

Sermon on A Covenant of Protection for Dwelling in the Most High God

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Text:

Psalms 91:9-13 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.

1 Introduction

On Monday, April 16, 2007 Cho Seong Hui, a Virginia Tech student murdered 32 students and professors. This has been unsettling for most people as they search for the reasons why. Individuals are beginning to wonder how they can protect themselves in a situation like this. There are several views on how to protect yourself in a situation like this:

- There is nothing you can do to prevent a situation like this. If it is your fate then it is your fate. This is a fatalistic attitude but possibly removes any anxiety.
- The government must put measures in place to prevent anything like the Virginia Tech massacre. A woman correctly mentioned that Americans have too much faith in the government. It is humanly impossible to protect the vast land mass of the US and its numerous people. George Washington University's president in an article in the Washington Post said when the university suspended a potential murderer the press criticized them and now the press is criticizing Virginia Tech for not suspending Cho as a potential murderer. Human means cannot provide the protection you expect.
- As an individual you can use demonic powers through occultism to protect yourself. The devil will protect you a few times and then he'll kill you himself.
- Finally, as an individual you can use the power of God as your protection.

Our main passage begins with a big "if": "If you make the Most High your dwelling." What does this mean? How do you satisfy this "if" condition? The answers to these questions are important because if you satisfy this condition then you receive the utmost and impenetrable protection from the Most High God.

When a hen senses the approach of a vulture she gathers her chicks and spreads out her wings to cover them. If a chick forces its way out of its mother's wings then it becomes food for the vulture. In the same way, God provides protection for those who dwell in the shadow of the almighty.

Let's explore what this big "if" condition means by examining the episode of Rahab and the two spies as recorded in Joshua chapter 2.

2 The approach of Israel toward Jericho put fear in the people of Jericho

God demonstrated his sovereign power over nature and over great kingdoms when he split the Red Sea and used the Israelites to conquer some world-renowned kingdoms. Israel's reputation as a conquering and insurmountable foe spread to the nations. And as Israel approached Jericho the people of Jericho were terrified and did not know what to do. It is as if suddenly Al Qaeda announces that they have a cell in your neighborhood ready to blow up the neighborhood. You know that Al Qaeda is crazy and can commit a suicide attack. You will be extremely terrified. And such was the terror that was upon the people of Jericho.

In that state of terror, two spies from Israel arrived in Jericho at Rahab's house. Just as in the US currently where the government has asked all residents to report any suspicious activity so also I believe the government of Jericho had alerted its residents. It was no surprise therefore that word got to the government that two Israelite spies were staying at Rahab's brothel. The government immediately dispatched soldiers to arrest the two spies. When they came to Rahab's house she faced a choice as to whether to turn the spies over to the soldiers.

In their state of terror, the people of Jericho had the four options I stated earlier as to how to deal with the impending doom. Rahab also had to choose one of these options:

- There is nothing she can do to prevent the attack. Just leave it to fate. If she dies, she dies.
- She must work with the government to prevent the attack.
- As an individual she can invoke the Jericho gods to protect her.
- Finally, as an individual she can appeal to the power of Israel's God to protect her.

3 Rahab negotiated a covenant of protection with the Israelites

Rahab chose the last option and so when the Jericho soldiers arrived at her house she lied and told them that the two spies had left already, while she hid them in her attic. When the soldiers left, Rahab negotiated a covenant of protection with the Israelite spies as recorded in Joshua 2:17-20.

Joshua 2:17-20 ¹⁷ The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us ¹⁸ unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. ¹⁹ If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. ²⁰ But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

Let's analyze the four terms of this covenant.

3.1 Covenant Term 1: She must put a scarlet cord in a window

The first term of the covenant of protection is stated in Joshua 2:18a: "unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down." This covenant term means that Rahab must tie the scarlet cord to the window and ensure that the scarlet cord stays attached. This scarlet cord served as a means of identifying the house that is to be protected and preserved. Without the scarlet cord it is subject to destruction just like all the other Jericho houses.

This identification by the scarlet cord is similar to the blood of goats that was used to identify Israelite homes in Egypt during the night of the Passover. The marked homes became the protectorate of the Most High. The angel of death did not strike those homes but struck any home that did not have the blood identification. (See Exodus 2:13)

In the same way when we become Christians the blood of Jesus serves as identification that we are in the dwelling of the Most High as the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 10:19, "we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus." You must remain immersed in the blood of Jesus to retain your rights to protection. Jesus teaches us that to remain

immersed in his blood is to be obedient to Jesus: John 15:10, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.”

3.2 Covenant Term 2: All family must be in the house

The second term of the covenant of protection is stated in Joshua 2:18b: “unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house.” This covenant term requires that Rahab must ensure that she is in the house. She must convince all her relatives to come and remain in the house. This is a call for Rahab to evangelize her extended family. The prostitute must proselytize noble citizens! Also, because she doesn't know when the Israelite attack will occur, she must be diligent to stay in the house and find a way to ensure that her relatives do not abscond from the house. This is a tall order that requires planning. To make it easier for them to remain in the house she must acquire enough food, drink, and other provisions to sustain them till the Israelite attack.

