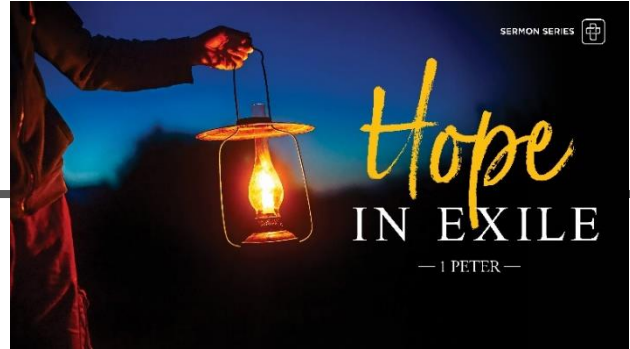


What Can the Righteous Do?

Psalm 11:1-7

David Sunday September 6, 2020



We're appreciative of the deacons and the service they give to our church family and community. We're going to have a membership meeting at the conclusion of our morning worship service on the last Sunday of September, the 27th, and will be affirming two new deacons and reaffirming a couple terms for elders and deacons as well.

As long as we're acknowledging those who serve, I just want to say a word of thanks to Ryan Graci. We thank you for serving as custodian in our church these last few years and for serving the Lord with such gladness. Ryan is going to be moving to Wisconsin to go a "gap year" study term up there, so he won't be around us as much. Ryan, we're really grateful for your great attitude and the work you've done for the church.

We finished 1 Peter last week. What a timely letter that was for us as a church during this season. We're going to start a new sermon series next week, Lord willing, in the book of Deuteronomy. Today I want to turn your attention to a Psalm. Please open your Bible to Psalm 11. God's word to us tonight from this Psalm is a word to strengthen our confidence in Him. It's *"For the choir director. Of David."*

We don't know the exact historical circumstance of this Psalm, but we do know that at different times in his life, David was under great oppression from King Saul, being chased around by him. Then he dealt with the revolt of his son, Absalom. He had plenty of opportunities to take refuge in the Lord. That's what this Psalm is about. Hear God's Word and worship Him as I read Psalm 11:

*¹ I have taken refuge in the LORD.
How can you say to me,
"Escape to the mountains like a bird!"
² For look, the wicked string bows;
they put their arrows on bowstrings
to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart.*

³ *When the foundations are destroyed,
what can the righteous do?"*

⁴ *The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD—his throne is in heaven.
His eyes watch;
his gaze examines everyone.*

⁵ *The LORD examines the righteous,
but he hates the wicked
and those who love violence.*

⁶ *Let him rain burning coals and sulfur on the wicked;
let a scorching wind be the portion in their cup.*

⁷ *For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds.
The upright will see his face.*

This is God's Word. Thanks be to God.

Kate and I were driving through our home town of Kenosha the last week of August. These were the words that came into my mind as I thought of the destruction that was taking place in our city: *"When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"*

An African-American man, resisting arrest, was shot seven times by a white police officer. Protests, rioting, looting and arson engulfed the city. More violence ensued as a 17-year-old youth shot and killed two other people. Graffiti is splattered everywhere. Businesses are boarded up. One hundred buildings have been damaged; more than 40 have been completely destroyed.

When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? I doubt many of you need to be convinced that we are living in a time of great unrest. Racial strife is rising. Cities across our nation have been burning this summer. Anarchy is gaining traction, while confidence in our institutions is tanking. The moral, social, civil and political order in our nation is crumbling.

But I'm not here to give you a jeremiad, to try to denounce all the social and moral evils in our nation. Instead, I want to lift our gaze to the King Who sits on His throne, Who's reign is unperturbed and undisturbed by all that is happening in our world. I want to lift our gaze to His Kingdom which is unshakeable. I want to help us—as we enter into what will probably be another couple of contentious months—to be the kind of people who live calmly and confidently as we trust in the grace and care of our covenant God toward us, when it seems like everything is falling apart.

