DEMONSTRATED, AS WELL AS STRENGTHENED BY, BOTH PRAYER AND PRACTICE.

THE LETTER TO TIMOTHY GIVES INSTRUCTION TO HIM AND OTHERS ABOUT HOW TO DO THIS.

IT TELLS US TO NOT GET DISTRACTED FROM WHAT REALLY COUNTS- OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

IN THE GOSPEL STORY ABOUT PETER FAILING TO WALK ON WATER, THE FAILURE OCCURRED WHEN HE BECAME DISTRACTED AND LOOKED AWAY FROM JESUS.

SO ALSO IT IS WITH US. WE CAN GET SO CAUGHT UP WITH WORLDLY DESIRES, RESPONSIBILITIES, OR DIFFICULTIES THAT WE LOOK AWAY FROM JESUS.

IN THIS LETTER, PAUL IS INSTRUCTING THE YOUNG CHURCH LEADER TIMOTHY AND HIS CONGREGATION TO REMEMBER WHAT IS IMPORTANT.

THEY SHOULD AVOID TEACHING THAT LEADS THEM AWAY FROM CHRIST AND HIS MESSAGE.

THEY SHOULD AVOID BEING GOVERNED BY MONEY OR THE LACK OF IT.

AND WHEN TURNING FROM SUCH THINGS THEY SHOULD TURN TO GOD, NOT OTHER SOURCES.

THIS DONE BY PURSING RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH CHRIST, STRIVING TO LIVE A GODLY LIFE, PUTTING TRUST IN GOD THROUGH FAITH.

IT ALSO INCLUDES LOVE, ENDURANCE, AND GENTLENESS, FOR THESE ARE THINGS THAT LAST.

UNLIKE WORLDLY THINGS THAT WE MAY LOSE IN LIFE AND WILL LOSE IN DEATH THE VIRTUES DESCRIBED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGE ARE ENDURING.

THEY ARE THE THINGS WE CAN TAKE WITH US WHEN WE LEAVE OUR EARTHLY LIFE BEHIND.

THUS THE CALL TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT IS A SPIRITUAL ONE.

IT CONCERNS HOLDING ON TO OUR CONFESSION OF FAITH IN JESUS, AND LOOKING TO HIS EXAMPLE.

THIS INCLUDES TRUSTING IN GOD THE FATHER TO RAISE US TO NEW LIFE, MUCH LIKE JESUS WENT TO THE CROSS TRUSTING HE WOULD BE RAISED IN VICTORY.

HOWEVER, PAUL KNOWS THAT STAYING FOCUSED IS NOT AN EASY TASK.

THIS WHY HE COUNSELS TIMOTHY, AND INDEED ALL CHRISTIANS TO KEEP OUR EYES ON JESUS AND TAKE HOLD OF HIM AND THE ETERNAL LIFE HE OFFERS.

ETERNAL LIFE IS BOTH A FUTURE HOPE AND A PRESENT REALITY.

IT IS SUCH, IN THAT OUR SALVATION BEGINS NOW WILL BE COMPLETED WHEN EITHER JESUS RETURNS TO EARTH OR WE ARE BROUGHT HOME TO HEAVEN.

VERSE FIVE OF THE SONG “UNDERTOW” DESCRIBES TAKING HOLD OF CHRIST AND HIS SALVATION IN THIS WAY:

“I’M BREATHING IN, I’M BREATHING OUT, I’M FIGHTING THROUGH THE FEARS AND DOUBT.

I LIFT MY HANDS, I LIFT MY HEART, I’M DROWNING IN YOUR GRACE.

YOUR LOVE IS WASHING OVER ME, I’M FINALLY HOME, I’M FINALLY FREE.”

THE WORDS EXPRESS THE REALITY OF OUR STRUGGLE TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH, AS WELL AS THE HOPE OF FINAL VICTORY.

IT DESCRIBES, IN ITS OWN WAY THE APOSTLE’S VISION OF TIMOTHY, AND INDEED OF ALL CHRISTIANS, GRASPING THE HAND OF CHRIST, WHICH IS TO TAKE HOLD OF ETERNAL LIFE.

LET US PRAY:

ALMIGHTY GOD, YOU CREATE, REDEEM AND SUSTAIN US, EVERY MOMENT OF OUR LIVES. IN YOU WE PLACE OUR TRUST.

WHEN WE FACE ILLNESS, CONFLICT, AND FEAR, YOU ARE OUR STEADFAST PROTECTOR.

WHEN WE SUFFER SETBACK AND LOSS, YOU RESTORE US THROUGH YOUR LOVE.

WHEN OUR LIVES PROSPER AND WE ARE COMFORTABLE, YOU MOVE US TO SHARE OUR BLESSINGS WITH OTHERS.

IN TIMES OF HARDSHIP AND PLENTY, YOU ALONE ARE THE SOURCE OF THE LIFE THAT REALLY IS LIFE.

HOLY GOD, IN LOVE AND TRUST, WE LIVE THE POWER OF YOUR RESURRECTION, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, OUR LORD AND SAVIOR WE PRAISE YOU. AMEN.