

“Confronting Crisis”

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Psalms Series

Sermon 11

First United Presbyterian Church

Moline, Illinois

August 19, 2018

Matthew 21:28-32

Psalm 11

Matthew 21:28-32

[28] “What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ [29] And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. [30] And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. [31] Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. [32] For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him. (ESV)

Psalm 11

To the choirmaster. Of David.

**[1] In the LORD I take refuge;
how can you say to my soul,
“Flee like a bird to your mountain,
[2] for behold, the wicked bend the bow;
they have fitted their arrow to the string
to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart;
[3] if the foundations are destroyed,
what can the righteous do?”**

**[4] The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD's throne is in heaven;
his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.
[5] The LORD tests the righteous,
but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves
violence.**

**[6] Let him rain coals on the wicked;
fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion
of their cup.**

**[7] For the LORD is righteous;
he loves righteous deeds;
the upright shall behold his face. (ESV)**

I. Introduction

Fear and anxiety can pop up for all sorts of reasons, or for no discernible reason at all. Maybe you face a terrible disease. Maybe you have to have surgery. Maybe you're going through some sort of conflict. Perhaps your marriage is in trouble, and it's eating you up. Or you've been attacked, or you are afraid of failing in some big way—or maybe you already have. Maybe you once had a full house with spouse and kids, and now it's just you. Or it's time to move out and go off on your own. And sometimes just the everyday pressures of life add up. What do you do when you feel fear rising? How do you cope when anxiety moves into your chest and refuses to leave? Today's Scripture is a short, powerful Psalm that brings good news for troubled souls. Come find peace for your soul, as the gracious gift of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

A. Psalms

Today we are returning to our series on the Psalms—the hymnbook of the Bible. This is poetry meant to be sung, and it is unique in that it is divinely-inspired *not* as God speaking to us, but as a model of believers speaking to God. It is therefore appropriate for worship, and the Psalms also provide for us models of prayer. That's why we've begun using a few lines of a Psalm to start off our congregational prayers for the last couple of weeks. By praying together at both the beginning and the end of the congregational prayer, we are reminded that this prayer is meant to be all of us praying together, and is not just somebody up front putting on a show.

B: Psalm 11: Crisis

As we take up our series once again, we find ourselves in Psalm 11. This Psalm was written by David. We don't know exactly when in his life he wrote it, but it was a time of crisis. Likewise, each of us will experience times of crisis. In a way, this whole life here in this fallen world is a kind of extended crisis. So how do you handle it when your world falls apart, or even if the foundations of society begin to crumble? What is a Christian person to do?

II. Refuge in the Lord (v. 1)

The short answer comes in the very first words of verse 1: *In the LORD I take refuge*. The word refuge implies danger, and a need to be protected from it. Refuge means “a condition of being safe or sheltered from pursuit, danger, or trouble.”¹ The Hebrew word carries the sense of turning aside to seek protection—whether it's from bad weather, the scorching sun, or the attacks of enemies. Verse 1: *In the Lord I take refuge*. Because God is Spirit, taking refuge in him implies an action of your spirit. So when you feel threatened by something, we are to take refuge in God, rather than simply trying to run away from the danger. Verse 1b derides the temptation to just try to run away from your problems: *How can you say to my soul, “Flee like a bird to your mountain?”*

¹ Google Dictionary

We are not to run away from our problems, fleeing alone. No, instead of running away by ourselves, we run *to* the Lord, who will protect us. More than that, in him, we move from fear to confidence. He is our Savior, he is our strength, he is our life. When we are in him, he strengthens us. His Word is food for our spirits. He will help us, by his Holy Spirit.

Therefore, when you *feel* fear and anxiety—*remind* yourself of God's help, and *choose* to take refuge in him. Replace fear with faith.

III. Malice and Destruction (vv. 2-3)

And yet, this can be so hard to do. For our circumstances can be very fearsome indeed. David acknowledges that in verses 2-3.

A. Ambushed

Verse 2 is all about being the victim of pure malice: *for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart.* This is when someone secretly makes a plan that threatens your life, your peace, or your livelihood—and seeks to do you this harm without getting caught. *They shoot in the dark at the upright in heart.* This is an unwarranted, evil attack. It's an ambush. And when you get ambushed, it can throw you off stride. That's why we prepare ourselves emotionally for it ahead of time, and remind ourselves of the plan of action when it happens. Take refuge in the Lord. Choose to be confident in him. Do not fear Goliath. Do not fix your

attention on the threat, but rather, fix your attention upon God who is mighty to save.

B. Foundations Destroyed

A second danger deals with calamities that go beyond your own individual welfare to strike at the foundations of society itself. This might include war, famine, contagion, or the philosophical cancer of relativism consuming the very moral foundations of our once-Christian nation. *Verse 3: if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?* Sometimes we can face the attacks of one bad-actor aimed at us, but there are other times when it feels like *everything* is falling apart, and you've got nowhere to go. Should you give in to despair, even if you don't see any path of escape?

