

Psalm 11 - God is my refuge

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[0 : 00] Psalm 11 on page 548 in the Church Bibles. In the Lord I take refuge.

How then can you say to me, flee like a bird to your mountain? For look, the wicked bend their bows. They set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? The Lord is in his holy temple. The Lord is on his heavenly throne.

He observes everyone on earth. His eyes examine them. The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence.

He hates with a passion. On the wicked, he will rain fiery coals and burning sulphur. A scorching wind will be their lot.

[1 : 09] For the Lord is righteous. He loves justice. The upright will see his face. What's our brother ready to come and give us our message?

Thank you. If you'd like to keep your Bibles open to page 548. We're going to look at this psalm through together and it would be useful if you could look down to it as we go along.

Let's pray first of all. I'm very conscious that we need God's help to, help me to be clear for one, and help us all, myself and yourselves, to understand and take to heart what God is saying to us today.

So let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the blessing it is to read it together. We thank you, Lord, for the great examples and teaching that you give us of how to live our Christian lives.

So we do pray that you would speak to us now. You would enable me, Lord, to be clear. And, Lord, you would help us all to be obedient to your word.

[2 : 19] In Jesus' name. Amen. Here in Psalm 11, we've got two questions from two different sources.

And each source asking that question is seeing exactly the same situation but drawing opposite conclusions. And each question reveals the questioner's heart.

I don't know whether you caught that, so I'm going to read it again because it's quite dense. I know what I've just read to you. There are two questions from two different sources in this psalm.

Each source, each person asking that question sees exactly the same situation but draws completely opposite conclusions. Each question that's asked, both questions that are asked, reveal the questioner's heart.

Well, let's see if we can unpack a bit of that as we go through. The first question in this psalm is in verse 3, and it's a question posed by David's friends, his advisors, and it's this.

[3 : 30] When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? So this psalm was written about 3,000 years ago.

So in those times, God's people were asking that kind of question, and we still ask that question today, but we might phrase it in a different way.

Today we might say something like, when biblical principles, which underpin our society, when they're thrown away, when they're forgotten, what hope is there?

So whether it's politicians, or sadly church leaders, or society in general, when those principles of integrity, honesty, justice, fairness, are no longer the bedrock of their actions, what hope is there?

Well, David answers that question, and I need to give you a bit of context here. So this is the title of the psalm, as I see it.

[4 : 35] It's basically what it's about. And we see that this question is being asked by David's friends. Notice, not his enemies, being asked by his friends.

Why are they asking this question? Well, the situation that David finds himself in is that his enemies, in verse 2, are trying to destroy him.

They're described as shooting Addo, shooting arrows from the shadows. So this is a, we're not told a specific encounter, but we know this is deadly opposition to David.

His enemies are out to literally, physically destroy him, to kill him. His advisors then are telling him to give up, to run.

And if you look down there at verses 1 to verse 3 in your Bibles, you'll see what they say is in speech marks. Can you see the speech marks there? So in short, what David's friends are saying to him is, run.

[5 : 59] There are people out to kill you. You cannot cope with this situation. All is lost. Run. And then they use this strange phrase, flee like a bird to your mountain.

We could see this as saying something like this. As birds fly up to safer ground when they're frightened, so you should seek the safety of the mountains. Escape while you can.

If you don't believe that's a fact, that birds are scared by sudden noises, then all the pigeons that sit on our roof, if you stand in the car park, and you make a car backfire, or perhaps you just drop something heavy, they all fly up, and they fly up to what they think is safer ground.

Well, that's what David's friends are saying to him. So a question for you, okay? Assuming the situation was as bad as the advisors thought, was this good advice they were giving, or was it bad advice?

Should he run? Should he hide? Or should he stand his ground against an enemy he couldn't combat? Well, from his advisor's point of view, and from what they could see, this was clearly good advice.

[7 : 21] And they try and convince David of this, in the words of this psalm. In verse 2, they say, can you see these words?

They say, for look. In other words, look at the situation you are in. But David could see that, rather than being good advice, this looking was the root of their problem.

