

Taking Cover From a Crumbling Civilization

Psalm 11

Studies in the Psalms #11

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IF there ever was a Psalm applicable to what is going on in our society today, Psalm 11 is it! Christians are being persecuted all over the world as **the wicked bend the bow...to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart** (v. 2). And as we look to our own western Christian civilization, we are seeing that **“the foundations are destroyed”** and we are left asking, **“what can the righteous do?”**

And what is the response of so many of us? Politics. Politicians. Political Action Committees. “This is the most important election of our generation,” we are told daily. And the importance was stressed by one conservative commentator who said because the Constitution and the Bible are sacred Scriptures, the Constitution hangs in the balance. I see your anxiety for our nation’s future. I hear it in your voices. I feel it in our conversations. And Psalm 11 is before us at this opportune and providential times to help us through. Psalm 11 is the confident prayer of the believer in Jesus Christ on *taking cover from a crumbling civilization*. How do I do that?

Find Refuge in the Lord (v. 1a)

From the outset, David emphatically begins with faith! **In the LORD I take refuge** (v. 1b). How do you and I *take cover from a crumbling civilization*? The first thing is to *find refuge in the Lord*. All around us the politicians and the would-be leaders of our civilization speak of themselves in godlike ways: “I am the leader you need. I will fight for you. I will solve your problems. I will give you what you need.” Have you ever stopped and asked why our society is so polarized by politics? It’s because the people we know who are practical atheists, agnostics, and secularists have a religion. Their religion is politics. The State is divine and only the State can bring us the salvation we need. And in response believers have more and been sucked into this-worldly type of answers to the problems we face.

From the outset David’s prayer is one of trust in the Lord. This means we are not to put our faith and trust in men and women. While you see your Senators, do not forget that your Savior is at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, seated in glory, ruling and reigning over all things. Jesus told his disciples after his resurrection: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). Peter said of him on the Day of Pentecost: “God has made him both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:37). Paul said of

him: “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:25); God’s great might was at work “when he raised [Jesus] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly place, far above all authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but in the one to come. And he put all things under feet and gave him as head over all things” (Eph. 1:20–22). And John recorded Jesus’ words: “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev. 1:18). This is your Lord, brothers and sisters! Find refuge in him!

Flee Convenient Advice (vv. 1b–3)

David tells himself that his refuge is the Lord, and we need to wake up and tell ourselves that before we enter the arena of this life. It’s right after that David begins to take on the temptations to flee—not to the Lord. He chooses faith but his friends say choose flight. We learn here that a part of *taking cover from a crumbling civilization* means to *flee convenient advice*.

How can you say to my soul (v. 1). Who is the **you**? The verb is plural so it’s most likely a group of David’s advisors. That means these are not his foes but his friends. Some of the most seductive and tempting words you are

going to face are from your closest *believing* friends who are not finding refuge in the Lord as they should. And what are they saying?

“**Flee like a bird to your mountain**” (v. 1). They are saying, “Get away! Save yourself!” We face this temptation, too, when Christian friends sense the way the wind is blowing in our society about human sexual identity and they tell us to just give up. “Forget about bathroom access and whom can marry whom. It’s a waste of your time. This is a political issue. Don’t talk about it. Just preach the gospel.” What’s the problem with that attitude? Let me illustrate. There was a nineteenth century Prussian general and military theorist by the name of Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831), who so famously said, “War is the continuation of politics by other means.”¹ That’s what is going on in politics.

But at an even deeper lever, there is a spiritual war going on. All that we are seeing around us is just the outward manifestation of humanity’s rebellion against God and the suppression of his truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). And we see this in verse 2 as it continues. David’s friends describe literal war, while we read this through the lens of Ephesians 6 and

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. James John Graham, 3 volumes (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Company, 1908), 23.

spiritual war: **the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart** (v. 2). Being persecuted in this spiritual war is harsh and painful. And it would be convenient not to experience it. But don't forget, Jesus said it is a blessing to suffer with him (Matt. 5).

Then notice in verse 3 a second piece of convenient advice offered by David's friends: **"if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"** (v. 3) Isn't that what we're seeing before our very eyes? We're witnessing the disintegration of societal institutions that are supposed to uphold order, protect virtue, and execute justice on evil. Our military is experimenting with social sciences. Our courts are putting their fingers to the winds so as not to be offensive to the mob. Our Congress is bought. The executive branch grabs more and more power by the minute through agencies and regulations.

I know it feels like giving up is better and just moving off the proverbial reservation. But we are called to flee this advice and instead fight. Let me give you an illustration. The last Emperor of the Roman Empire was Constantine XI Palaiologus. After holding out for eight hundred years against the armies of Islam. When the Ottoman Sultan, Mehmet II, besieged

Constantinople, for the final time, he offered Constantine a great deal: give me the city and you can have your life and even rule elsewhere. All of Constantine's advisors said to flee. But he prepared to fight. As the great battle raged between just several thousand within the city walls against tens of thousands outside, the walls began to be breached and the end was near. The last anyone saw of their Emperor was him removing his royal vestments to fight in plain clothes as one of his men. And he reminded them one last time, "Remember, you are Romans," before charging the enemy and being lost forever.

Fight in the Lord's Strength (vv. 4-7)

But how do I fight a *spiritual* battle as I *take cover from a crumbling civilization*? We are to *fight in the Lord's strength*. David prays out the reason for his taking refuge in the Lord and the way to fight and not take off in flight: the Lord is King! This was implied in his opening statement of verse 1 but now it comes out in full.

The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven (v. 4). In those days the temple was on Mount Zion and so it was a target of attack. But the Lord lived in it as the earthly representation of his heavenly

throne. We might pray this based on the New Testament, “Jesus is in his holy church; Jesus’ throne is at the right hand of God.”

His eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man (v. 4). He hasn’t forgotten you. As we sing in one hymn:

This is my Father’s world:
O let me ne’er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father’s world:
Why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let earth be glad!

The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence (v. 5). All our trials and temptations in this spiritual war are to test our faith like silver and gold in a fiery furnace.

Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup (v. 6). This image of fire and sulfur comes straight from Genesis 19 and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. And the image of a cup of wrath comes from Psalm 75:8.

For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face (v. 7). Our righteous God has satisfied his righteous demands in Christ on the cross and gives us that righteousness as a gift so

that we can be acceptable to him. But he's also making us more and holy and righteous in our sanctification and this verse says the Lord loves these good works. And one day we receive the gracious reward of seeing him face to face. This is one of the great promises of God. We read of it in Psalm 17: "As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness" (v. 15). God's face is his beautiful presence smiling upon us. "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). "They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4).

But how? Doesn't the Old and New Testament no one can see him and live? This comes true in Jesus Christ, who as the eternal Son took to himself a true human nature, like us in every way without sin. And what a promise to end on! Everything seems to be falling apart around us. It's easy to want to just flee and escape it all. But the Lord has a promise for us in the midst of it all. Let us flee to him for refuge. Let us fight the good fight of faith in his strength. Let us press toward to goal: his gracious smile. Amen.