

Crumbling Foundations

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[0:00] Psalm chapter 11. One more psalm in this study of the psalms by Dale Ralph Davis.!

We've watched this month in Egypt, haven't we, just to see how quickly the foundations of a government can crumble. And not just Egypt, but other nations that have shown the same signs of cracks and how quickly things that seem so firm and in place are no longer in place.

Nations and governments that have stood for hundreds of years can crumble in weeks and days. The events of a few hours on 9-11-01 taught us that things are not as firm and stable and safe as we once thought.

That terror and horror and destruction could ever just be around the corner. And so someone is saying to David that the foundations were being destroyed.

You see that in verse 3. The foundations were being destroyed. And it points to the situation when all the normal protections and securities disappear.

[1:41] The social fabric is unraveling. The law and order is disintegrating. Court systems are failing. It's every man for himself.

We've seen that, haven't we? The disintegration of justice where there's pillaging and looting and burning. And that's the way earthly systems and governments and systems of justice have shown to be.

They fail us. You can't count on them to defend the innocent and to punish the wicked. So what are the righteous to do when everything's falling apart? When the foundations are crumbling?

Well, we'll see what this righteous man, David, does. Or even more pointedly, what his faith does. Three points this morning.

The first is the advice that faith hears. There's advice that faith hears. Now, before we come to the advice itself, we're first given David's position.

[2:43] And we sometimes have this in the Psalms. There's going to be a whole lot of conflict and wrestling that goes on. But sometimes the Psalms starts out with the solid foundation and position of the psalmist.

And that's what we have here. David's position is found in the opening words of verse 1. In the Lord I take refuge. So this is what the righteous can do.

They can take refuge in the Lord. The foundations may be crumbling, but this foundation is firm. His feet are on the rock that will not move.

He finds refuge in the Lord. Now, we have a decision that needs to be made about the text itself.

Someone is clearly saying something to David. Most likely it's his friends, his associates.

Maybe some of those mighty men that were with him. Indeed, they distinguish themselves from the wicked and seem to care much for David. But the question we need to ask, it's not so much who these counselors are, but what exactly are they saying?

[3:55] Where do their words end? They begin here in verse 1. We see that. But where should the quotation marks end? Now you say, well, just go back to the Hebrew and check.

Well, it's not in the Hebrew. It did not put quotation marks around the speaker's words. So it's left to us an interpretation of the context.

Where do you sense that these quotations should end that begin here in verse 1? Some versions of the Bible place them at the end of verse 1. That's all that these counselors have said.

Others place them at the end of verse 2. The NIV places them at the end of verse 3. You see what you believe to be the place to end the quotation of these counselors as I read 1 to 3.

Well, I believe that the NIV gets it right here.

[5:14] That the quotation runs all the way from 1 to the end of 3. It all seems to go together and to be of one piece of advice that's being given to them.

That none of these are David's words himself, but are the words being spoken to him. In other words, his friends are saying, David, the wicked are going to nail you. They've got you in their sights. They're snipers shooting at you from the shadows. Their bow is bent. The arrow is on the string. And you can't see them, but they can see you. There's no protection. There's no law and order. There's no way that you will be kept from death. Everything's falling apart. And when the foundations are crumbling, what else can you do, David, but hightail it like a bird to some secure mountain hideout? Run for your life. It's the advice of fear, isn't it? It's advice driven by fear. [6:20] It makes sense on one level, but it's clearly in conflict with David's position of trust in the Lord. He sees this conflict and it bothers him.

You see, he says, In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me? You see, there's a conflict between trusting in the Lord and doing what you are counseling me to do. How can you say this to me? It seems out of touch with trusting God. And so how can you, of all people, say this to me? Now, it's the source of the advice then that makes it so subtle and so dangerous. The advice is not coming from an obvious adversary. Somebody that's out to get David. But rather from those who care deeply about David and his safety. World Magazine has run an advertisement for a Christian college prep school. [7:25] A school to help prepare your young people to go into university and so on. And it's a full page ad and it shows a young man at university.

