

Psalm 11 Sermon / COB / 06.12.16

Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** Open up your Bible to Psalm 11. In my last year of seminary, I wrote a twenty-five page paper about this psalm. If I were to read it aloud to you, it would take us about two hours. How many of you brought your lunch? Perhaps I should ask how many of you are hungry for the word of God! Good news for everyone: I think I can give you the essential highlights in half an hour.
- † There are some small differences between English translations of this psalm, but the meaning should be plain in whatever translation you use. Today, I am going to share my personal translation. Let's read it and then I will tell you where I differ from the major English translations.

[2: 11.1-3]	1	[Introduction] [David speaks]	For the Director; according to David. I have taken refuge in Yahweh. How can you say to my soul, "Flee like a bird to a mountain?"
	2	[Advisors respond]	"Indeed, see! The wicked are bending the bow. They have taken aim with their arrow on the bow string, to shoot in darkness toward the upright of heart.
	3		For the foundations are ruined. What has the righteous person done?"
[3: 11.4-7]	4	[David responds]	Yahweh is in his holy temple. Yahweh, his throne is in Heaven. His eyes see, his eyelids examine the sons of mankind.
	5		Yahweh examines the righteous and the wicked. His soul hates the one who loves wrongdoing.
	6		May he cause it to rain snares on the wicked! Fire and brimstone and raging wind are the portion of their cup.
	7		For Yahweh is righteous. He loves righteous deeds. The upright will see his face.

- † **[4: Yahweh]** Two thoughts about this translation. First, I have used God's name, instead of "LORD" all in capitals. God revealed his name to mankind with the intention that we would use it when remembering and praising him. It is one of the great tragedies of history that we have lost certainty on how to pronounce God's name and have given up using it. Scholars think *YAH-way* is the most likely pronunciation, and that is what I have used here.
- **[5: dialogue]** Second, there were no quotation marks in ancient Hebrew. So we have to decide who is talking in each line of the psalm. Most English Bibles assume David does all the talking, while quoting at length from his advisors in vv.1-3. I think it makes more sense to see this as a dialogue. Let's look at it like that and see what you think!

Exposition

- † **[6: 11.1]** As we begin in v.1, his advisors have already told David that he should flee to the mountains. David quotes what they said as he responds with, **“I have taken refuge in Yahweh. How can you say to my soul, ‘Flee like a bird to a mountain?’”**
- Let me ask you, do you think David’s advisors actually said, “David, you should flee like a *bird* to the mountain!” Probably not. Most advisors were more deferential around a king, especially a passionate warrior king like David. Most likely they advised him to flee to some particular mountain fortress. So David’s question contains an element of angry mockery, which is brought out even more by the use of a rhetorical question. David asks how they can advise such an action, when he has chosen to depend on God.
 - The mountain would be a refuge, high, remote, and defensible; perhaps it offered hidden ledges or the cover of trees to which a bird could flee for refuge from a predator. But David says he already has taken refuge in God; this means he has already put his trust in God for deliverance. I imagine David standing behind God, or under his cloak, allowing God to fight his battles for him.
 - Those of us who know David’s biography might wonder why he saw flight as acceptable at other times, but not now. We do not have the details of this situation, but perhaps he was being advised to flee from a foreign attack and leave his capital and its people helpless; that would have been counter to his understanding of his covenant role as Israel’s king and God’s anointed representative. Perhaps the threat was internal strife – but not from his royal line – so again it would not be fitting for God’s anointed king to abandon the field to his antagonists. Perhaps whatever the threat, God had communicated to David his promise of protection in this instance.
 - You might know the story of David as a boy, when he was the only Israelite willing to stand up against the fearsome Philistine Goliath; do you remember that one? David had courage then because he believed in the promises God made in the Mosaic Covenant and had seen some of them come true already in his life. Now David is a grown man and God’s chosen King of Israel. He still believes in those promises, he has had prophetic visions about the coming Messiah-savior, and God has promised him that his dynasty will last forever. David’s perspective is, with God as his refuge, how can his anyone advise him to flee? Can you see his perspective?
- † **[7: 11.2-3]** The advisors respond in vv.2-3: **“Indeed, see! The wicked are bending the bow. They have taken aim with their arrow on the bow string, to shoot in darkness toward the upright of heart. For the foundations are ruined. What has the righteous person done?”**
- The imagery here is of a physical, military attack [the bow and arrow], but this could metaphorically represent a political attack. Elsewhere in his Psalms, David used the image of arrows to represent bitter speech or lies.
 - If this is a military attack, the advisors might be saying that the foundations of the defenses are in ruins and so the attackers must find victory over the city; if this is a political attack, they might mean the foundations of society – such as the legal code or civil order – are ruined to the point that the antagonists threaten the very existence of the king and his advisors. What is certain is that the wicked appear to be winning, they are about to strike the telling blow, and this puts David and his advisors in grave danger.
 - David’s advisors see that his enemies are ready to strike and all is crumbling; and they think, even David, as the righteous king, either has not been able to stop it or could not do so now, so they advise David to flee to the mountain. Can you see their perspective?