They were judging the situation by just what they could see, and no more. So what was David's response? His response here is the second question in the psalm, was, how can you say this?

He says there in verse 1, In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me, flee like a bird to your mountain? I'm taking refuge in the Lord, says David, therefore I need not worry or fear.

David's response is what, a similar response to what we read in 2 Corinthians 5, 7, where it talks about the Christian, God's person, living by faith, not by sight.

[8 : 41] I was reading two chronicles in my Bible readings yesterday, and I came across a really interesting verse, which is very similar here to what the situation David faced.

But this is King Hezekiah years earlier, sorry, years after this, saying a similar thing, when the hordes of the Assyrian army were closing in on Jerusalem, and again, they were completely outnumbered by the Assyrians, and people no doubt would have said to Hezekiah, all is lost. But Hezekiah said this, I'll read them to you if you want to look them up, you can on page 465, but I'll read this to you. Be strong and courageous.

This is what Hezekiah is saying to his people. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged, because the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us.

Literally, greater power than us is, there are more with us. For there is more with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.

[10 : 04] So those words there, with him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God. That changes the dynamic, that changes the situation entirely.

David's version of this, of what Hezekiah said is, the Lord is my refuge, why should I fear? And David spells out there in verses 4 to 7, why he is not afraid, why he doesn't think he should fear. In verse 4, he says that God is reigning in heaven, that he sees all. And in verses 4 and 5, he sees the righteous and the wicked.

So he sees the situation. Verse 6, he will judge the wicked. And verse 7, he brings justice to the righteous.

We know that because he says, they will see his face. He doesn't say to his friends, what you are seeing is wrong. You must change your glasses, if they had glasses in those days.

[11 : 12] What you are seeing is wrong. No, he can't say that, because what they are seeing is true. He can't say, you are understanding this wrong. No one is really out to get me, because they could see it with their eyes.

But he does say, God is bigger than this situation. The Lord is in control. He sees all that is going on.

And he will deliver the righteous. And he will judge the wicked. It's not just that he realizes that God is in control and he need not fear.

But there's another element to this. He refuses to run and therefore be deflected from what purposes God had for him. whatever the opposition is he was going to face.

So what does this psalm have to say to us today? We see from the title, if you look back at your Bibles there, just above verse one, you see the title for the director of music of David, that this was a song, this was written as a song, and it's a song to be sung, sent to the director of music.

[12 : 30] And this psalm, as well as other psalms, was to be sung by all of God's people. This psalm was in the Israelites' songbook, if you like.

They used it in worship. And why was it so important? Why was it put here in Scripture, not just for the Israelites to sing, but for us to reflect on today?

Well, I think there are two truths here, which is important for believers of any generation, for every one of us sitting here this morning.

The first is that whatever our circumstances look like, God is fully in control, so we can fully trust him. The second thing, as David was seeing, we must not be deflected from God's purposes for us. We're going to look at these a little bit closer, just these two points here. God is in control. In particular, God's control is shown by verses four to seven.

[13 : 38] The fact that he sees, and he doesn't just see, but he has the power, and the will, and the purpose to act. We're told that he sees the righteous, and will save them.

He sees the wicked, and will judge them. So, take time to think right now that God sees and understands you completely this morning.

He sees maybe your anxiety about your present situation, about work, family problems, financial hardships. Maybe you have housing issues, or maybe you suffer with poor health.

Well, God sees those things, and according to this psalm, he will save you. Though he may not take the issue away, his promise is to be with you through it, and to be your refuge, as he was to David. This word refuge comes repeatedly through the psalms. I wouldn't do a count of it. I'd need more fingers than I could count on. It comes time and time again in the psalms, this idea of God being our refuge.

[15 : 02] And it's describing a place of safety. If you've trusted Christ, then you are in the safest place you can possibly be. You're in his shelter.

You're under his protection. A story in Genesis chapter 6, it's the truth, it's history, is Noah's Ark, where Noah, you remember from your Sunday school days, brought the animals into the ark.

