

## **SLIDE 1. Series: Everyday Disciples**

Teaching: *How Do We Celebrate the Faithfulness of God?*

Sunday November 17.2024

This weekend – we have taken the time to celebrate the faithfulness of God to South Langley Church over the last 60 years.

60 years! Wow!

The first thing I think of when I think about our 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a church is that South Langley Church has been a faith community of Jesus people who have met to sing songs about God and to God, talked to and listened to God, and opened the Word of God together all those Sundays – that's 52 Sundays per year X 60 years – that's 3120 times this church has met for worship as a testimony to its community – a presence that invites people to know Jesus.

Good morning, and welcome to 3121!

Just as a heads-up: I'd like to close this teaching time with your stories – your *fond* or *fun* memories of SLC. We had a # of people do that last night at our GALA. I'd like to give you a chance to share some of your own this morning.

Cue it up!

On this theme – I'd like to put this question to us this morning: *How Do We Celebrate the Faithfulness of God?*

A GALA?! For sure!

The bible mentions a # of parties for the sake of remembering.

There are 7 feasts (or "festivals") in the O.T.: the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of the Harvest, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles.

They all functioned and function still as symbols connecting our Jewish ancestors to the creation account, their rescue from slavery, and the rhythm of sabbath – so – connecting them to life and rescue from death and rest - which – of course - point to Jesus as Life and Salvation and Peace.

And so our stories last night (and this morning) can also act this way – as symbols of God's faithfulness - pointing to Jesus.

Stories told at a party or at a gathering of the church or even just to a friend or family member – stories of how God has demonstrated His faithfulness in our lives.

This is a way to celebrate.

We can also celebrate the faithfulness of God with spiritual markers.

Again, the bible mentions a # of altars of remembrance – to mark and remember important events – times when the Israelites saw God’s faithfulness to them.

One such example is found in the book of Joshua – chp. 4 – when they built an altar of 12 stones – one stone for each tribe – after God parted the river Jordan for the Israelites to safely cross.

Perhaps you have some such things in your life – a marker or a token – that reminds you of a particular time of God’s faithfulness in your life.

I have several such markers on a wall in my office – certifications and diplomas and degrees – all of which marked a transition in my life – all of which act as a reminder that God helped me get to and through those days and times.

I have several books in my library that were given to me as gifts – marking an accomplishment of some sort – with hand-written notes of congratulations.

I have one shelf in my library that is full of tokens – which act as reminders of short-term missions trips I got to lead to Jamaica WI, to Waveland Mississippi, and to the Baja of Mexico. Deep, rich memories of God being enough for me - my life and salvation and peace – symbolized by a Bob Marley candle, a coffee table book published by Hungry for Life with a pic. of me in the middle of nowhere Chihuahua, and a cactus-carved cross (among other things).

## **SLIDE 2. Stories and stuff – ways to celebrate the faithfulness of God.**

If these are HOW-TO ways to celebrate and remember God’s faithfulness – Psalm 91 reminds us of WHY.

Reading Key: **A priest. Someone praying to God. The Lord.**

*Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty* (v. 1).

The priest opens the Psalm with two Hebrew names/titles for God: Elyon – the Most High and Shaddai – the Almighty – most important and most powerful. A safe person/place to dwell for those who believe.

The pray-er replies...

*I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust"* (v. 2).

In light of God being the most important and most powerful of all beings - the pray-er chooses to trust God. He testifies that God is his refuge and fortress – words that imply places of safety and security.

The priest then goes on to list various dangers to symbolize ways in which God can protect His people. These vary from the symbolic snare of temptation to disease to enemies – both human and spiritual.

*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. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.*

*You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.* (vv. 3-8).

There are a # of stories in the bible where God protects and delivers his people from harm – like when God delivered the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land – like when God protected David from King Saul.

But – there are other stories where God's people suffered and sometimes died – like Job's tribulations – like Jeremiah being jailed – like Paul being shipwrecked and eventually martyred.

And so it will be for us. Life will come at us. Sometimes God will protect or deliver.

Sometimes He won't.

But – with God – we can be assured by this priest as was this pray-er then – that God will cover us and provide refuge – that He will be our shield and rampart - when we turn to Him.

So – rather than seeing these verses as promises that apply in any situation – it'd be better to view them in the context of v. 8 – which suggests that God will preserve His people in the midst of His "punishment of the wicked" – that a with-God-life includes protection and deliverance; a without-God-life includes punishment.

And the bible says – beyond this – that a with-God-life produces endurance and character and hope through suffering (Ro. 5:3-4) – among other good things – for those called according to His purpose (Ro. 8:28).

Or as author and pastor, James Montgomery Boice observes...

"God does not always lift a Christian out of troubles. Sometimes it is his will that we endure them and profit from them. We are told in Romans that we acquire hope, develop character, and learn perseverance from what we suffer (Ro. 5:3-4). When we go through such circumstances, God goes through them with us. He sustains us in our sufferings."