† **[8: 11.4-7]** Ok, but David has an answer for them as to why he will continue to rely on God. In vv.4-7, he says, **“Yahweh is in his holy temple. Yahweh, his throne is in Heaven. His eyes see, his eyelids examine the sons of mankind. Yahweh examines the righteous and the wicked. His soul hates the one who loves wrongdoing. May he cause it to rain snares on the wicked! Fire and brimstone and raging wind are the portion of their cup. For Yahweh is righteous. He loves righteous deeds. The upright will see his face.”**

- **[9: 11.4a-b]** Up in Heaven, which is a higher and greater refuge than any mountain, sits our all-knowing and holy God. I think David mentioned the temple to emphasize God’s holiness and righteousness, and he mentioned the throne to emphasize God’s authority and power.
- **[10: 11.4c-5]** This God’s eyes see everything, and his eyelids examine all people, both the righteous and the wicked. The Hebrew verb translated as “examine” here [בָּקַר] in this context means God is examining the hearts, testing the motives and actions, of all people. Nobody can escape his discernment, not even those who do their evil in the darkness. God is examining everyone, the righteous and the wicked, and – because of his own righteousness – his response is to hate the wicked, who love violence and wrongdoing.
- Does it seem strange to talk about God’s soul? We know God does not have a soul in the sense we think of the term, as almost a synonym for the human “spirit,” the immaterial essence of a person which God brings to Heaven after death. I looked up this word [שָׁדָד]. The most advanced Hebrew lexicon [HALOT] defines it in this context as “the centre [*sic*] and transmitter of feelings and perceptions.” So saying **“His soul hates the one who loves wrongdoing”** is like saying, “God, in his heart, hates the wicked who love wrongdoing.” God does not have a physical heart either, but saying it that way makes more sense to us.
- It also seems strange to many modern audiences to think of God hating anyone, but the meaning of this Hebrew verb [שָׂאָף] is clear. It is important to realize that the target of God’s hate is not the average person who struggles sometimes with temptation to do what is wrong. These wicked people love wrongdoing, they have made themselves enemies of God by outwardly opposing God’s ways. They have opposed the king, who was God’s anointed representative and leader of God’s people on Earth. By opposing David, these people have gone against God’s authority structure and sought to usurp authority for themselves.
- So, David’s response as to why he has sought refuge in God began with noting God’s character, authority, and awareness, and here builds on those things to include assurance that God knows the hearts and actions of the wicked and will focus his anger on them.

† **[11: 11.6]** David hopes God will act on his anger, by raining snares down upon the wicked. This was imagery which would have been familiar to David’s original audience. A snare was a net used by fowlers to catch birds. In the Bible the emphasis of this imagery was on the dominion of whoever cast the net and the powerlessness of the one who got caught by it.

- This also would be ironic: that David’s adversaries, while hunting him to the point where he was advised to flee like a bird, would themselves be caught in God’s net like birds. David is saying, “You think I should flee like a bird? It is my antagonists who will be caught like birds!”
- The raging wind might refer to the hot desert wind. Brimstone is an archaic word for burning sulfur. All this brings to mind the punishment God inflicted on Sodom and Gomorrah and images of the punishment coming with the final judgment or of Hell itself.