There's a passage in Isaiah 33 that describes the tone and the content of what I hope the Holy Spirit will impress upon our hearts this evening. I hope this will stay with us throughout the weeks and months to come. Isaiah 33:5-6 says this: *"The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he has filled Zion with justice and righteousness. There will be times of security for you"*—or as the ESV puts it, *"He will be the stability of your times"*—*"a storehouse of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. The fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure."*

That's what I hope you will experience, God's people at New Covenant, as you trust in the Lord during this season: that He is stability of our times, that He is our source of security, that there is a storehouse—an abundance—of salvation, wisdom and knowledge found in fearing Him. God's Word in Psalm 11 is inviting us into that place of security.

God's Word in this Psalm is urging us to remember the stability we have in Him by showing us two movements of faith in the life of King David—two movements of faith we're called by grace to imitate. First, in verses one through three, we see a decisive rejection of the counsel of despair. Then in verses four through seven, we see a persuasive rationale for taking refuge in the Lord.

A decisive rejection of the counsel of despair – Psalm 11:1-3

When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? It starts with a decisive rejection of the counsel of despair, a decisive rejection of voices calling you to despair. That's what King David is doing in verses one through three. Remember, he is God's anointed king.

If you think back to Psalms 1 and 2, which are the gateway to the book of Psalms, we see in those Psalms the contrast between the righteous and the wicked. This contrast hinges on their attitude toward God's instruction in the Torah and their submission to God's Messiah, His King. *"Blessed are all who take refuge in him,"* it says in Psalm 2:12 (ESV).

That's what King David is decisively doing here in Psalm 11:1. He tells us right at the start of this Psalm, *"...in the Lord."* It's emphatic. *"In the Lord, in Yahweh, in my covenant God, I have taken refuge."* This first line sums up the whole Psalm. It's a Psalm about finding refuge in God in times of distress. David is saying, *"This is the habit of my life. This is where I am going to continually flee when in distress—to the Rock of Ages, cleft for me, to the shelter in the time of storm, to the hiding place, the refuge—to God's presence."*

Friends, we are just like King David. We are refuge-seeking creatures. There's a dot in your heart that's continually bobbing, pointing like a compass, looking for refuge, looking for a

place where you can find peace and safety. Your emotional health, your mental health, your spiritual health, even your physical health, is going to be shaped by where you seek refuge. As we go through contentious times in our nation, your witness and my witness to a watching world is going to be conditioned by where we seek refuge.

If I'm going to cable news, podcasts and the internet, trying to find refuge, there's going to be a tone, an attitude of life, an approach to power, a lack of joy and peace that will characterize my life. But if I'm seeking refuge in the Lord, then my life is going to be characterized by things like meekness, trust, humility, love and peace. Jesus said, "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*" (Matthew 5:5 ESV).

There's only one place where you're going to find this meekness and that's by finding refuge in the Lord. No one drifts into refuge. No one just lands there by accident. You have to deliberately and decisively go to a place of refuge. For David, this is a decisive choice, to run to the Lord and reject voices who are advising him to run in a different direction. We hear those voices and their demoralizing advice beginning at the end of verse one.

They say to him, "*Flee like a bird to your mountain...*" (Psalm 11:1 ESV). "Flee, little birdie." It's hard, you know, to sneak up on a bird, because what does a bird do when it's threatened? It doesn't stand there and fight. It flees. It finds a place of safety. Sometimes fleeing is the right thing to do. Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 10:23, as He sent the 70 out on the mission to proclaim the gospel, "*When they persecute you in one town, flee to another.*" We see the Apostle Paul doing this in the book of Acts when he escapes in the night from a walled city as they lower him down in a basket.

Sometimes the advice to flee is well meant. We think of when Jesus said He was going to go to Jerusalem to die on a cross, Peter said to him, "*Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you*" (Matthew 16:22 ESV). He was trying to protect Jesus from harm. But aren't you glad that Jesus rejected Peter's advice and heard in that advice the voice of Satan?

Aren't you glad that in Luke 13:31 we read, "*At that time some Pharisees came and told [Jesus], 'Go, get out of here. Herod wants to kill you'*"? Jesus said to them, "*Go tell that fox, 'Look, I'm driving out demons and performing healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will complete my work.'*" Aren't you grateful that Jesus trusted in His Father and did not flee from the mission God assigned to Him? Likewise, sometimes you and I have to stand and fight for what we believe. We live in perilous times.

