

In Faith We Will See the Lord's Face

Psalms 11 • 2021-11-14



Someone recently shared with me a video clip from a pastor in Australia. The video had the title of something on the lines of, "I never thought I'd say this." The pastor went on to explain all the dangers and political ploys which we are moving against people and Christian churches in Australia. It was quite striking to hear him describe the government system setup for reporting non-compliant churches. The hefty fines imposed on some people seemed outrageous. And the new rules weren't just about pandemic affairs like mandatory masks or vaccines. They were about required digital trackers and digital codes which would permit a person to do basic things like shop, travel, or even gather for worship. The pastor concluded that he would need to relocate to a safer place in order to continue doing ministry. That meant setting up a new headquarters in the United States. I don't know much about his ministry or his motives for wanting to relocate. But just as early Christians had to flee in order to carry on ministry, I'm sure some of his precautions were prudent. No doubt many can relate to the frustrations and concerns he faces over those who want to silence his ministry and take control over it.

It certainly was an attention-grabbing video title, "I never thought I'd say this." Consider how many of you have already said that same phrase regarding your fears about changes in the world. Try to anticipate just how many Christians will still be saying that same phrase in years to come. What will we do when there is no safer place to flee? Today we are meditating on a Psalm by David which deals with this very same struggle. In Psalm 11 David shares the appropriate response for a believer who faces a world turned against them.

David knew what it was like to be hounded down by enemies on all sides and forced to flee. When he was young David once stood up against Goliath. But later he couldn't stand up against an entire army. King Saul wanted him dead. David ended up nearly trapped in a house surrounded by Saul's men who were waiting to kill him. David had to flee and hide in the mountains. And when he was king many years later David once again was surrounded by his enemies. His own son Absalom started a rebellion. David was forced to flee to the mountains in order to save his life.

So, you can imagine David was no stranger to hearing people around him say, "You have to flee! The enemy is too great!" That's what he writes about at the start of Psalm 11. People around him were telling him, "*Flee to your mountain like a bird. Look! The wicked bend their bow. They set their arrow against the string to shoot in the darkness at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being torn down, what can the righteous do?*"

God's people have given into despair and defeat far too many times in the past. Remember how quickly the people of Israel despaired right after the plagues? They had left Egypt with a powerful display by their God. But soon they feared dying by the attacking chariots of Pharaoh. And the same people didn't act any better when they explored the promised land. They cried in defeat, "It will be impossible to take possession of this land." The army of the first king of Israel cowered in fear under the threat of Goliath. They forgot who they served and who fought for them. Centuries later nearly all the Israelites in exile in Babylon obediently bowed to the idol set up by King Nebuchadnezzar. They were too afraid to resist. And when Nehemiah tried to rebuild the temple of the Lord with the people who returned from exile, it wasn't easy. The people were too afraid of the surrounding enemies. Things didn't get that much better as time went on. Seemingly bold men like Peter ended up fleeing. He ran off along with all of Jesus' disciples on that night when a band of soldiers came to Gethsemane. "*Flee to the mountains like a bird!*"

And we might feel the same way today. Would we flee in the face of surrounding enemies? There is a real spiritual battle going on. The Scriptures describe the situation for us, "*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" (Eph 6:12) We see the flaming arrows aimed at us in the darkness. The same groups of people who are targeting churches in other countries will eventually find their way here. A Christian only needs to mention their stance on Scripture to find themselves a target of the devil's attacks. If you affirm the Word of Christ and say that he instituted marriage as a life-long union of one man and one woman you will be surrounded by attack. If you affirm that all life --including the unborn, the elderly, and the intellectually or physically disabled is valuable and should be honored, then watch out. You may see the bow bent and the arrows set on the string to shoot at you.

How should Christians respond to all these threats? Many are cowering in fear at the culture around them. "*What can the righteous do?*" It seems like they can choose to either suffer, flee, or adapt. Some flee or avoid the stigma of attending a faithful church. Others adapt. But how do many adapt? When a teaching is no longer popular or accepted, they say, "*When the foundations are being torn down (marriage, family, gender, life, the free preaching of the gospel), what can the righteous do?*" What can the righteous do besides fleeing or giving up in a world that is changing so fast?

And don't misunderstand. It's not wrong for Christian preachers in Australia to adapt by relocating to places where they can continue to do ministry. It wasn't wrong for David to flee when Saul was trying to kill him or when his son Absalom was hunting him down. David knew when it was time to flee to the mountains just to live another day.