And he's sitting at a table in the library with an attentive and attractive young lady. And the caption of the ad reads this way. Where is your son getting his answers? Maybe from the sweet girl like Julie. She's smart, pretty, and believes she is a reincarnated Babylonian princess.

Well, the ad is revealing the subtlety of your son's danger. This New Age worldview is not coming from a fire-breathing, faith-destroying atheist professor from whom you might expect it to come. But it's coming from a friendly face with whom your son has developed an emotional attachment. And so here in Psalm 11, the advice doesn't come from David's enemy seeking to destroy him, but from his friends and supporters seeking to help him.

[8:38] It's sincere, it's caring, it's concerned, it's plausible. But it's nevertheless advice basically opposed to his faith position. In the Lord I take refuge, so how can you say to me, flee like a bird to the mountain?

Now when advice comes from one beside you, it takes all the more wisdom and discernment to see to the bottom of it. And so we're taught in Philippians 1 to pray that we might be able to discern what is best.

What is best? What is best? And there are many times that we must ask ourselves, is this faith or is it presumption? And that can be a hard line to discern.

If I do this, is that faith or is that just presuming upon God? Is this a time to run or a time to stand? You know, Scripture is advised both in different contexts.

How do I know? Is this a time to flee or a time to stand and fight? Is it a time to seek cover? Or a time to risk danger? And so the most religious, well-intentioned counsel may lead us to living with unbelief rather than living by faith.

[10:03] When we only and always take the safe course. When we're never willing to risk or lose anything. Where do we get that kind of counsel?

Well, it often comes from those who love us. They don't want to see us hurt. And so play it safe, John, is the counsel they give me. And so someone has said, the love of your friends will often create your most subtle temptations.

Now, can you think of, so that seems to be the position that David is in. His friends advising, play it safe, David. Run like a bird to the mountains. Can you think of other wrong advice that came from a friendly source in the Bible?

Raj? There were folks who were advising Paul not to go to Jerusalem. And then both people were supposedly led by the Spirit. Okay. So there's a similar situation.

Because of the dangers in Jerusalem, they advised Paul not to go up. Paul says, I'm not only willing to go up, I'm willing to die there. Alright? Others, when it came from friends.

[11:12] Advice that came from friends. Mark? Okay. What was Job's wife's counsel to Job?

When he was struck with boils from head to toe? It's not the first time we've heard those words about cursing God, is it? In the book of Job.

Where did we hear it first? And he said to God, you touch his flesh and he'll curse you to his face. That's the devil's agenda for Job.

And he comes and he puts that sweet little idea into the heart of his sweetheart. And has her speak the devil's words to Job. You see how it's much more difficult to sort out the advice when it comes from one so close to us.

Who else in the Scriptures received advice? Dennis? King Ray Paul's friends, how do you reject the advice of people who wasn't in the text? Okay?

[12:17] Be harsher on the people, not softer. And because it was his cronies, his friends, he was much more prone to go with their advice, even though it was the wrong advice.

Anyone else? You get the principle. Dave? Okay. Peter to Jesus. The Lord Jesus has just said to his twelve, we're going up to Jerusalem and there I'll be handed over to the leaders and they will abuse me and crucify me.

I will die and rise the third day. And what's Peter's advice, Dave? In the strongest terms, Lord, this won't happen to you. You won't end up dead.

No. Jesus' response to him reveals the source of that suggestion. Does he say, get behind me, Peter? Get behind me. Satan.

And yet Satan put his words in the mouth of one of the closest people on earth to Jesus, James, Peter, and John. And one of them says to Jesus, Lord, this will never happen to you.

[13:30] We need special discernment when the counsel is coming from those who love us the most. And this is the condition that David finds himself in.

And the assumption behind their advice is that safety is all important. You've got to remove yourself from any threat of evil. Now, what's wrong with that thinking?

Pardon? Okay. All right. It went against the promises that David had, that he is going to be on the throne one day, depending on when this came in David's life.

But the promises of God? Does your Bible ever suggest that there are other things more important than your safety?

Your self-preservation? Don't fear those who kill the body, but he who kills the body and then has power to kill the soul as well in hell.

