

God Our Refuge in Times of Trouble

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[0 : 00] Chris, Lou is going to be bringing God's Word to us this morning. And just, you know, we tend to think that singing is worship, and then the rest of the service is something different. Actually, we're going to continue worshiping God by listening and responding to His Word.

This is one of the ways that we worship, is we listen and we respond to God's Word. So our worship continues, just because there's not music involved doesn't mean we're not worshiping. So we're going to continue to worship by listening to God's Word.

Chris is going to bring God's Word to us this morning. And in many ways, I don't need to introduce Chris, because he serves in so many ways. And Leo leads the production team, so the sound, they lead that team.

Chris also helps lead a CG. He also serves in the worship team from time to time. Some of the songs that we sing at church, Chris wrote those songs himself. He's a great musician and a songwriter.

But Chris, you've also got a great grasp of God's Word. And we've got a preaching cohort that meets once a month, and we go through texts. And Chris has preached a few times there. And Chris, you've got a great grasp of God's Word.

[1 : 00] But you're also somebody who, as Isaiah 66 says, you've got a humility before God's Word. You bow down before God's Word. And you don't sit over in judgment. You let God's Word speak to you. And I really respect you for that, your humility before God and His Word.

So it's great to have you share Psalm 11 with us this morning. Just one thing before Margo comes up. So at Watermark, one of the things you'll notice is we quite often have a wide variety of people leading things, leading the service, leading communion, preaching.

And one of the reasons is we don't want to be a church that's so excellent, have such a high standard that we never give people opportunities. We want to be a church that's constantly raising and developing people, giving people chances to minister.

The only way you grow is by getting a chance. And so we want to be a church that part of our culture is to say, let's give people chances. We don't need to have such a high standard.

We actually want to be raising people up and giving people chances. So it's part of our culture. So on that note, Margo, will you come and read Psalm 11 to us? And let's listen to the reading of God's Word. Hello.

[2 : 06] We're reading from Psalm 11 today. Starting in verse 1, we read, In the Lord I take refuge.

This is the word of God.

Check. Can you guys hear me? But, yep, so as Kevin introduced me, my name is Chris.

And I don't actually work at Watermark, but I am preaching today by Kevin's invitation. And, yeah, I work as an accountant. I don't actually normally talk this much.

I normally sing a lot on stage. And I think some people in my CG probably haven't even heard my voice before. But, yeah, here I am. I'm going to be trying to talk for 30 minutes. So that's a challenge.

[3 : 43] But, anyway, enough chit-chat. For those who know me, you may know that I go bouldering quite a bit, which involves climbing up walls. It's around, like, five meters tall or so. And I grab onto a hose of various shapes and sizes, all without the assistance of a harness or a rope.

And on a good day, I can probably attempt a new climb and get it done in one go. But on a bad day, usually trying a new route takes time and time of trial and error and trying to figure out where my hands go and where my feet go.

So sometimes it's putting all my weight, all my trust on a hold that's probably not that much bigger than a golf ball. And sometimes it involves taking a bit of a leap of faith, jumping from one hold to

another hold, hoping that my feet will land right where it needs to be.

And climbing can be representative of our daily lives, too. Sometimes factors within our control can affect the outcome of our lives. But sometimes factors outside of control, like the Typhoon 3, can affect them.

Sometimes we succeed in climbing the corporate ladder, but sometimes others beat us to the top. Sometimes our high-risk, high-reward investments, like GameStop stock, makes us a lot of money.

[5 : 02] But other times we lose money even on low-risk investments like bonds. And while it's easy for us to praise God when we feel like we're at the top of the world and are doing well, what happens when the hard times kick in?

Where do you place your faith in then in the midst of your hard times? The chance to remain faithful in the midst of adversity isn't something that is much different from what David, who was the author of Psalm 11, experienced.

And to give some background, David is the second king of Israel, and he's most famous for, out of all the people of Israel, he was the one that beat Goliath, who was a 10-foot-tall, formidable warrior. But his life took a hard turn, though. Not by his fault, but the previous king, Saul, disobeyed God and lost favor in God's sight.

And Saul became jealous of David. In 1 Samuel 18, we read that as David and the men of Israel were returning home from battle after beating Goliath, the Israelites were chanting, Saul has struck his thousands and David his 10-thousands.

[6 : 12] And now, I'm sure that the Israelites meant this as a chance to celebrate how the Israelites won the war over the Philistines. But hearing Saul being compared like this obviously made him very jealous.