- If this is a military attack, we envision God physically raining down fire and burning sulfur, whipped by the wind, to thwart the attack. If this is a political attack, we envision God using the wicked's own unrighteousness to trap them into a suffering position, thus thwarting their attack, and perhaps reserving the literal fire and brimstone for a later date of ultimate judgment.
- † **[12: 11.7]** David finishes with a statement of confidence: God is righteous. God loves righteous deeds. Therefore, though the wicked target the upright, the upright will see God's face.
- In the Old Testament, upright people trust in God, reflect the character of God, and praise God. They are peaceful, and though they are targets for the wicked, they are saved by God.
 - David's language implies deliverance for God's people. In the Old Testament, when God hides his face the implication is that he will not respond to needs and prayers; on the other hand, to have God's face upon you or to have it shine upon you implies grace, peace, compassion, blessing, and that God sees what you are doing or what is happening to you.
 - If the advisors have pointed out that the righteous person has been unable to do anything to stop the wicked, David has an answer for them: he has a righteous God who is able to defeat the wicked and deliver the righteous person. Because God is righteous and loves righteous deeds, David anticipates that righteous people will see God's face, that God's face will shine upon the righteous. Thus David anticipates God defeating his antagonists.
 - Because of his covenants with God, David would have anticipated this deliverance in the physical near future, soon enough that he would not need to flee to the mountain as his advisors suggested. That's our psalm. Now let's talk about what we can do with it.

Meaning and Application

- † **[13: suffer]** We believers today certainly might suffer at the hands of the wicked, through physical attacks or verbal-political attacks. It seems guaranteed by New Testament passages such as **2 Timothy 3.12 NET**, which says, **"Now in fact all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."** We should prepare ourselves for such attacks and not be flustered by them. That's our first application: prepare for attack.
- † **[14: Mosaic]** Because of our faith, we will have enemies. I have heard some Christians say that since David calls for curses against his enemies, we can too, but that is not right. David and his countrymen were under a different spiritual paradigm than believers are today.
- Under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel as a nation was to reflect God's character and represent God over the rest of the nations, and the king of Israel was God's anointed representative leader over Israel and thus over all the world. So to be against David was to be against God; and because he could act for God, David had the right to seek divine punishment on the wicked.
 - However, with his death and resurrection, Jesus – as the Jewish Messiah – inaugurated a New Covenant which replaced the Mosaic Covenant. The benefits of this New Covenant will not be fully realized until Christ returns to rule on David's throne as the ultimate king of Israel and thus over all the world. But in the meantime, between Christ's ascension and his return, we have a different paradigm, with a unique purpose and system.
 - **[15: New]** Until Christ returns, the church – with Christ at the head – is to reflect God's character and represent God as his ambassadors to the rest of the world. The church is not to rule in authority, but rather to exhibit grace and love as we share the gospel and invite all

people to accept the salvation Christ offers. So while it is appropriate to long for God's deliverance from our adversaries and even to long for his ultimate justice when Christ returns, we are to pray for our enemies, not desire their destruction. Only Christ, as the ultimate Davidic king, will have authority to judge. Application two is to pray, not curse, our adversaries.

- † **[16: Retreat]** As we pray, should we flee or stand our ground? In this instance, David stood firm, but even David found it advisable to retreat more than once. So this psalm is not teaching that physical prudence and retreat are always in conflict with faith and obedience.
 - Also, in our time period, we do not have the same promises of physical deliverance and protection as had the nation of Israel or David as God's anointed king. I have heard believers say that they are fearless in dangerous situations, because they know God will not let harm come to them, but that is a foolish perspective, given the many New Testament teachings and examples to the contrary and the growing number of Christian martyrs around the world. Application three is to understand sometimes fleeing is necessary.
- † **[17: Wisdom & Revelation]** So how do we know when to flee and when to stand firm? Last week, Kevin, Steve, Matt, and I were talking about how to make decisions. Kevin shared this wisdom: when you need to make a decision about something like whether to buy a new car and God has not provided guidance, before you make that jump you have to carefully analyze how you will pay for it, whether it is worth the money, how well it will serve its purpose, whether there are better alternatives, and so on; on the other hand, if God reveals his will for you to do something, then you jump, you go for it, trusting God will help you work out the details later; you act in faith and obedience, trusting God with the result and using your human reasoning to help you fulfill God's will, rather than to decide what to do.
 - **[18: Psalm 11 example]** David's advisors no doubt were experienced and intelligent. They used human reasoning, which is not always wrong or sinful, but it can yield wrong answers if we do not consider God's revelation. Using only human wisdom to assess their situation, the advisors concluded it was hopeless, so they prescribed fleeing to a safe refuge on a mountain.
 - David, on the other hand, thought more about God's revelation. He knew that God had made promises to Israel and to him as the king. David's rebuttal relied on what God had revealed about himself and his plans for David and his people. God is holy, powerful, and aware of what is going on in the affairs and hearts of all people; God loves the righteous enough to deliver them, but hates the wicked enough to punish them. Application 4a is act on God's revelation.
 - To David, living by faith and obedience meant standing his ground, trusting in God to deliver on his revealed promises, trusting in God's revealed character regardless of what was happening, trusting in God's power and justice, and fulfilling the obligations God had given him.
- † One of the running themes throughout the whole Bible is the choice each person continually has, whether to rely on human wisdom or on God's revelation. In this church, we often call this the choice between taking the bottom line or the top line.
 - This psalm shows some of the dangers of human wisdom, even of human wisdom that seems prudent and logical: that is, it might go against God's revelation or at least neglect God's revelation, and therefore come up with a flawed perspective. Application 4b is take the top line.
 - **[19: Deliverance]** There is a question about the top line too. The believer today who trusts and obeys God's revelation in the face of temptation, deception, or accusation and persecution, can