And this is an illustration here, the ark is an illustration of what David's saying, that in the Lord he takes refuge. If you've taken refuge in God, you're safe no matter what floods, what trials you may face.

He faces them with you. But if you haven't taken refuge in Christ, not only do you have to face life's trials alone, but you also have to face God's judgment alone.

But God has provided a way that we can take refuge in him. So God sees his people, but God also sees those who are wicked. In this psalm, they're described as those who love violence.

[16 : 27] That's how they're typified there in verse 5. But the word wicked also describes those who are quite content to live their lives with little reference to God or with no reference to God.

Those of us who insist on living apart from him. The warning to us today and the fearful thing is that God will grant those people the desire of their heart, but they will come under his judgment as we read there in verse 6.

God is in control. God is bigger than our situation. He sees and he acts to save the believer and judge the unbeliever.

God is bigger than our God. The next thing that I think this psalm mainly says to us is, don't be deflected from the purposes God has for you.

I'll take you back now to another Old Testament story, the story of Jonah. God had a mission for him, didn't he? Do you remember what that was? It was the preach to the people of Nineveh.

[17 : 38] Jonah. But instead, he ran away to Tarshish in the opposite direction. He did the opposite to what David was doing. David would not let his circumstances or those around him deflect him from God's purpose, but Jonah did.

David's purpose here was to be king and to lead his people. We've been seeing that through 2 Samuel, haven't we? David was God's anointed. It was God's purpose for him to be a good king, to lead his people.

How can he do this if he runs away? So it's important that he stands his ground and he fulfills God's purpose for him. But for us sitting here or standing here this morning, what is God's purpose for us? What does God call us to? Well, personally, what has God called you to? Maybe you haven't thought of this in quite those terms that God has a purpose for you.

But he does and he has called you to be faithful to that. Now, if you're not a Christian this morning, the Bible says that the first thing that God calls you to is repentance so that you may know his forgiveness and that you may come into his family.

[19 : 01] Jesus said in Mark chapter 1, the time has come, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news.

That's everyone's starting point. It's my starting point when I was a kid of 13, and God, I opened my eyes to this. We need to repent and put ourselves right with God.

But if you are a Christian, I wonder what you think God has called you too. There are generally things that God has called us to. Matthew 5 tells us that we're to shine as lights, we're to live a good life so that God is glorified.

2 Corinthians chapter 2 tells us that if we're a Christian, we're to be the aroma of Christ to those around us. Or chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians, we're to be reconcilers, to call other people to be reconciled to God.

But in Psalm 11, I think what God is primarily calling us to is to persevere, to endure, to keep the faith, not to give up.

[20 : 20] If you have your Bibles, if you'd like to turn to page 1180, you'll find that that's Philippians chapter 3 and there's four verses there that I'd like us to read.

I'll read it to you. And this is key to this idea of endurance, perseverance. Philippians chapter 3 verse 12 and this is the apostle Paul speaking.

verse 13 I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining forward to what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

So what's the goal that Paul is talking about here in Philippians chapter 3? Well the earlier part of the chapter, Paul describes it as knowing Christ better and better in this life.

That was his goal, that was his aim, that was his great purpose. So even more than being the great apostle that he was and preaching to the Gentiles, his greatest goal was to know Christ better.

[21 : 54] Now if anyone knew Christ, you would think it was the apostle Paul. Jesus had revealed himself to him on the road to Damascus, as we know, and he was the foremost of the apostles as we see him now.

But his goal, he wasn't satisfied until he could know Christ better and better. I wonder whether that is our goal this morning. What is this heavenly prize Paul is looking forward to in Philippians 3? Well it's Christ. There's no other, more than wanting the goal of heaven, more than wanting anything he could hope for.

It was to have Christ, to see him face to face. David says a similar thing at the end of Psalm 11, verse 7.

He says, for the Lord is righteous, he loves justice, the upright will see his face. So if Jesus is the centre of all this, we ask ourselves a question, how was Jesus the fulfilment of this psalm?

