

PSALM 11

INTRODUCTION

In our church we have been concerned about a number of social issues lately that we believe will have a detrimental effect upon our society. We have sought to influence people against the Government's plans to repeal section 28. We have recently been concerned about the European employment directive, which would make it illegal for organisations to refuse to employ an individual because of that individual's religious views and sexual orientation. We have been concerned about the licensing of the Telewest arena in Newcastle for a three-day sex exhibition.

When we consider the many other issues that concern Christians; the rising tide in crime, the decline in marriage, the break up of families through divorce, the abuse of children and the increase in drug taking, it seems that evil goes unchecked. Then we also live in a day when the Bible is just not believed, or its morals accepted anymore and even churchmen accept the rising tide of secularism. At such times we may be led to ask the question that is being asked in this Psalm. When the foundations are being destroyed what can the righteous do (v. 4)?

It is a question that many Christians have asked at various times throughout the generations. In times of stable government or strong faith the righteous can appeal to the country's laws or to the established standards of faith or to morality. But when the foundations of our society are crumbling around us, these things just do not exist. In such times what shall we do becomes a burning and important question?

This was the burning question facing David. It appeared to him that everything was crumbling around him; the very foundations that he could have appealed to in the past are now being destroyed. At such times David has two choices and we have those same two choices as well.

We can flee to the mountains like a bird, which is exactly what David the writer of this Psalm is being encouraged to do. Either his friends or his enemies or perhaps his own heart is so fearful and is therefore encouraging him to take such an action. We might say listen the enemies are lying waiting for you, you won't even see the blow coming, the best thing you can do is to get away from them, flee to the hills. But notice that David refuses to do so, and he resolves within his heart to take refuge in the Lord (v 1). He decided that he is going to keep on being righteous and stand against the evil.

Now we do not know exactly what the circumstances in David's life are at this stage. But it is quite clear that David is being opposed (v 3). He is in danger from the wicked, who are bending their bows, hiding in shadows waiting to shoot at Him (v 3). But David is upright of heart, which means that He is upright in heart before God, not because of his character but because of his personal trust in God. Therefore he responds to these threats in a way expected of a person who is upright in heart, who is trusting in God. He takes refuge in the Lord, the temptation to hide and run away from the problems must have been very tempting, but he refuses to hide in the mountains, for he will hide in the Lord. Why has David resolved to take this action? The answer is because of who God is.

You see to take refuge in someone you must have complete confidence that He is able to shelter and protect you. In the midst of a gale you do not want to take refuge in a tent, you want to shelter in something that you know will be up to the job. Well David has complete confidence in God that He is up to the job of sheltering and protecting him.

1. WHO IS THIS GOD THAT DAVID TAKES REFUGE IN.

To answer the question of who this God is; we must ask where is this God?

a) **The Lord is in His holy temple and on His heavenly throne (v 4)** - Now we must remember that the psalms are poetry, and therefore the language is poetic. Therefore we have to ask what would such a phrase like this one, mean to the original readers of this Psalm. Although the temple was not yet built the principle of the temple lay in the tabernacle. What did the tabernacle and temple symbolise for the Israelites? God's presence with His people that is what is meant here. This God that David is taking refuge in, is the God who is with His people. Therefore no matter whom David's opponents are or no matter what their tactics were; David was going to take refuge in Him because He is with His people. No matter what plight His people might find themselves in, they can be assured that God is with them.

Now within our own society we must always remember this truth, even though our Christian heritage is being eroded and destroyed by the ungodliness around us, and even though it appears that opposition to the Christian position will increase, we must always remember that we do not find our security in stable government, or in agreed morals but in God alone. He is always with His people and with God on our side we are always in the majority. Remember David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17).

This temple is holy because the God who resides there is holy. Remember the temple had a place called the holy of holies, for it was there that God symbolically dwelt with His people. In our society it may well be that the foundations are being destroyed by the wicked, but the Lord is holy and therefore His standards are the ones that ultimately we are to live by and are judged by. That's why we can take refuge in Him. Society is changing all the time, I can remember not that long ago, when living together before marriage was frowned upon, now sadly in many of our towns and cities it is normal.

I can remember a time when at least Christian morality was upheld and thought of as a good thing, but now it is seen as being narrow minded and as I heard one person say this week on the radio, Puritan. So society is changing and the standards within the world change, but we do not measure standards by what our society thinks. We measure it by God who is holy and is with His people.

But we also learn that the Lord is on His heavenly throne, this speaks of sovereign rule and also the throne is the place of judgment. In the midst of David's difficulties he can trust in the Lord and find refuge in Him because he knows that ultimately it is the Lord who is in control and is ruling and it is He who will judge David and all His enemies. As Ruler He is able to protect David and indeed all His people even in the midst of the most trying of circumstances.

I don't know what you may be facing personally, I don't know what trying circumstances are troubling you, but I do know that we are all facing a society whose foundations are giving way, and a society that is increasingly becoming unchristian. I suspect that as this happens increasingly over the years then opposition to Christian morality and views will also increase.