be confident of God's deliverance... but it will not always be the kind of deliverance David anticipated. Sometimes God delivers us out of a hardship or gives us victory in it, but he does not promise us this always will be the case. What he does promise is that he will either deliver us through that time of hardship or deliver us to Heaven through physical death. So we might have victory, we might have struggle but endure it, or we might be killed but arrive in Heaven; all of these are forms of God's deliverance.

- † Knowing this should give believers confidence to continue trusting and obeying God's revelation even in the face of the worst attacks of the wicked. We can learn from David's example. We too can take refuge in God. Is that not a wonderful image? We think of God cradling us in his hands or of God fighting our battles as we stand protected under his cloak with his arm around us. God is our refuge, even when we are suffering defeats in this life. But how do we take refuge in him?
- **[20: Depend]** First, we take refuge in God by turning to him in prayer and depending on him to sustain us, empower us, and grow us stronger through the hardships. LeeAnn was laid off from her job this week. You can offer her an encouraging word, but please don't give her advice, she is still grieving this loss and change. I would have you notice that despite this shock, this unwelcome setback, we are sustained, empowered, and will be strengthened through this, because we continue to enjoy intimacy with God through prayer and because we have chosen to depend on God, to trust in his plan for us, to trust in his ongoing provision. Application 5a is to seek refuge by prayerfully depending on God.
 - **[21: Trust]** Second, we take refuge in God as David did in this psalm, by trusting in God's promises, trusting in his character, trusting in his power and justice. Now we have to be careful not to trust in promises God did not make: that brings false hope that leads to doubt when things fall apart. As we said earlier, we do not have some of the promises God made to Israel and David.
 - So LeeAnn and I do not count on God giving her an even better job or even another job at all. What we can count on is that he will keep his promises, such as to provide what we need, to sustain us through the challenges. And we can rely on his character, knowing that God continues to be aware of what is happening and continues to be righteous; knowing that he is working his plan in the universe, which is far more important than whether we are rich or poor financially; knowing that he will turn all things to the good of those who love him and thus grow us spiritually which is far more important than growing our financial accounts. Application 5b is to seek refuge by trusting God.
- † **[22: Obey]** Third, though it might sound strange to some of you, we take refuge in God by continuing to obey his revelation and serve him even when we are suffering. That's because we have to be with God to take refuge in him, we have to be walking with him, in his light. That is the only path that leads to guaranteed deliverance, guaranteed spiritual blessings, and the best that God has for us in life.
- Though we sometimes will have to flee to the mountain or suffer setbacks, acting in faith and obedience means today as it did for David to stand firm in our convictions and beliefs, regardless of what troubles befall us, even when human wisdom would suggest giving up or running away.
 - If we get flustered or feel sorry for ourselves to the point of turning away, of lessening our vigilance to obey and serve, of seeking out worldly coping mechanisms like drugs, porn, over-eating, violence, or saturating and losing ourselves in tv, video games, and the internet, then we abandon God's provision, we have walked away from him, and we can expect to suffer more

and experience deliverance less. Application 5c is to seek refuge by submitting, obeying, and serving God.

- † **[23: See]** In this time period between Christ's ascension and his return, we must understand that God's justice sometimes is delayed even until the time of judgment when Christ returns. Even then, while we will reap our reward, there is so much grace which all believers enjoy that what we consider an injustice today might have been forgiven along the way as our antagonists were led to Christ through the gospel. Still, that should cause us to rejoice!
 - What we can be sure of is that we will see God's face. Having received grace and salvation through Christ, we know ultimately we will be with God in Heaven and then experience resurrected life on a renewed earth with Christ as our king. And even now, we can "see God's face," in that we can know that his grace and love and blessing are upon us, always, regardless of our circumstances. He promises never to leave us and that we cannot be torn away from belonging to him. Let us take refuge in those truths!