

of the Lord!” (Job 1:21). God is the God over all the living. He is also the God of pestilence, wars, and disasters, too. Nothing happens or doesn’t happen apart from His will and power. Whenever plague or pestilence wrought disaster upon God’s people in the Scriptures, it was always a consequence of the people’s unfaithfulness, and it was God’s way of bringing His people to repentance and faith. This is why when calamity strikes, our first response should always be repentance; that with humble hearts we may beseech the Lord’s mercy for Jesus’ sake – mercy to get us through the fiery trial.

When we do, we have the Scriptures by which the Holy Spirit brings us help, comfort, and encouragement. Look at **Psalm 91**, for example. The Christian boldly confesses, **“I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”** ³ **For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.** ⁴ **He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.** ⁵ **You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day,** ⁶ **nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.** ⁷ **A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.** ⁸ **You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.** ⁹ **Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place-- the Most High, who is my refuge--** ¹⁰ **no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent” (vv. 2-10).**

Notice the Psalmist doesn’t say, “You won’t get sick.” He doesn’t even say, “You won’t die.” The recompense of the wicked refers to their damnation because they didn’t trust in the Lord. When it says these bad things won’t “come near you” or no plague will come near “your tent”, it doesn’t mean those who take refuge in the Lord are exempt from these dangers. Instead it means God will guard you in body and soul *even in the midst of them* (TLSB note, Ps 91:10). For the Christian life is not merely an earthly life. Though at God’s appointed time, death will come to us all unless Christ returns first, Jesus says in **John 10:28**, **“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”** Earthly life and comforts are fleeting. Eternal life is without end! Though ten thousand people might fall around us, the Christian will not be deterred because the Lord is our rock and our fortress. The Lord spares His people of spiritual disaster. Think of the words we just sang. Christ is “our health while we are living, our life when we shall die” (LSB #539). When the Christian makes the LORD his dwelling place, no evil can befall him regardless of what happens to him on this side of glory!

This all matters because the Lord spoke the words of our Gospel reading to the disciples in order to keep them from falling. The word translated “falling away” in our text is not the word for apostasy, which means a falling away from the faith. Instead it’s *σκανδαλισθητε*; cause to stumble, be offended.

You see the help, comfort, and encouragement of the Holy Spirit is not that the Holy Spirit will spare us from suffering as if *because* we are Christians nothing bad will happen to us. Though, it needs to be said God indeed spares us much suffering because He is merciful! Instead, the help, comfort, and encouragement of the Holy Spirit enables us to face suffering with confidence and boldness and the assurance of the Gospel. Jesus is our confidence as we sang in the opening hymn! Jesus was encouraging His disciples so that they wouldn’t fall away when the world started killing them off; that they wouldn’t stumble in the Faith thinking the Lord had abandoned them. Jesus was preparing them to suffer for His name’s sake! They trusted God’s Word! When Jesus ascended into heaven He made a promise: **“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).** The Christian is never alone! The Christian never suffers alone! The Holy Spirit is here for you in His Word to help, to comfort, and to encourage. Jesus says, **“Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28).** Come to Jesus. Meet Him at the altar where He comes to you in His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. And trust His word that what He gives you is for the strengthening and preserving of both body and soul. He delivers you from pestilence and disaster; from the terrors of the night and Satan’s arrows that fly by day.

The same Word of God which encouraged the disciples then continues to encourage you today. The Word cannot but achieve the purpose for which God sends it (**Isa 55:11**). It will keep you from falling, and preserve you steadfast in the one true faith until life everlasting. Until next year, Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Amen.