And Saul even wanted to kill him, which forced David to flee from Saul and his army as they went after him. And it was during these times of trials when David probably wrote this psalm.

So let's dive into this psalm together. In verse 1, David starts with his main point by declaring that God is his refuge. He writes, In the Lord I take refuge.

How can you say to my soul, Flee like a bird to your mountain. So in light of David's security in God, the idea to flee or to run away is out of the question.

David doesn't ask others to validate his opinion by asking them what they think, as if David needed someone else to tell him that finding his refuge in God is the right thing. But he instead asks this rhetorical question to challenge the advice that he's receiving from his advisors.

[7 : 16] So through the psalm, David wants to show us that we can place our trust in God during our trials because he is our holy and righteous judge.

Let me repeat that again. Trust in God during our trials because he is the holy and righteous judge. And when bad things happen or when evil comes upon us, we can still trust in God even if the world says otherwise.

And we'll take a look at the psalm in the following sections. First section, the insufficient advice. And second section, the holy and righteous judge. So let's look at the first point, the insufficient advice. Verses 1 to 3 reads, So in these verses, David's advisors are essentially telling him to run away so that David can preserve all that he's built his life upon.

Now, from David's perspective, this might not seem like a bad or unwise thing to do. As mentioned earlier, at this point in history, David already established himself as a valiant warrior, and he was already in line to be the next king.

[8 : 48] He was also anointed by the prophet Saul and has the favor of God upon him. So if David doesn't flee, he might lose his popularity contest to Saul.

But also, if Saul wins, then Saul might continue ruling over Israel and leading the Israelites down a path of moral destruction. But David here isn't necessarily trying to prove that fleeing is bad or wrong.

In fact, as mentioned earlier, David actually physically fled from Saul. But rather, David is highlighting how his advisors' advice to flee is based on their limited view of who God is.

His advisors think that God isn't strong enough for David to place his foundation in. And his advisors want to ensure that David, especially when Saul or others are against him, has some sort of backup plan just in case God fails.

And if we look at our own lives, do we have our own backup plans in case God fails? And what does that say about our view of God?

[9 : 55] Do we believe that God is the sure and steadfast anchor who is worthy of our faith and trust? In verse 2, then reveals the immediate dangers that David was facing.

Let's look at verse 2 together. So David's advisors are using the imagery of archery to show us that the wicked, which refers here to Saul and his army, are attacking the righteous, which refers to David and his men.

And on one hand, there's a sense of secrecy and surprise when wicked are shooting in the dark. Being in the darkness reduces our ability to understand our surroundings and it gives the wicked an upper hand.

But on the other hand, the image of the wicked shooting in the dark also shows us how we often feel defenseless when we're being attacked. Unlike someone standing right in front of you, wielding a sword and slashing you or stabbing you, archers are not only able to attack you from a distance, but at the same time, it's also harder for you to retaliate and attack them back.

And before we move on to the next section of this psalm, let us reflect on what this psalm means for us in our world today. The Bible often portrays mountains as a picture of strength, of stability, of security, and that's how our countries would want our governments to be too.

[11 : 29] But in a time when tensions are escalating between nations and the stability of the global economy is at risk, where do we run to? Or if we look specifically more into our own lives, in the midst of our own struggles, what are the mountains that we flee to?

And where do we turn to to find security? For many of us, we always find ways to distract ourselves, to escape from our present realities, whether it's through alcohol, through Netflix, through Tinder. And while these things are not necessarily inherently bad, they only take our focus off of the situation temporarily and ultimately fail to provide the long-lasting security or peace that God gives us.

Once you've sobered up after a long night out, you still have to wake up and go to work the next day. And once you've finished binge-watching Netflix, you might have to finish your homework that's due tomorrow, assuming that chat GPT is not allowed, but that's a different conversation. But instead of finding our refuge in these things, this psalm calls us to find our true refuge in God, just as David did, trusting that God hasn't failed, as God showed David when he beat Goliath, and never will fail us through eternity.

[12 : 54] And so we've looked at the insufficient advice that David has been receiving from his advisors, but then what is it about God that makes David cling to him as his refuge?

And what is it about God that draws David to him instead of causing David to flee? And why should we, if we look at the psalm, why should we cling to God when struggles come our way?

