

## **SCRIPTURE: Psalm 104**

### **Psalm 104**

- 1 Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.
- 2 He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent
- 3 and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind.
- 4 He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.
- 5 He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.
- 6 You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.
- 7 But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight;
- 8 they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them.
- 9 You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.
- 10 He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains.
- 11 They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst.
- 12 The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches.
- 13 He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work.
- 14 He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth:
- 15 wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.
- 16 The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
- 17 There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine trees.
- 18 The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the coney.
- 19 The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down.
- 20 You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl.
- 21 The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God.
- 22 The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens.
- 23 Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening.
- 24 How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.
- 25 There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small.
- 26 There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.
- 27 These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time.
- 28 When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.
- 29 When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.
- 30 When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.
- 31 May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works—

- 32 he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.
- 33 I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
- 34 May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.
- 35 But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more. Praise the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD.

**Sermon Text: *Song of Solomon 2:9***

- 9 My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.

***Psalm 121***

**Psalm 121 A song of ascents.**

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from?
- 2 My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber;
- 4 indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
- 6 the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.
- 7 The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life;
- 8 the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Dear Hunters, Hunted, and Redeemed by God:

You are probably sitting here, looking for a deer hunter theme for this service and wondering, “Why is John preaching on the Song of Solomon?” Certainly seems like an odd pairing. The Song of Solomon is known for being a love poem and certain facets of love expressed between lovers. Some of these facets are so well-known that when I suggested this text to Pastor Sonnemann, and recited it to him, there was silence. I asked what’s wrong. He laughed and said, “Nothing. I’m just waiting for the anatomical reference.”

But Solomon mentions more than anatomy in this Song. Did you know he also mentions the outdoors? Solomon mentions nineteen plants and thirteen animals. It obviously fits in with Solomon’s reputation of his knowledge of nature (1 Kings 4:33). So as you head outdoors in search of “The Trophy,” think about the plants and animals Solomon mentions in this book.

The Song is mainly about love. At the basic level it is the love between a husband and wife. It is the picture of marriage. Taking it a step further, it is illustrative of the love God shows to His Bride, the Church. Ironically, the Song was read every Passover in the days when Jesus walked upon the earth. And so it shouldn’t surprise us that Jesus used illustrations from weddings and marriages when speaking at Passover time! In the marriage illustrations in Scripture a common theme comes out: Jesus’ love for his Church. Jesus looks out for the Church and he protects the Church. Tonight’s text tells us that **“Our Lord, Like A Stag, Watches Over Us.”** *He is near us as He keeps an eye on us. He protects us like a stag protects his does.*

**“Our Lord, Like A Stag, Watches Over Us.”** *He is near us as He keeps an eye on us.* No doubt as you heard the verse, **“My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice,”** you may have wondered about what kind of person this lover is. It almost sounds like the lover is a peeping tom! But what we have is a lover keeping watch over his beloved. Notice what the beloved is saying. These are words of admiration. These are words spoken in safety and confidence that a protector stands nearby, someone who is trusted and whom the beloved loves and is loved by the lover. These are not words of surprise or fear or of shame.

All too often people are afraid of God watching them. They feel the shame of sin. They know their imperfections. Quite frankly, sometimes I feel a little queasy knowing God is watching. It means that I have no secrets. As the psalmist says, “[The Lord] knows our inmost thoughts.” I am laid bare before God, with all my faults, all my sins, all my hypocrisies open for God to see. With sin, it seems like God is a “peeping tom.”

So, how can the writer of tonight's verse see God watching us as something positive, something that we should cherish and treasure and indeed welcome? We can welcome and embrace God watching us because of what it means.