No! Do not give up hope in the Lord! Verses 4-6 now dive into this. No matter how it *seems*, God is there, he rules, he knows, and he is at work in all this, even for good.

IV. God Is Sovereign (vv. 4-6)

A. He Is There

Never forget, that no matter what it may *seem* like, God is there. He has not gone away. He is with you, so trust in him. You are not alone. In

Hebrews 13:5, God says, *I will never leave you nor forsake you*. God exists, he is in our midst, and so you must remind yourself always that you are not alone. [4] *The LORD is in his holy temple*.

B. He Rules

Moreover, God is not just sitting there watching your crisis, doing nothing. No, he has a plan, he is in control, and he is good. [4] *The LORD's throne is in heaven*. The throne shows that he *rules*. He is going to *do* something for good even in your hard situation.

C. He Knows What Is Happening

Moreover, even though he may be silent for a season, he knows *exactly* what is going on. Verse 4: *his eyes see*. He sees everything and knows everything, even our inmost thoughts. He knows your suffering, and he's not going to leave you in it indefinitely. He has allowed this in your life for some mysterious reason, and he is going to use it both to *test* you and to *grow* you—so that you will be the person he intends you to be in eternity. Hebrews 12:6-7: *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

D. He Tests the Righteous and Will Improve Them

God therefore tests the righteous through hardship, and he will improve your character for glory. Verse 4: *His eyelids test the children of man.* Verse 5: *The LORD tests the righteous.* The testing through hardship in your life reveals the character of your soul. It is the storms of this life that show whether or not you have actually built on the foundation of the word of Christ. It is the buffeting of wind and wave and attacks and crises that show the quality of how you've spent your life. Have you been serious about seeking God? Or have you been going through the motions? You can put on a show from day to day, but it's the crises of life that will reveal the reality. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15:

[10] According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. [11] For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. [12] Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—[13] each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. [14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

When the Lord looks at your life, when he looks to see the quality of your obedience, endurance, faith, love, and service in the midst of hardship, what will he find? Are you actually obeying him, and stepping out boldly in faith and service? Or do we just read about it in Bible

stories? Do we follow the example of the Apostle Paul and plant churches, or do we just enjoy the assurance of salvation we receive for ourselves in Jesus—and then go out for a nice lunch?

Jesus once said, “What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ [29] And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. [30] And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. [31] Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. [32] For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

Many of us in this congregation have been Christians for a long time. But do not let familiarity breed contempt. Do not lose that first love—that first excitement of knowing Jesus Christ. If it has grown dull, then rekindle it through a decision to praise God with zeal, and to obey God with radical devotion. The Christian foundations of our culture are eroding away. As a church, we can no longer be complacent, or simply rely on outside people coming here to us. The lost are in just as desperate a need for salvation in our day as in Paul’s. Why is it then that we have shown no urgency to plant new churches in our own community where people are moving-in and the area is expanding?

When God examines your life, when he finishes with all the testing that we go through in this world, what will he find in you? What sort of obedience to the Lord did you practice? Yes, if you believe in Jesus you are saved, and that's good news! But now, on the foundation of faith in Jesus, how did you live your life? And what does your life reveal? Did you build on the foundation of Christ with *gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw*?

Faith without works is dead—a real faith is lived out in a truly-changed life of selfless service.

E. He Hates Evil

So the Lord tests and disciplines and refines the righteous—that is, he uses hard times to improve them, for their eternal good. By contrast, verse 5 says that *his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence*. Never forget, that though God may seem silent in your life at key times and for long periods, he is there, he is on his throne, he is in ultimate control and he *hates* evil.

F. He Will Destroy the Wicked

In fact, God does not just hate evil, he is going to do something about it. Judgment will come on all evil. Verse 6: *Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup*. Though the wicked may prosper for a while, and though they might visit great trouble upon you for a season, this too shall pass. God will destroy

the wicked, and put an end to all their evil. If you belong to God, he will vindicate you in the end. That's what we see as we move from verse 6 to verse 7: God will save you.

V. Vindication: God Will Save (v. 7)

A. The Lord Is Righteous

Verse 7: For the LORD is righteous. That means that he is right, and just. He fulfills his own moral law perfectly at all times, and he keeps his own covenants perfectly at all times as well. As Peter writes, the Lord waits to execute final judgment in order to bring more people to faith and repentance. His delay—while he temporarily tolerates continuing evil—represents his mercy for those whom he is still planning to save. But the Lord *is* righteous—and so we can have complete confidence in him, no matter much time passes until he vindicates us and finally ends all evil.

B. He Loves Righteous Deeds

In the meantime as well, we should not only call to mind that the Lord himself is righteous and will one day work out complete justice, but we must also bear in mind that *he loves righteous deeds* (verse 7). Here again is the reminder to extend ourselves in radical obedience to the Lord in the pursuit of righteous deeds. But now, don't just hear this and let it flow by like water under the bridge. Let's examine ourselves earnestly! Where are our righteous deeds? Are we obeying the Lord to

the fullest extent of our capabilities? Are we extending ourselves in faith?