Because a disaster like the Virginia Tech massacre comes unannounced you must be ever prepared. Your only preparation is to remain in the house of God, dwelling in the secret place of the Most High. Regardless of what attractions are outside, you must stay in the house. Outside the house of God, it may be sunny, people may be making good business, people may be dancing in the street, or people may be advertising protection of various kinds. But you must focus and stay in the house of God. If you go chasing after the quick-fix prophets you will end up exposing yourself to destruction because you would have left the dwelling of the Most High God.

3.3 Covenant Term 3: Anyone outside the house is not protected

The third term of the covenant of protection is stated in Joshua 2:19: “If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him.” This term of the covenant may appear to be a rehash of the second term which requires them to stay in the house. It is not a rehash but a clarification that is typical of a legal contract. The term clarifies that the protection stipulated in the covenant is not for Rahab and her family but it is for those who are found in Rahab's house at the time of the Israelite attack. If Rahab or anyone was outside the house they are to be destroyed. In a similar way, your protection is not based on your human relationships – pastor's child, elder's wife, or member's husband. Your protection is based on you personally dwelling in the house of God.

A shepherd usually gathers his sheep together at night and keeps them in the barn. But one day one of the sheep decided he wanted to find out what it was like to be outside in the night. So after the lockdown, he got up pushed a window and went out. As he walked out enjoying his freedom from the restrictions of the barn and the shepherd, a fox lurched from the darkness and attacked it to death. The sheep had left the protection of the shepherd and the barn. The sheep had violated the covenant of protection and suffered the disastrous consequences.

So it is with serving the Lord. Our covenant is not to go outside the dwelling of the Most High. Yet many of us take liberties. “A little bit of sin will not hurt.” Then one sin turns into many sins or it becomes a permanent way of your life. You have permanently taken yourself out of the dwelling of the Most High. You are now open for destruction.

Or you say, “Let me check-out this prophet; they say he has powers.” You start skipping church to attend his programs. He starts telling you things about yourself. Sooner or later you are so enthralled with him that you no longer have the desire to go to the church that just teaches you the Bible. You have permanently taken yourself out of the dwelling of the Most High. You are now open for destruction.

Or you say, “Today I am tired and so missing church one day will not hurt.” One day turns into several days. Sooner or later you start praying less and not reading your Bible and then you find more excuses for not going to church anymore. You have permanently taken yourself out of the dwelling of the Most High. You are now open for destruction.

It is because of all these examples I have given that is why the Bible says in Hebrews 10:25, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

3.4 Covenant Term 4: She must not undermine the mission of the Israelites

The fourth term of the covenant of protection is stated in Joshua 2:20: “But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.” This condition calls Rahab to loyalty to the mission of the Israelites. It is a command not to undermine, intentionally or inadvertently, the mission of the Israelites. She must teach and hold her family to this level of loyalty.

If you love God you will be loyal to the church. If you say things against the church you are undermining God’s mission since the church belongs to God. If you act deliberately or negligently against the church, you are undermining the church, which is God’s mission. We’ve

had situations where someone falls into open sin and wants to leave the church to avoid discipline. Instead of leaving quietly, they create a strife with a leader or member and use that strife as the reason for leaving while maligning the church and undermining the mission and work of God. In whatever way you do it, if you undermine the church and cause people to leave the church or prevent new people from joining the church then you are undermining the mission of God. If you undermine the mission and work of God then he nullifies his covenant of protection with you.

4 Rahab fulfilled all the Covenant Terms and secured her protection

Rahab promptly performed her part of the covenant as stated in Joshua 2:21, “‘Agreed,’ she replied. ‘Let it be as you say.’ So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.” Rahab did not procrastinate nor did she have a change of mind about the impending doom. She performed all her part fulfilling the four terms of the covenant. And so, when Israel destroyed Jericho, “Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho-- and she lives among the Israelites to this day.” (Joshua 6:25) Rahab, the prostitute, became a part of the lineage of Jesus Christ as a result of her faithfulness to the covenant of protection with God.

If you remain faithful to God and his church not only will God protect you but he will bless you abundantly. Our main passage then describes more fully God’s actions to protect you if you remain faithful to him:

Psalm 91:9-13 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.

5 Conclusion

The Virginia Tech massacre has scared everyone. The only comfort I can offer you is that there is a God who is able and is willing to protect you as stated in our main passage. But there is a condition for getting that protection: you must dwell in the Most High God. The story of Rahab and the spies explains to us how to satisfy that condition. The approach of the all-conquering Israel toward Jericho put fear in the people of Jericho. Rahab had a choice between God's protection and the world's protection. She chose God's protection and negotiated a covenant of protection with the Israelites. There were four terms in the covenant that Rahab had to fulfill: (1) She must put a scarlet cord in a window; (2) All family must be in the house; (3) Anyone outside the house is not protected; and (4) She must not undermine the mission of the Israelites. Rahab fulfilled all the covenant terms and secured her protection. We must also take Rahab's attitude and follow the same terms to secure our protection in this world.