We might think of it this way: While absolute safety is not guaranteed in life – those who trust in God by obeying His will and wisdom are not subject to unnecessary or unredeemable dangers.

In fact – they are protected and delivered from a great many of them.

Which – admittedly – would have been for them – and is hard for us now - to see - sometimes – what didn't happen – what God kept us from – what He pulled us out of.

Speaking to the priest – the pray-er says...

*If you say, "The Lord is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling...(v. 9).*

The priest sees where he's going and finishes the thought...

*... no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent (v. 10).*

For those who call God their refuge and make Him the most important person in their lives – God will keep from overwhelming harm and complete disaster – even if events would affect their death – because – with God – there will come a time and place when and where *no moth or rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal* (Mt. 6:20).

This is eternal life – something that is yet to come – but also something in which we can participate here and now – in a with-God-life – a life with the One and only eternal One – who is life and salvation and peace.

The priest goes on to tell the pray-er HOW God will protect and deliver him...

*For he (God) 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.* (vv. 11-12).

This is consistent with what the writer of the book of Hebrews tells us – that angels are *ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation* (Heb. 1:14).

Part of their job description is to guard believers and lift them up to keep them from stumbling.

Satan knows this and used this knowledge to tempt Jesus in the wilderness – to throw Himself down from the top of the temple in Jerusalem – then quotes this very verse - *For God 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.*

Jesus responded by quoting Deut. 6:16: *Do not put the Lord your God to the test* – which is instructive for us – that we shouldn't either - put ourselves in unnecessary danger – expecting or demanding that God would protect or deliver us from it through angelic intervention.

This said – the priest indicates that angels will guard and lift and protect us in all our ways – even including – using word-pictures...

*You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent* (v. 13).

Lions and serpents are symbolic for either people or demonic spirits – who oppose God’s servants – both human and angelic.

We will not be “eaten” by proverbial lions, and we will not be “poisoned” by figurative snakes. More than that – we will overcome them. Believers can oppose those who oppose us on the basis of our faith in God.

Whether it be in prayer: “Help me, Lord.” Whether it be speaking, “Get behind me Satan.” Whether it be in partnering with God to do what is good (Eph. 2:8).

The Psalm ends with a shift - to the perspective of God. The Lord speaks directly to the pray-er or any man or woman who loves Him and acknowledges His name...

*“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.*

*He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”* (vv. 14-16).  
Psalm 91.

Effectively – God pronounces several blessings on those who put their trust in Him...

### **SLIDE 3**

- 1. His protection** (“I will rescue him... I will protect him... I will deliver him”).
- 2. His power** (“I will answer him”).
- 3. His presence** (“I will be with him”).
- 4. His provision** (“I will satisfy him and show him my salvation”).

Now – circling back to where we began – I wonder if we might have stories of God’s faithfulness that might fall under any of these blessings...

### **SLIDE 4**

**When do you remember God protecting or delivering you from something or someone?**

**When do you remember God answering a prayer?**

**When do you remember having a clear sense of God’s presence?**

**When do you remember God providing for you?**

Perhaps I can begin...

I remember meal after meal being provided by God through many of you when I had my left knee replaced this past summer AND – in the first 20 months of my being with you – when I was still commuting from Chilliwack – meal after meal shared in your homes.

I remember a clear sense of God's presence when Ed Van Bergen prayed for me at pickleball days before my surgery – and when Wilma Kohen prayed for me after the service when our 2 visitors so rudely interrupted our worship gathering.

Both of those prayers were answered: the one for a successful surgery and recovery – the other for peace and wisdom.

This said – I have also had a clear sense of God's presence – all on my own.

Just this week – during the time when I was putting my thoughts together for this teaching – I was washing my hands – and for whatever reason – I stopped – and looked directly at the stream of water coming from the tap.

I was grateful for the warmth of the water – because my hands were cold. I let the tap run. I let myself enjoy the hot water rolling over my knuckles and fingers and palms. And as I looked at that stream of water pouring out of my tap – it also occurred to me how fortunate I was to have water – clean water – anytime I needed it – right there at my disposal. Just a tap-turn away!

I stopped. Breathed in deeply. And said a quiet prayer of thanks to God. I sensed His presence in all of this – and esp. when I seem to hear Him say to me, "You're welcome."

Me walking away with a symbolic remembrance that He is enough.

The first of the questions and the last of my stories is harder to track.

Of course – I am grateful that God has saved me from sin and death through His Son, Jesus Christ. There is no greater delivery than this.

But – what has God protected me or Jackie or my kids from or saved us from – in our day to day lives?

A traffic accident? Jobs we didn't get that wouldn't have been a good fit anyway? False accusations or criticisms or lies that never made it our way? Demonic temptation?

I choose to believe that God has protected me at different times – from all of these things!

And so I thank Him! I thank Him, for instance, for all those times I've prayed for safety as I/we have travelled. I've asked for it. It's happened. I don't want to be ungrateful!