This whole Psalm is about weathering crises and battling through the fear and anxiety by turning our focus to God and taking refuge in him. When we praise him and meditate on him, we choose confidence—not *self*-confidence, but rather, confidence *in God!* And the amazing thing is that when we have confidence in God, then we gain a supernatural boldness for faithful obedience in the form of righteous deeds. For if God is for us, who can be against us? When you are filled with confidence in God, then you start to move spiritually from a defensive posture to an offensive posture. You go from worrying about being a victim of the forces of hell, to instead joyfully stepping forward as a spiritual soldier of Christ to advance the kingdom of God. And that's what our long-range vision will be about as we describe it in our congregational meeting this morning. We don't want to run away. We don't want to be complacent. We want to take refuge in the Lord, grow in confidence in him, and then advance his kingdom with great boldness and faith. Remember the story of Caleb and Joshua in the book of Numbers. Although the Promised Land was full of walled cities and strong giants, they voted to enter and conquer anyway—for if God commands it, then God will bring victory. Even so, should we not also step out with such faith and boldness today?

And so what if we fail? Even so, we would be doing greater deeds of righteousness than we are right now. May we *not* live with our own comfort and convenience as our highest goals—but rather, let us put

before our eyes the things that will please the Lord on judgment day. I want to hear the Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” I want to see Daniel 12:3 fulfilled, which says, *And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*

Strive for the great deeds in service of the kingdom of God! Just as David had his mighty men of valor in physical battle in the Old Testament, may we aspire to be mighty men and women of valor here in the continuing history of the New Testament church as it spreads spiritually throughout the world!

Look, we know God is going to judge us. We are saved by faith, so there is now no condemnation. Praise the Lord! However, there’s still a comprehensive life review—every word, every thought! If we believe in Jesus, we won’t be condemned, but, as Jesus said in Matthew 12:36: *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.* On this basis, God will distribute rewards and responsibilities for the life to come.² So why not ask what pleases God—what are truly righteous deeds, and do *those*? The Lord loves righteous deeds. Let’s commit ourselves to lives of righteous deeds that will bring our good Lord pleasure.

C. He Will Save and Glorify the Upright

² Matthew 25

Remember that in all of this, we are secure in Jesus Christ! For no matter how Satan may buffet, no matter what trials we go through, God will save and glorify the upright. Verse 7: *the upright shall behold his face*. The face of God! The angels veil their faces, but we shall see him as he really is. We shall know him even as we have been fully known. We will be his holy, forgiven, perfected sons and daughters stewarding all of creation in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is salvation and glorification all wrapped into one perfect bundle. And so because we are assured of this, we can have confidence in God. Then as we grow in confidence in God, his promises begin to be realized in our lives, as the peace of God fills our hearts and his joy flows into us.

D. Who Are the Upright? It's Those who Trust in Jesus

This is confidence *in God*—not *in ourselves*. But now, when this Psalm talks about the upright, that does *not* refer to those who just worked really hard and lived really good lives. No—if it were based on our own efforts, none of us would qualify! Rather, the one who is upright is the one who trusts in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. For our salvation is not based on our own performance, but on God's grace, received by faith. When we believe in Jesus, then his righteous life is credited to us as our own, and our sins are transferred to him to bear as his own. And so he died on the cross to pay the price for our sins, and on account of his righteousness credited to us as a free gift, we are considered to be upright in God's sight. So when God looks at a believer in Jesus, he sees that person clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The upright are

upright because of the uprightness of Jesus Christ—and not their *own* performance!

So believe in Jesus, receive the gift of *his* righteousness, and therefore eternal life! And if you believe in Jesus, then remember that you *already* have eternal life! Remind yourself of this, and use this fact to drive out your fear and your anxiety. Choose to praise God, and choose to be confident in him. This perspective will give you peace in crisis, for though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, the Good Shepherd will bring you through successfully, and he will prepare a table before you in the presence of your enemies. Your cup shall overflow.

VI. Conclusion: Through Crisis to Safe Harbor

Rejoice! The heart that rejoices knows that it already stands acquitted before the throne of God on judgment day. Defeat your fears and anxieties by recalling the assurance of salvation in Christ. Choose confidence in God, and then, no matter what, you will not be disappointed. Indeed, you will be equipped with the boldness and confidence and faith to embark on great adventures for the glory of the Lord. Today we step out. The days of biblical exploits are not yet over. Why not us? Let's turn many to righteousness through Jesus Christ, and shine like the stars forever. Let's ask God to make us ten-talent people. Let's aim for a hundred-fold harvest. For no matter what darkness and

troubles come at us in this life, we will stand victorious with Christ.
What have we got to lose? *“Even so”—it is well with my soul.*

Glory to God! Alleluia!

Amen