And David proceeds to describe who God is in verses 4 to 7, which leads to our next point, the holy and righteous judge. And first, let's look at God, the holy judge, as David establishes in verse 4. In which he writes, the Lord is in his holy temple. The Lord's throne is in heaven. His eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.

So as Kevin talked about earlier, the word holy means to be set apart. It's to be made distinct by God from what is ordinary. And in this verse, David uses the word holy to describe God's temple.

[14 : 00] And if you think about back in David's time, the Israelites gathered to worship God, not in a church building, not in Ebenezer school, but in a place that's known as a tabernacle.

And the innermost part of the tabernacle is known as the holy of holies. It's where the presence of God dwelled, and is so holy and sacred that, as Leviticus 16 shows us, only one person is allowed to enter the room each year.

And this one person is the high priest who entered into the holy of holies to atone for the sins of all of Israel. And he was only able to do so after following a series of procedures to ensure that he met God's standard of cleanliness.

And in fact, some accounts also mention that they would tie a rope to the leg of the high priest just in case the high priest might have missed a step in cleaning himself and died in the holy of holies so that they could track him out.

But as we see here, God's holiness means that no one can be in his presence without first being made clean. And therefore, only God himself in his holiness qualifies to live in his holy temple.

[15 : 15] And coming back to Psalm 11, David also shows us God's holiness by reminding us that his throne is in heaven. In verse four, he writes, the Lord is in his holy temple.

The Lord's throne is in heaven. And if you recall in the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis 1, we understand that on the second day of creation, God separated the heavens from the earth. And this is not just a physical separation that makes it impossible for us to get there. But it's also a reflection of how sinful our own hearts are and how infinitely far away we are from God.

Our hearts are so full of sin that no amount of good deeds we do outweighs the penalty of our own sin and buys us a ticket into heaven. And just as how we in our unholiness cannot be in the presence of God, we can't enter heaven either.

In the last line of verse four, David reminds us of God's vantage point. He writes, So David uses the imagery of God's eyes and eyelids to remind us that God knows all things and sees all things.

[16:28] Although God lives and reigns from heaven, which, as I talked about earlier, is separated from earth by much more than a physical barrier, his knowledge and understanding of the world transcends that barrier.

He sees beyond this barrier between us and hears and knows every spoken and unspoken thought that we have. And since God knows everything, we can trust in him knowing that he knows what's best for us.

And this isn't meant to sound like God is creepy or intrusive or a stalker, but that because God knows and sees everything, he's able to judge us righteously because he has all the facts.

To give a fair and just judgment. And this leads us to our next point. God, the righteous judge, which we see in verses five to seven. David writes in verse five that, The Lord tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves the violence.

So on one hand, David describes God as hating the wicked, but on the other hand, David describes God as testing the righteous.

[17:42] And now this might seem confusing as we would expect God's reaction to the righteous to be the opposite of hate, which is love. But David's choice of words here give clarity and insight as to how God demonstrates his love toward the righteous, which is by testing them.

And in the same way, despite how Saul is trying to kill David, David so firmly believes that God loves him and is using this opportunity as a way to test him.

And if you look at verse six, verse six further, David further elaborates what God does to the wicked. David writes, Let him rain coals on the wicked. Fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

So David shows us that God himself, and not David, is the one who will enact vengeance against the wicked. David also reminds us that the wicked deserve God's punishment, which isn't meant to be a light warning, but it's so severe even to the point of death.

And in the same way that God is just in punishing the wicked for what they deserve, he is equally just in rewarding the righteous for what they deserve, which is by testing them.

[19:09] Let's look at verse seven together. For the Lord is righteous. He loves righteous deeds. The upright shall behold his face. The word righteous is normally used to describe someone or something who is morally right or justifiable.

For instance, if you refer to someone as a righteous man, that someone would be someone who stays on the right side of the law, even when he's tempted to disobey it or pressure to break it.

But here in verse seven, David reminds us that God is righteous, that he is the ultimate standard of righteousness. And the fact that God is righteous is not different from how he is holy.

In fact, God's righteousness works hand in hand with how God is holy. God's perfect righteousness shows us what his perfect standard of holiness is.

It shows us that we fall infinitely short of his standard and how much we are in desperate need of his all-sufficient grace to save us. And David doesn't end by describing God as righteous, but he also adds another sentence by saying that God loves righteous deeds.

[20:29] And does it sound like David is unnecessarily repeating himself? By placing these two ideas together, David reminds us that a righteous God must love righteous deeds.