First of all, God cares enough to hang around with us. Think how important it is for us to have someone to be with. Many crave such attention they find themselves in bad relationships and bad marriages. But with humans, there is usually some quality that makes us desirable—a sense of humor, trustworthiness, good looks, a well-stocked wallet. Humans rarely accept another human unconditionally. But God accepts us for who we are. He stays with us. When Adam and Eve fell into sin he didn't throw up His hands in disgust and give up on the human race. Instead, he gave us his promise—a promise of a Savior who would redeem us from our sin. Then, he fulfilled that promise by living for awhile among us. He paid the price for our sins by dying in our place. This all is assured by his resurrection, which is the ultimate victory over sin, death, and Satan.

God also cares enough to know us. Who in your life really knows you? How much do you trust that person? Take that many levels up and you still don't come close to how much God knows us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. Do you know what will happen once you walk out those doors tonight? None of us knows what will happen, but God knew what would happen before we even came in through those doors, before we even got up this morning, before we were born, yes before he even created the world.

Why is it a comfort that God knows us? It goes back to the first point—despite knowing us, God still remains with us. He still went ahead and created the world. And he still went ahead and created each one of us. And as the old saying goes, “God doesn't make junk.”

**“Our Lord, Like A Stag, Watches Over Us.”** *He also protects us like a stag protects his does.* Do you know what a buck does, especially in mating season, if he senses his does are threatened? About a month ago I read the unfortunate story of a farmer in Minnesota. It seems he kept deer as pets of a sort. Maybe they were hurt and he was nursing them back to health—the article didn't really say. What it did say was rather gruesome. The wife found it odd that her husband was a bit late for lunch. When she went to look out the door, the buck was wandering loose in the yard. She found her husband gored in the pen. Authorities speculate the buck was protecting his does in the pen—even though he knew the farmer who had been providing for him. The protective instinct was that great.

You and I—all of us—are tempted and assaulted and assailed each day by Satan, the Accuser. For some, maybe it's the lure of drugs or alcohol or sexual sins. For some it's the temptation to be disagreeable with a spouse or children. For some of us it's not being totally productive in the work environment for our boss. Some of us have pasts—and Satan works on us to doubt that God could ever forgive us. Or we feel abandoned by God—not because God has abandoned us, but because Satan has convinced us with that lie.

But while we are tempted, we have promises from God. He will not tempt us beyond what we are able. And he will always provide a way out for us. There was a couple when I vicared who were expecting a baby. But they received news that prospective parents never want to hear—the baby would have serious deformities and quite frankly the child’s “quality of life” would be very poor (by human standards). The child’s lifespan, if it survived birth, was expected to be short—possibly days. They were encouraged to abort this child. Yes, this couple struggled with this decision. But in the end, with prayerful consideration, they decided this child was God’s own child as well and God would care for this child and give them the strength to cope. A week after they made their decision, our Lord spared them much further agony by taking this child home to be with him.

Definitely we cannot withstand such temptations on our own. And God does not leave us unequipped or unprepared! He gives us weapons to dress as soldiers for the battle. He gives us his Word and his Sacraments to build and strengthen that faith—even while that faith is exercised by temptation. It is for the use of these tools that the writer to the Hebrews encourages us not to give up meeting with one another.

God also protects us in our lives. No doubt most, if not all, of us can recall a “brush with death” experience—maybe even falling out of a tree stand or an errant bullet in the woods. God sends his angels to guard us each and every day. We are preserved until he calls us home, for which he has also protected us. He protects us from the accusations of Satan by shielding us with the blood of his Son. This blood deflects all flaming arrows Satan shoots at us—arrows of temptation, arrows of guilt, arrows of doubt.

As most of you head out into the woods, take a look at the nature around you. Observe as Solomon did the beauty of that nature. Remember the beauty of the love of a spouse or special person in your life. And reflect on the beauty of God’s love, a love that, **Like A Stag, Watches Over Us.”** *He is near us as He keeps an eye on us.* Not as a peeping tom, but as one who loves us, knows us, and has our interests in mind. *He protects us like a stag protects his does.* He protects us from Satan and his lies and deceits. And he protects us in this life for life eternal.

Amen.