The Apostle Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:1 that in the last times perilous times would come. How will we respond? Will we run? Will we hide? Will we flee from the battle?

That's the counsel that is being given to David. He's also given reasons why he should flee in verses two and three from what one commentator calls, "The might, the method and the menace of the wicked."

We see the might of the wicked in verse two: "*For look, the wicked string bows; they put their arrows on bowstrings.*" You can just picture them standing with their bows, getting them ready, then putting their arrows on the string. They are mighty.

Then we see their method at the end of verse two. It's "*to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart.*" It's gorilla warfare, ignoring all the rules of engagement. They're looking to assassinate the king.

Then we see their menace in the taunt of verse three: "*When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*" They're ripping apart the very basis of society. Anarchy is reigning. Terrorists are lurking in the shadows to ambush the righteous. The righteous king cannot trust anyone. There's no public virtue. There's no fair play. There's no rule of law. The foundations of the righteous that they depend on are falling apart and crumbling. Therefore his advisors are saying to him, "What's the use of doing anything? Just flee. Just go and find a place where you can be safe." That is the counsel of despair.

One way to discover what your life is really based on is to analyze when you feel hopeless, when you feel like there's no use doing anything at all, when it seems like life has lost all purpose and meaning. That's a sign that some foundation you've been depending on is crumbling underneath your feet. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? It all depends on how big your God is.

Ray Pritchard says, "If you have a big God, then you have a place of refuge. But if you've got a small God, you've got a big problem."

A persuasive rationale for taking refuge in the Lord – Psalm 11:4-7

David doesn't flee to the mountains because he's learned to make God his mountain. The foundations of society might be crumbling around him, but he's indignant that they would even suggest these words of despair, because he has a firm foundation under his feet. He has fled to the Lord for refuge. He says to them in verse one, "How can you say this to me? I know in Whom I have believed. I know in Whom I trust."

Then in verses four through seven, he argues persuasively for why we should do the same thing he's been doing, why we should run to the Lord for refuge. Verses four through seven are a persuasive rationale for taking refuge in the Lord. The counselors are saying, "David,

everything is falling apart. Run and hide.” He’s saying, “Oh, no. I will not flee.” Why not? Verse four, *“The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord—his throne is in heaven.”*

In other words, David is saying, “This is my Father’s world. Let me never forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.” The Lord is in His holy temple. That means He is near to His people when they call on Him. He is accessible. David uses His personal covenant name here—Yahweh, the God Who makes Himself known to us in covenant care, compassion and loyalty. The Lord is in His holy temple. He is near to all who call on Him in truth, yet His throne is in heaven. He is sovereign over all.

In other words, although the world around you is crumbling, the Lord is not fleeing. God is not breaking up. God is not falling apart. God is not frightened. God is seated on His throne. The flag of heaven is flying high. The King is in residence and He reigns. That’s the first premise of David’s argument for taking refuge in the Lord. He remembers Who’s in charge. God is in charge.

Whenever we panic in this world, we’re forgetting Who is in charge. We’re acting as if there’s no one at the steering wheel of the universe—at least no one we can trust. Tim Keller says, “There’s a premise underneath our panic.” The premise underneath our panic is this: “I am the rightful master of the universe. I know how things ought to be—and they’re not going the way I think they should.” So then we panic. King David is saying, “Oh, no.” In the words of the song:

God is still on the throne
And He will remember His own
Though trials may press us and burdens distress us
He never will leave us alone

God is still on the throne
He never forsaketh His own
His promise is true, He will not forget you
God is still on the throne

[From “God Is Still on the Throne” by Kittie L. Suffield]

That’s his first premise. “God’s in charge. I know Him and can trust Him.”

The second premise in David’s rationale for taking refuge in the Lord is that this Lord Who rules over everything also sees. He sees everything and will judge rightly. Look at the second part of verse four: *“His eyes watch; his gaze examines everyone.”*

This is a source of comfort when you’re being oppressed. God sees. God knows what’s going on. No one ever gets away with anything ultimately in God’s world. It’s a source of hope

when you're being obedient, even when everything around you is falling apart, because there is no such thing in God's world as an act of obedience that He does not see, that He does not notice. There's no such thing as unseen obedience in God's world.

