

7/14/2019

“God’s Promise of Protection”

Scripture: Isaiah 43:1-3a; Ps. 121:7-8; Mark 13:1-13

Series: Standing on God Promises

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: God promises and provides protection of different kinds and ways.

As we continue our series Standing on God’s Promises found in the Holy Bible, we consider today one of the most perplexing of God’s promises to understand. That is, God’s Promise of Protection.

A couple of related events I will likely always remember occurred between May 31, 1999 and sometime later that summer. My mother and older brother Robert were at home in the house I grew up in Philadelphia. My brother was at the top of the stairway on the third floor, attending to a ceiling leak during a thunderstorm when he heard a loud boom. When he looked up several minutes later, he noticed a glow from under one of the bedroom doors. When he went and opened the door, the room -- which was then being used for storage - was on fire. He quickly closed the door, went downstairs, called the fire department, and proceeded to get my mother out of the house. Thankfully, the fire department was already on the road, returning from another call. They arrived even before my mother could leave the house, proceeded to bring the hose and sledge hammers up to the third floor, and put the fire out, then tore out some ceiling and smashed at least four double-hung Gothic arch windows almost 100 years old to let the smoke out.

After getting the call from my brother, I took a week off to go visit my mother and check out the damage. I boarded or sealed up some windows and brought two or three back with me to Virginia. After spending some time restoring the windows, I was ready to journey back to Philadelphia to replace them. My mother, at this time, had gone to stay with my other brother, Albert, and his family.

I was getting ready to leave for Philadelphia around 10pm and planning to stay overnight at a hotel which Karen was staying at for work a few days in Bethesda, MD. After getting the windows safely blanketed and nestled between the front and back seats on the passenger side of my car - which by the way I had just recently had repainted - I said a prayer before leaving. “Lord, you know how much time I’ve put into these windows. Please keep me safe in my travels. And if something happens, I don’t care about the car, just don’t let these windows get destroyed.

Well, I was driving up I-95 and got off to get a cup of coffee about 45 minutes into the trip. As I was making a left turn onto the ramp to get back on to I-95, I was going very slowly with caution, when someone came flying down over the hill from the opposite direction and broadsided my car on the passenger side! Well, don't you know my prayer was answered! The car was totaled, but I and the windows were not damaged at all!

† **From the time of our birth to the time of our earthly death, security is a basic human need.**

One of our basic needs as human beings is a need for security or safety. We are born into this world totally vulnerable to the elements and other creatures in our environment. Along with that need for security comes a natural desire to feel the protection afforded by another. As infants and children, hopefully that desire or need is met by a parent or parents. In an extended family, there are also aunts, uncles and grandparents. Even siblings and cousins usually provide a measure of security and protection. I could share at least a few stories, as could probably many of you.

As we venture from home, we may look to other adults such as law officers, teachers, or others who are in positions of authority or responsibility. Often, if a young person doesn't feel safe or secure by such adults or sometimes to meet another need – that of belonging – they may turn to peers in both a positive or a negative way; by joining groups like teams or clubs, or cliques and gangs.

As adults, we still have that need for security. Sometimes we try to develop ourselves physically or mentally to meet the dangers we may face that threaten our own security or safety, or those of others we love or value. As groups of people, we form forces or even armies to protect and defend ourselves.

† **The Holy Scriptures provide many witnesses of God's protection, both physical and spiritual.**

We know from historical accounts within and beyond the bible humankind's struggle to be safe and secure from natural and human dangers.

From within our spiritual selves human beings also turn to seek a power or powers beyond ourselves that will protect us. Most, if not all, of the religions of the world, from the so-called primitive to the present, contain an element that addresses this need.

So, what does the bible tell us of our need and God's promise of protection? What have our ancestors learned and affirmed by God's Spirit and their experience? In what and in who can we place our faith and trust?

From the times of ancients like Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, David, Esther and others, God provided protection of those he called to follow God's way and purpose in life.

The writer of Psalm 121 affirms a beautiful image of God's watchful love and protection, and affirms (7-8) "***The LORD will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.***"

David sang (PS 4:8) "***I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.***"

King Solomon is recorded in Proverbs 18:10, "***The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.***"

And Psalm 91 proclaims (1-6, 11-16):

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."

Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. . .

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Even in the times of the alienation of God's people from God's own self, God did not desert or forsake His people. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed to an exiled people of Israel (43:1-3). . .

But now, this is what the LORD says – he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior . . ."

And in that time of exile and captivity, God not only raised Daniel to a place of trust and prominence with the kings of that land, but protected his friends from the fiery furnace

and Daniel in the lion's den (Daniel 3 & 6).

† **God's promise of protection can give us courage and peace to face all of life's circumstances.**

Of course, we should remember that God's promise and provision of safety is not a license to be totally reckless.

Remember how when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness to throw himself down from the Temple, even using the promise of God's protection from Psalm 91(vs. 12). Jesus answered him by saying, "It is also written: '*Do not put the Lord your God to the test.*'" (Mt. 4:7 NIV). The only exception to this is found in God's word through the Prophet Malachi (3:10) on another matter, which we will consider next week.

And Jesus prophesied and foretold his disciples that there would be persecution and suffering to come. Yet God would provide guidance and protection by the Holy Spirit. Here, he was especially speaking about spiritual safety and protection.

In speaking of the coming tribulation, he said (Mark 13:8ff) . . .

"Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."

When we witness the imminent danger and effects of natural or man-made destruction, we might again be reminded and assured of God's protection. And, thanks to the power and leading of the Holy Spirit, we may also witness the loving kindness of all peoples, even of differing faiths and nations.

Let me close with one more story; that of Trish Krider of Florida, from today's Upper Room (7/14/19) devotional. She says . . .

"For the first time in all the years I lived in Florida, a hurricane threatened our home. I had seen the destruction that is created in the wake of a devastating storm, but never before had it been so personal. As we anxiously watched the reports of the pummeling of islands in its path, we prepared our home as best we could and sought safer ground on which to wait it out.

“The waiting was filled with fear, uncertainty, and stress. We had no way of knowing exactly where the storm would hit and what its aftermath would be. We worried not only for ourselves, but for our friends and family. And we prayed.

“Through it all, one constant brought me peace. I knew that God was with us and would see us through, no matter what the hurricane left in its wake. When the winds had died down and we began the trip home, I was at peace knowing that – no matter what awaited us – we would get through it with God by our side.”

She prays, “Heavenly Father, help us remember that no storm in life is too devastating for you to handle. Amen.”

Friends, let us always remember God promises and provides protection of different kinds and ways. And God’s promise of protection can give us courage and peace to face all of life’s circumstances!

Remember and use this or another prayer of affirmation:

The light of God surrounds me;
The love of God enfolds me;
The power of God protects me;
The presence of God watches over me.
Wherever I am, God is!

Thanks be to God! Amen!

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Questions for Reflection:

When and of what was the first time you can remember being afraid?

How have you experienced God’s protection of you? For a loved one?

What sense of assurance, peace, and courage do you feel by knowing God is watching over and protecting you? How have you witnessed that feeling and promise to others?