And it would go against God's character for him to love unrighteousness or be in the presence of any unholiness. And this is exactly what gives David the confidence to place his trust in God, that God in his holiness will be able to see that David is in the right and that Saul is in the wrong.

That God in his righteousness will help David, the righteous one, win the battle while judging Saul, the wicked one, by punishing him according to what he did to David.

But what does David finding his refuge in God mean for us? Like David, we too might feel like we are often unjustly persecuted for doing the right thing.

If you're in school, maybe you feel like your teacher should have given you the A instead of giving it to your lazy classmate who slacked off during a group project. And if you're in the workplace, maybe you feel like your clients are always blaming you for sticking too closely to the rules, especially when bending the rules just a tiny bit can help them save money, which really appeals to me because I'm a tax accountant.

[21 : 49] So yeah. But regardless of how others are treating you, we can rest assured knowing that God is the holy and righteous judge who notices these things, whether big or small.

His knowledge of everything in our lives makes him worthy of our full trust and devotion. And just as David finds his refuge in God during hard times, we too can find our refuge in our holy and righteous God, even when our struggles seem too big and when God seems small.

So from reading the psalm, maybe you think that you don't need God or maybe you think that you're the righteous one in a story just like David is.

And because of that, you don't deserve God's punishment. But we fast forward a few chapters to Psalm 14. David writes, there is none who does good, not even one.

And even David himself, the seemingly righteous man who is being attacked and pursued by the wicked Saul, comes to this conclusion that he himself is not good. And Paul also writes something similar in Romans as well.

[23 : 01] He says that, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Even the great apostle Paul himself knows that he is inwardly a sinner.

The Bible shows us that all of us are unable to meet God's standard of righteousness by our own efforts. And it's due to our own sin that makes it impossible for us to save ourselves.

We are inherently wicked and we rightfully deserve the fire, the sulfur, and the scorching wind to come upon us, just as David shows us in this Psalm.

And even after we die, we are destined to live and burn in hell for all eternity. But the story doesn't end here. God doesn't just leave us in our place of sin and despair to fend for ourselves.

In fact, he provides a way out of our hellbound trajectory by sending his own son, Jesus Christ, who is both fully God and fully human to this world to show us how he wants us to live.

[24 : 09] Which sounds like good news, right? Except, because of our sin, we didn't want Jesus. Instead of making Jesus our king, we rejected him and made ourselves our own kings, just as Kevin talked about last week.

And we hated Jesus so much that we gave him his death sentence by sending him to the cross where he died. But when Jesus died, something amazing happened.

The Bible tells us that at that moment, there was a big earthquake and the curtain that once separated the Holy of Holies that I talked about earlier from the rest of the temple was torn in two.

And this means that from that moment onward, we no longer needed a high priest or a sacrificial offering because Jesus himself is the great high priest and the sacrificial lamb who paid for all of our sins.

Those who turn to him and trust him. And he bore the death penalty that we, wicked sinners, deserved. And in doing so, he spared us from the punishment of God's judgment.

[25 : 21] But then Jesus' death was not the end though. Three days later, he rose from the grave. And Romans 6, 9 tells us that death no longer has dominion over Christ.

So we too, if we place our full faith in Jesus and trust that the blood he shed on the cross is more than sufficient to cover our sins, then we too will be resurrected in heaven after we die.

So what does Psalm 11 mean for us? As David shows us, when it seems like evil and chaos are surrounding you and your life is crashing down, we should still find our refuge in God because he is our holy and righteous judge.

And like David, we don't have to look to anything else or anyone else to find our refuge. But we can instead remind ourselves of who God is and let the truth of who God is draw us to him.

He resides in his holy temple in heaven and righteously judges us for his own glory. And the refuge we find in God is exactly what we need to survive the enemy's attacks on us.

[26 : 37] But the Christian life isn't just about surviving though. It isn't just about the here and now. If you look at verse 7, David writes that the upright shall behold his face.

And what does David try to say here? To behold something is more than just looking at something. It also has an aspect of gaze, of contemplation, of looking at something intently.

The first song we sung today was Behold Our God in which the chorus says, Behold Our God seated on his throne, come, let us adore him. And we aren't here just trying necessarily say, hey, there's God, let's look at him and sing to him.

But we are instead fixing the eyes of our hearts on God who sits on the throne and using all that we have with all enthusiasm to ascribe to God the praise and the glory that he alone deserves.