And this is a source of conviction when you're being obstinate in sin. "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked. Whatever a person sows, that will he or she also reap" (Galatians 6:7). The Lord's eyes watch. His eyelids hone in and examine everyone. God is never doing nothing. He is always carefully watching. His eyes "*run to and fro throughout the whole earth,*" evaluating the lives of every human being (2 Chronicles 16:9). All hearts are laid open before Him. All secrets are laid bare before Him. All desires are known unto Him. There is a solemn and eternal difference between the righteous and the unrighteous; God knows those who are His and those who are not.

Verse five says, "*The Lord...hates the wicked and those who love violence.*" In other words, in verses one through three, it looks like it's not safe to be righteous in this world. But actually the opposite is true. It's not safe to be unrighteous in God's world, because God hates the wicked and those who love violence.

I want to just ask, do you have room in your theology for verse five? Do you have room in your thoughts for a God Who hates the wicked and those who love violence? You should. You should, because God could not be a God of love if He weren't a God of wrath as well. Thankfully, as we heard last week, He is the God of all grace, not the God of all wrath. We're thankful for that. But we could not appreciate His grace if we did not recognize the gravity of His wrath.

If a violent person comes into my home and brutally attacks my wife and children, what would you think of me if I walked right up to that person and said, "Oh, I love you very much." You would think there's something wrong with me. You would think, "Does he really love his wife and children if he is not aroused to wrath at such evil?"

God is holy. Verse five is telling us that God is always on the side of the faithful who are oppressed and is always against those who are violent and who do what is evil. There is comfort in knowing that this God will judge the world and that He will set all wrongs right. He will cast all evil and all unrepentant evildoers into the lake of fire. So we say amen to verse six: "*Let [God] rain burning coals and sulfur on the wicked; let a scorching wind be the portion in their cup.*" This is reminding us of God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, that sudden, final and sweeping judgment. It reminds us of the scorching wind of a desert when the crops are all dried up and there's drought without any satisfaction.

We take refuge in a God of perfect judgment—and that’s good news. If His judgment is good news, you might wonder, “Well, why doesn’t He do it right now? Why is there so much evil still in this world?” Because there’s better news. God is patient. He is patient with sinners. He is not wanting any to perish, it says in 2 Peter 3:9, but all to come to repentance.

God is so patient with sinners that God’s Son Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane on Thursday night before He died on Good Friday. There He experienced the knowledge of the judgment that was going to come upon Him on the cross and He said, “Father, if it is possible, take this cup from Me—this cup of judgment.” Jesus understood what it would be like to experience the scorching wind of God’s judgment against all evildoers. But instead of fleeing from drinking that cup, Jesus said, “Father, not My will, but Yours be done.”

The next day He thirsted upon the cross. He was emaciated with thirst as the scorching wind of God’s judgment against our sins bore down on His soul and body. He did that so that He might give the living water to every repentant sinner who turns away from their sin and flees to Him, coming to Him to drink.

God’s patience is good news for us. He loves us who once were children of wrath. If today you are in rebellion against Him, know that He is a God of wrath, but He’s also a God of patience, a God of love and a God of mercy. Today, you can move from being “once a child of wrath” to now a son or daughter of His love, if you will trust in Jesus.

Look back at verse five. It says, “...*He hates the wicked...*” What’s the parallel verb to “hates” in verse five? You probably want to say, “love.” But that’s not the parallel verb in verse five. The parallel verb to hates in verse five is “examines.” He hates the wicked, but “*The Lord examines the righteous...*” This reminds us of a worker of precious metals who puts the metal into the fire to assay it, to show what’s really there, to refine the metal to show the genuineness of that precious metal.

Out of love for His people, the Lord shakes the flimsy foundations of our lives. He puts us into refining fire situations to show us what we don’t know, to show us where we’re weak, to show us where our false foundations are, to show us that He is God and we are not, to show us that He is worth having, even if we lose everything else.

