

“Living Robustly . . . or Just Plain Well”
Sermon for 16 August 2015
Text: Psalm 91:14-16

Psalm 91:14-16 English Standard Version (ESV)

**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.”**

My hope of finishing this sermon series faded as I prepared this message—there is rather more here than could possibly be shared in a single sermon. These verses mark a profound shift in voice. These are words written as words spoken by God—the other voices (reader, choruses—or whatever) fade into the background. The words are those God speaks to someone and He does so in the first person: **I will rescue him . . . protect him . . . I will answer him . . . be with him in trouble . . . deliver and honor him . . . satisfy him . . . and show him my salvation.** Eight things that God will do to him **who loves me . . . who acknowledges My Name.** I suppose I could hold these things at arm’s length and live well; or I could seize them passionately (ferociously even) declaring openly, “I really don’t care who he is . . . I want “him” to be me.”

I do not have wander very far afield to find how apt the second posture is! It is right in verse 14: **he holds fast to me in love.** The I want what he has is right there; even more poignantly in the Hebrew where “clinging” is the notion behind **holds fast.** It is more like tethered, or like a ship tied to the dock—secured, made fast. So my reaction to these divine promises is one of fierce desire: “I want what he has.” If there is any such thing as sanctified selfishness, or holy jealousy, I would suggest that we are in the neighborhood right now! This is what propelled me from being a God-fearer to becoming a full-fledged Christian. When I saw what I wanted (or heard as the case may be), I wanted it—when I decided to “cling” I was, at once secured!

I acknowledged His name. How does one do that? When we cry out, “I want you to be my Lord and Savior, Jesus,” we are acknowledging His Name. For He is Lord and Savior and Jesus. Once again, when I affirm that I am at that instant, protected. So, secured and protected because of love and acknowledgement. Not bad, but also, not common enough! This business of naming is huge; it relates to our personal identity. This is huge item in our culture and a key disparity between believers and everyone else. When I decided, through grace, to cling to God and acknowledged His Name, by the gift of saving faith, *I was adopted into the family of God.* This is my identity! It is a gift extended to me by God *on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ.* So, for me, as for every saved individual, we receive as a gift what others experience frustration and futility over.

Here is what the world says, this is the shape of their captivity (for which we hold the key to their liberation!): *you must create your own identity*. You must reach into the depths of who you are, locate your deepest desires and authentically actuate them or fail as a person. Therefore, the path to identity is through performance and through the acclaim and accreditation of others! This is not merely trying and difficult; it is actually quite impossible. Restlessness and confusion are common fare on this journey to becoming the uniquely you. And the risks, costs and dangers are high.

Scripture addresses this need for identity very differently. First, we begin from the position of knowing *we are given our own identity*, a personal name (Isa. 62:2: **The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give**. And Rev. 2:17: “**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.”**). We are *given* a name which grows on us, unfolds for us as it were through our entire lives.

The culture urges us to express our selves, explore our deepest needs, excluding any consideration of God’s purpose and design in making us for Himself. This is difficult, if not a dead end street. There are things within, and experiences we have which hinder and hamper the unaided quest for the “true me.” Our faith helps us achieve what the worldling’s seek by effectively dealing with those barriers to the self we should be! We have the help of the One we cling to . . . the One we acknowledge.

God does answer prayer, extend comfort and protection, He delivers from dangers, traps and snares. God escalates a believer’s honor, sometimes adding length of days and fullness of blessing to *whomever calls upon Me, lives with Me*. God has and has caused His people to live in peace, escape massacre and war; they enjoy peace and joy in the midst of awful times because of the believer’s intelligent love—and those who trust in Him are exceedingly precious to Him! Therefore we ought earnestly and eagerly to obtain this standing near God. It is a glorious thing when God sets His loved ones on high—let the redeemed of the Lord say so. This is how we are to receive: **When he calls to Me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.** (v.15) When God answers him, one meaning is that of spiritual securement: the ascension of the believer into heaven, into the very presence of God.

Therefore, we must allow that the **long life** alluded to in verse 16 has as at least one reference: eternal life. Doubtless, many, full and satisfying years in this life were considered a great blessing to the first Jews hearers. But, beyond that blessing now, we shall sit down to *a feasting that shall never end*. The negative inference of this blessing is that disobedience (and unbelief) shorten life, whereas obedience prolongs life *even unto eternity!* True religion lengthens the years of a man’s life, but the next stop, heaven is forever.

God preserves our lives in this so that we might magnify His Name and perform our duties to His glory and praise. This is significant stuff, unlike our trophies, sport's awards and professional careers. (I am unconvinced that we shall have names on our doors in heaven; partly because it will not matter and partly because it will be totally unnecessary.

He liveth long who liveth well
 All other life is short and vain.
 He liveth longest who can tell
 Of living most for heaven's gain.

Or, so Horatius Boner writes, concluding:

He liveth long who liveth well
 All else being flung away
 He liveth longest who can tell
 Of true things truly done each day.

Salvation means living out the fullest measure of one's days. That returns us to the word: robust. Live robustly. Do so each and every day. Then, at life's end, you can leave heart satisfied and content. Yes, you will have feasted well here and now, but you will arise from this table's fare toward a better, more festive day. Therefore, let anticipation inform your gait—the King for you doth wait. There an "oh, so great salvation" is held for you. . . in all its all-ness. Why live well, it is hoped for us that we should live greatly.

Nothing will be held back anymore for by our change we shall be able to sustain it. There, knowing and being known, all things will come clear . . . there all things pure pertain, forever and ever.

Amen.