So now we know what the word behold means, but what does David mean when he says that the upright shall behold his face? Can we even see the face of God?

[27 : 51] God tells Moses in Exodus 33 that you cannot see my face for man shall not see me and live. And as we looked at just now, because of our sin and unholiness, we cannot even be in the mere presence of our holy God.

And much less are we physically able to see God's face. So David here is instead showing us that the ultimate end goal of the Christian life, beyond all the trials, the tribulations, the suffering in your life that God puts us through is to see the face of God.

To be able to see not a God hidden behind a veil, but instead see God for who he really is. not the seemingly evil and cruel God that we tend to see, not just the God that punishes the wicked, but to instead see him as the holy God, the righteous God that demonstrated his love for us by sending his son Jesus to die on the cross for us.

And he is the God in whom we can place our full trust in, just like David did when he was being pursued by Saul. And so, now we know that we need to survive until our journey ends.

But what about the here and now? What are ways that we can find our refuge in our holy and righteous God in our daily lives? The one, if life is good, recognize that you still need God.

[29 : 32] Finding our refuge in God starts with us knowing that we need him. Maybe you feel like you're doing well right now and you don't want to change the status quo or maybe you think that God is something that only the weak and the broken people need.

But that is exactly why we need to first understand about ourselves is that we are inherently weak and broken people. Whether life is good or bad, our works still cannot save us.

And regardless of our circumstances, we are still in desperate need of God's grace to save us. So even when life is good, remember that you still need God.

And two, if life is a struggle, remember that this journey isn't over. In defending his ministry, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4, 17, that for this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

So whatever you're struggling with right now, maybe it's a job situation you're in right now or maybe you're struggling with sin. Maybe you are struggling with depression or maybe you've lost a loved one recently.

[30 : 48] But know this, we can trust in God knowing that he is preparing us for an eternal purpose. And just as David trusted that God is testing him through his trials, we too can trust that God is using our situations to shape us, to mold us into something greater.

And we can rest assured with the assurance that one day we will see Jesus face to face as David described, free from the sin and the suffering in this world.

And if you're here today but don't consider yourself to be a Christian, then perhaps ask yourself, where does your hope lie?

And even if you don't agree with anything that I said over the past hour, I hope that this question resonates with you. And I do want you to know that this is also a question that Christians struggle with all the time.

Where does your hope lie? Where does your hope lie? Where does your hope lie? And I myself, as I was reflecting on this question while preparing for this message, I've been thinking about how much hope I've been placing on an internal transfer application I put in that has been in limbo for quite a while.

[32 : 08] I got support from my boss, I had my interviews, and HR even told me that the interviews went well. And I was very optimistic that I would be starting in my new department at the beginning of this year, thinking that it would deliver me out of the misery and the boredom and the repetitiveness of my current position, and instead give me long-lasting happiness and fulfillment.

But fast forward to now, I'm still on my same job. Though through this long and arduous process, I do feel like God has been working within me.

He's been challenging my convictions, he's been testing my patience, and while I still don't fully know why he's placed me or kept me where I am, I know that he has a specific purpose for doing so.

And in the meantime, even though my transfer hasn't happened yet, or maybe it won't even happen, I am still trusting God knowing that he is sovereign over my life and that he, as the holy and righteous judge, is in control over my life.

And this is just my story, but I'm sure that all of you guys have similar stories of placing your trust in other things than in God.

[33 : 28] And in every situation that we are in, we can still place our trust in God knowing that he is our holy and righteous judge. And even when it seems like our struggles never end, even when it seems like our world is crashing down on us, we can still place our full faith in him.

And as we will sing later, Jesus is the solid rock on which we stand as we navigate life on this earth. watermark, let us seek Jesus in everything that we do and build our foundation in him from now until the day we will see him.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, I thank you for being the holy and righteous judge over our lives. And God, we're sorry that we've placed our hope in our education, in our career, in everything else but in you.

But God, I pray that you help us see that whether it's in the midst of our struggles or whether we are doing good, you are still the God that we can place our trust in.

Help us trust in you knowing that through our testing, you are transforming our hearts to become more like yours. And help us trust in you knowing that our journey isn't over, that we have something to look forward to at the end.

[35 : 00] And Jesus, help us look forward to that day when we will be with you, when we will be free of the sin and the suffering and the trials of this world. In your name I pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Eig New