Tim Keller says, “For the righteous, all disasters are really examinations.” Every hardship that comes into your life, child of God, is an examination. We need examinations to grow stronger, to learn Who God really is, to learn how much we need Him. Disasters can only knock out false foundations. They can only cause the collapse of what is built on sand. But there is a firm foundation—God is in charge. God sees. And God will judge.

The last premise in David's rationale for fleeing to God for refuge is the reward God has in store for the righteous. Look at verse seven: *"For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds. The upright will see his face."*

Listen, the distress in this life is real. The troubles in this life are real. But if you are a believer in Jesus, you will outlive your trouble and distress. Can you take that to heart tonight? You will outlive every trouble, every distress, because the Lord is righteous. He loves righteous deeds and will reward those who have fled to Him for refuge. The upright will see His face.

If you turn over to Psalm 16:11 (ESV), it says, *"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."* Then the end of Psalm 17 says, *"I will see your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be satisfied with your presence."* That's how this Psalm ends in verse seven: *"...the upright will see his face."*

Derek Kidner says, "If the first line of this Psalm shows us where our safety lies, the last line of this Psalm shows us where our hearts should be." Our safety lies in finding refuge in the Lord (verse one) and our hearts should be longing to see His face (verse seven). We only long to gaze into the face of someone we love.

I'll close with this little illustration. I read a story about a man by the name of William Dyke. He was blinded in his earlier years by an accident, but he went on to be a great intellect and accomplished many things in the scholarly world. Then he met a woman with whom he fell in love and she consented to become his wife. During the time of their engagement, he met a surgeon who said, "I think I could correct your blindness." He consented to put himself in the hands of that surgeon and the surgery was performed.

On the day of the wedding, the bandages were removed and he saw his bride face to face for the first time. It was simply the fulfillment of all that had already happened. He had already held her hand. He had already heard her voice. He had already prized her love. Now he saw her face. He loved her before he even saw her.

That's our experience as Christians. We love an unseen Savior, but one day the sight is coming. It's that coming sight—being able to see the One we love, the One Who has held our hand, the One Whose voice we have treasured—that sustains us in the midst of all the fiery ordeals of this life.

As I look at that promise—*"...the upright will see his face"*—I just want to say, "Amazing love—how can it be?" Because I'm not someone who has always found refuge in the Lord. I

have fled like a bird in the face of trouble. I have not always loved righteousness and hated wickedness. So how can I be counted among the upright who will see His face?

That's where we need to remember that this is a Psalm of God's anointed king. These are words that a greater son of David could take on His lips and pray with unimpeachable integrity. Because we have a King in Jesus, Who did not flee when the arrows of the world's sin and unrighteousness were flying in His direction. Because He was pierced for our rebellion and crushed for our iniquities. Because He bore the punishment that brought us peace and because He was willing to endure the Father's face turning away from Him when He bore our sins, we now can receive a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. We can see the Father's face and behold the King in His beauty.

When this world is crumbling, when your life is falling apart, when it seems like the very foundations of society are collapsing, what can the righteous do? We do what we need to do every day of our lives. We flee to the Lord for refuge, trust in His protection and carry on with His Great Commission. We don't flee. We don't look for an escape hatch. We don't withdraw emotionally from the suffering world. We don't try to find refuge by electing the best politicians in November, thinking that's what's going to solve all our problems and restore our foundations. No, we engage politically, but we find our refuge in the Lord, Whose Kingdom cannot be shaken.

Withdrawing sometimes can feel like a welcome escape, but it's really forfeiting the influence we can have for the gospel; it's forsaking the Great Commission. So flee to Jesus for refuge. That's what you can do. Then throw yourself into the Great Commission, knowing that you're receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, because He was crushed, because He was shaken, because He was bruised and pierced on the cross for us.

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, it's often not until things are taken away from us that we realize all that You are for us. So we pray, Lord Jesus, that as we suffer in this life and as the world around us is going through a lot of heartache and trouble, that You would become increasingly real to us, that our love for You would grow more and more, that our longing to see Your face would become the greatest pursuit of our lives. Help us mean it when we say, "All I have is Christ." Help us believe, Jesus, that You are all we need. We ask this in Your name. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

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