He was prudent, but David presents an attitude far removed from a response of fear. He holds an attitude guided by faith. It seems like David became sick of hearing people around him telling him to flee. His response: "Flee? What do you mean 'what can the righteous do?'" David wasn't one to give into despair and defeat. He was one who took refuge in the Lord. *"How can you say these things to my soul? ... In the Lord I take refuge."*

You don't ever have to fear when you are found in the Lord. *"The LORD is in his holy temple. The LORD is on his throne in heaven."* God isn't ever outnumbered. He sits ruling over this world. When it seems like all the foundations are crumbling, remember who founded the earth and rules over it.

And our Lord isn't just some ruler who sits unaware of what is going on in our life. *"His eyes observe. He focuses on the children of Adam."* That should be a warning for all who commit evil. It should also be a warning for churches that decide they can tolerate wickedness. God is watching. All churches that try to avoid suffering by affirming evil cannot go unnoticed by the Lord. He is watching and will hold them to account. And the same can be said for you and me. If we begin to give into defeat and tolerate sin in our own lives, we are not going to escape his notice. The Christian who cries out against homosexuality but allows pornography to take a secret hold in his heart is a hypocrite. He is not fleeing evil or fighting it if he lets it rule his heart and home. The Christian who defends life but isn't helping single mothers or won't take the time to honor his aging parents are not fooling God. Our God focuses on what everyone is doing and failing to do. And he sees your life. *"There is no creature hidden from him, but everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we will give an account."* (Heb 4:13) Our holy God focuses on us and our deeds!

And though the wicked bend their bow to attack us it will be nothing compared to the one in heaven acting from his holy throne. *"The LORD is righteous. He examines the wicked. He really hates those who love violence. On the wicked he will rain down fiery coals and sulfur."* The Lord will not allow evil to stand forever. He will bring every evil act into judgment and will send the sinner to the fires of hell. What God did to the sexually immoral in Sodom and Gomorrah is a picture of what he will do for everyone who is immoral. The fires of hell await all who do evil.

What can the righteous do when the foundations are being torn down? They can trust that the devil will fear to tear down the foundations of God's Church. The Lord is on his throne in heaven. The Lord will tear down the foundations of this sinful world and bring it into judgment. And those who take refuge in him will not see defeat and the dark. In the end they will see triumph with God in the light. *"Indeed, the LORD is righteous. He loves righteousness. The upright will view his face."*

In faith we trust that God rescues all who take refuge in him. The Israelites despaired when they saw Pharaoh's army. The same Lord who sent the ten plagues then drowned Pharaoh's army in the sea. The Israelites despaired at the great walled cities of Canaan. God made the walls come crumbling down. The army of Saul cowered in fear. God used a shepherd boy to bring down the great warrior. The exiles bowed in fear of the threat of fire. Three men didn't burn in the fire. God sent his angel to protect them when they didn't bow to worship the idol of gold. Nehemiah's men were afraid of the enemies around them. God allowed his temple to be built and kept them safe. The disciples fled in fear of the power of the soldiers and the Sanhedrin. Jesus faced the attacks in the darkness of this world knowing he would rise from the grave. He showed his fearful and fleeing disciples his power over death and all the enemies of God.

Though we may fear, and we may falter from the truth, and we may flee, Jesus didn't turn aside one step from his mission. He held on in faith. Peter tried to get him to turn aside from the cross. He told Jesus that the cross would never happen. But Jesus responded, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me to drink?" And basically said to his own, "How can you say to me, 'flee?'" He faced the cross in our place. And on the cross he bore the fire and judgment of hell which God justly pours out on every sinner. So, all who take refuge in him can live without fear. And every sinner who repents can stand righteous through faith in their Savior Lord.

I've mentioned this before but want to share it again. The Psalm described only two sides of the spiritual warfare going on in this world. There are the wicked and the righteous. It is very black and white. You are either righteous in God's sight or wicked. You are for God or against him. There is no in-between camp. That is because our righteousness comes through faith. All who take refuge in Jesus are righteous. The righteous are all who bear the robe of righteousness given by Jesus to all who believe. It is a gift of God received through faith. That describes all who believe. It describes you who take refuge in the Lord and all his promises in Christ.

It is interesting to note that David uses the same word for God's examining gaze on mankind to describe the righteous looking on the face of God. You will be brought from the plight of this world with its arrows flying toward you in the dark. And you will be brought to the light of God's presence. The flaming arrows will cease. And you will behold the face of God. You will see it in the living and glorified flesh of the Son of God. He now sits on his throne in heaven.

Now, what will you do the next time you hear reports that make it feel like the whole world around you is crumbling? How will you feel when it seems like there is nothing the righteous can do but flee or give into despair? Take refuge in the Lord. Join with David and all who trust in the Lord to go from fear to faith. Know that the Lord sees what is going on. He will deal with every sinner. And all who look to the living, reigning Christ will see his face with all the saints.