At such times let me point you to the Lord. The One who is Sovereign, and is in control. The One who is ruling no matter what the circumstances may say. He is the One who is holy and has holy standards and therefore judges according to His standards and not accordingly to the morality of this world. Trust in the Lord, find refuge in Him at such times for He is with His people at all times.

David goes on to tell us three things or three implications of the fact that the Lord is in His holy temple and on His heavenly throne. These three things will help us to remain righteous even when the very foundations of our society are crumbling around us.

2. THE IMPLICATIONS OF GOD BEING IN HIS TEMPLE AND ON HIS THRONE

a) He observes the sons of men (v 4) - The Lord watches all that people do. These enemies of David who think that no one sees them for they hide in the shadows are seen by almighty God the One who is ruling, holy and dispenses judgment. Nothing escapes the eyes of the Lord. This past week we have had some terrible killings in N. Ireland done under the cover of darkness.

The people who do such things, think that no one sees them, but O how wrong they are for the Lord observes all their actions. The terrible sexual practices that go on in our land at night, are seen by our all-seeing God, every robbery every mugging, every drug pusher and taker, every under handed practice is observed by the Lord. Nothing escapes His attention.

But not only does the Lord see all that goes on in our world the text also says He examines them. The word can mean either to test them or to try them. Here it means that God tests them. He tests them not against the morality of this world but against His own holy standards. His examination is not just of actions, but motives and intentions, for the Lord observes the very heart of mankind as well as their outward actions.

On knowing this, what would you do, if you were in David's shoes? Flee to the mountains or take refuge in the Lord, the One who sees and examines the actions and hearts of men including the very people who are out to get David. I know whom I would rather trust in.

b) He examines the righteous (v 5) - The word examine is the same word as before but this time it means to test in the sense of inspecting and finding them to be what they claim to be. You test gold to see if it is pure gold, well God examines Christians to see if they are true. As He does so He finds that they are who they claim to be.

It may well be that He allows the foundations of our society to be destroyed in order to test us, to examine us to see if we will continue to take refuge in the Lord. You see God tests both the believer and unbeliever, when He tests the unbeliever He finds a heart in rebellion against God, but when He tests the believer He finds them righteous. Not because Christians are morally more righteous than non-Christians but because we have been made right by God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a comforting thought and another reason why we should take our refuge in the Lord, we are all going to be examined by the Lord, but trusting in the Lord rather than fleeing to the mountains is a sure sign that we are righteous, and more importantly that will be God's verdict as well. This brings me to my final point. What is the result of such an examination. Over the past couple of weeks our young people have been getting their examination results, for some it was elation and for others it was disappointment, for some they passed for others they failed. Well God's examination of mankind, will pronounce a result upon each one.

3. GOD'S VERDICT ON MANKIND (vs. 5-7)

His verdict is twofold:

a) For those He pronounces as wicked, judgment follows (vs. 5-6). Because the Lord sees all that goes on and measures the action, motives and intentions of mankind against His own Holiness, then the truth is that those who do not trust in Jesus Christ and His righteousness will have the verdict of 'wicked' pronounced upon them. God's attitude to such people will be judgment.

Now the picture of verse 6 is obviously a reference to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), which is an example to us all of how seriously God takes sin and judges it.

According to Jude, Sodom and Gomorrah is an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire in hell (Jude 1:7).

So God's verdict on all unbelievers is hell. That is why if you are an unbeliever you need to realise that at this moment of time God sees you as wicked. That is what you are when you are measured against the standards of a holy God. You may be ten times better than most people, but against God's standard you are wicked, and if you remain in that position you will end up facing God's just punishment in hell. Why is that the case? Because the Lord is Righteous and He loves justice (v 7) and if He is going to be just He has to give you what your wickedness deserves.

What can you do about it? Turn to the Lord and find refuge in Him. To do that you must acknowledge your wickedness, and ask Him to make you righteous. That is possible because Jesus Christ the righteous One gave His life for unrighteous people (1 Peter 3:18). So faith in God through the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross makes one righteous, and upright in heart.

b) For those He pronounces upright, blessing follows (v 7). The greatest blessing that anyone could ever have is to see God. It is because the Lord is righteous and loves justice that those who have been made upright by God through Jesus Christ will be eternally blessed (1 John 3:2). This is the future for all true believers today, this is why when everything around us seems to be crumbling and there are no longer any absolutes within our society, we should continue to find our refuge in Him, for in doing so, we are continuing to wait for our ultimate goal which is to see God and be with him in heaven for all eternity.

Are you tempted to flee Christian? Let us take our refuge in the Lord, for he is with us and is on His throne. He examines all men and pronounces His judgments. For those of us who are made righteous by God will one day see His face. But for those who are declared to be wicked, hell follows. To such people let me say don't flee to the mountains, flee to Jesus Christ, and find your refuge in God.

Amen