[23 : 12] We've seen in the psalm that God saves his people and he brings judgment on the wicked. When we look at the death and the resurrection of Jesus, we see there both God saving people and God bringing his judgment.

This time, not on the wicked, but on the perfect son of God. You're probably familiar with Isaiah chapter 53, verse 5 says this, he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. So the cross wasn't a dreadful accident, it wasn't that Jesus couldn't help himself, but as he was hanging there on the cross, he was in our place, bearing the judgment of God on our sin, so that we can be forgiven and saved from the judgment that we deserve ourselves.

So his death and resurrection shows us the salvation and the judgment of God, both at the same time. But secondly, Jesus is the fulfillment of this psalm because we see in Jesus the perfect example of one who would not be deflected from God's purpose for him, his father's calling on his life.

And we see what that was exactly in Matthew chapter 20 verse 28, the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[25 : 07] That was Christ's calling, man, that was to do his father's will and to give his life a ransom for many. And we see in the life of Jesus that he was tempted and he suffered far more than we are to give up.

It's strange to think that in a way, isn't it? Because Jesus the perfect God-man, we know he was tempted, but he was also tempted to give up the cross.

When the devil tempted him in Matthew chapter 4, he was given three temptations, wasn't he? The first was to turn stone into bread, but all three temptations was temptation to go against what God wanted for him.

And therefore to sin. If Jesus had sinned, his substitution on the cross would be no use for us because he wouldn't be the perfect man.

So the devil tried to deflect him from this by making him sin, but he would not yield to those temptations. The temptation to jump off the temple roof.

[26 : 30] What would have happened if Jesus would have said, well, sure, I will be safe, let me just do this one thing. What would have happened if he had done that?

Well, he probably would have had the adulation of the crowd. He would have been put forward as some kind of the true Messiah, the true one sent from God.

Of course he was, but he wouldn't have been allowed to go to the cross. He wouldn't have suffered in our place. So throughout Jesus' life, there were things that would throw him off his mission to the cross.

Even his close friend and disciple Peter, Matthew chapter 16, when Jesus told him that he was going to suffer and be killed, what did Peter say?

Never, Lord, this shall never happen to you. Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter? Get behind me, Satan, you are a stumbling block to me.

[27 : 34] Peter was a stumbling block because he was inadvertently, he didn't really understand the full impact of this, but he was distracting Jesus, he was deflecting him off of God's path for him.

Jesus had to go through to the cross. Luke 9 51, and this is the last verse in this section, and we're coming to a close now.

We read this, as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. So when he knew his death was imminent, he didn't run, he set out to the place of his execution.

Why was he resolute? Why would he not be deflected? Well, because he was doing his father's will, and in doing that he could bear the judgment that the wicked deserve, as it's set out there in verse 6 of Psalm 11.

So just in conclusion now, God sees and understands whatever difficulties we're facing, whatever difficulties you're facing at the moment, and he also sees those difficulties that you can't see that are going to happen to us in 2025.

[29 : 08] But as we step into that new year very soon, let's remember that everything is in his care and under his control. No matter how frightening it may seem to us, no matter how out of control we may seem, everything is under his care and under his control.

We need not fear. walk that road with Christ, press on to trust him more and more and to know him better.

In other words, persevere. if you have your Bibles, the last reading we're going to have is on page 1210, 1210.

It's Hebrews chapter 12 and I'm just going to read to you two verses and the reason we're closing with this is because it speaks of perseverance on the journey and it tells us that our encouragement won't be from things going well for us but our encouragement will be from looking to Christ.

Verse 1 Hebrews 12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

[30 : 42] Fixing our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith for the joy set before him he endured the cross scorning in shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God consider him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart let's pray father we do thank you for our lord jesus christ we thank you that he's made a way for us to be right with you thank you father that you have called us to look to him to persevere to keep going and we pray that as we face this coming week and as we face 2025 that lord you would help us to persevere to keep looking to jesus the author and perfecter of our faith in his name we pray amen