[14:46] Paul? Consider your safety, Paul. No, I'm ready to be offered. If that's the will of God for me to die in Jerusalem, then let's go. Because the kingdom of God and his purposes are more important than my safety.

Wasn't that Jesus' position? There's something more important to Jesus than his own personal safety. Or he'd have fled to the mountains. He'd have not gone to Gethsemane where he knew that Judas knew where he would be.

He'd have gone to some secret place. But there are times in this world when to avoid risk and to avoid personal loss can only be done by sinning.

And Jesus says, I would rather die than sin. And when we seek our own safety, whether it be from physical destruction and death, or even the things that would lead to that, like my job.

That's the way I get food. That's the way I feed myself and my family. So that's most important.

Well, what if you've got to lie in order to keep your job?

[16:06] Well, after all, I've got to live. And Jesus says, who told you that? Whoever told you that?

I told you if you wanted to be my disciple, you better pick up your cross. Which is what? An instrument of death. Because if you're following me, the crucified one, you'll need a cross to die on. They'll kill me and they will persecute and take some of your lives as well. So, here's the struggle.

Safety, yes.

Self-preservation, yes. But it's not the most important thing. It's not the ultimate thing. And that's the position that is being counseled to David. David, run for your life.

Flee to the mountains like a bird. And in the very first line of the psalm, David says, In the Lord I take refuge, and there I am as safe as I ought to be.

[17:07] So that's the advice that faith hears. The second part of the psalm is the answer that faith gives. Verses 4 to 7.

And these two, the advice that faith hears and the answer that faith gives, are in sharp contrast with each other.

Notice the different points of focus. Fearful unbelief counsels, Look, the wicked. Look what the wicked are doing. And faith answers, verse 4, Look what the Lord is doing. Look, the Lord is in His holy temple. The Lord is on His heavenly throne. Now somebody might say, Well, that's the very problem that I've got.

God is far off. I'm here on earth, and I've got people with real bows and strings and arrows, and they're pointing at me in the shadows, and God's far off in heaven. Well, that's not why David brings up the fact that God is in heaven.

[18 : 19] What does the Lord on His far off heavenly throne have to do with my trouble here? Well, everything, because from that throne He rules over everything that concerns me here. And from that throne He governs the universe and carries out His sovereign will, doing whatever He pleases.

So this statement of the Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord is on His heavenly throne, is not a statement of Him being removed from us, but a statement of Him reigning.

He's reigning. And it's good for us that He is. He's not a far off God detached from what's going on here. He's very active in His care of His own.

Now, what are the three verbs? A little English lesson here. The three verbs that describe the Lord's activity in verses 4b through 5.

Look at that passage and tell me the three verbs, the actions that are coming from the Lord. Give me one of them. 4b through 5.

[19 : 26] He observes. Another? He tests or examines. And the last? He hates. All right?

Let's walk through those. He observes. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch over the evil and the good. So He's observing. He's on His heavenly throne from which vantage point, if you will, He observes all things.

So I may not be able to see into the secret shadows where wicked men are bending their bows and aiming at the righteous, but He sees. He sees right through those trees and shrubs and knows who they are and what they're doing and that they draw their next breath from Him.

And He sees the ones that they are aiming at. He observes the righteous and the evil. Secondly, He examines.

He tests. So this is a more... It goes beyond just the outward form. Yes, He sees them hiding in the shadows, but His vision goes right into their heart and He examines them and He knows their motivations, He knows their thoughts, He knows everything about them.

[20 : 44] And then thirdly, as for those wicked lovers of violence, He's more than just observing and examining them. Rather, His soul hates them.

The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence, His soul hates. He hates them because they love violence.

And so David, again, puts us on notice that we might need to revise some of our theological clichés about God hating the sin, but loving the sinner.

His very soul hates the wicked who love violence. cut God down to the center of His being and you'll find holy, pure hatred for those who do violence.

Not just for their violent deeds, but for themselves. He's already told us that in chapter 5 and verse 5. You hate all that do wrong. You not only hate their doing of wrong, you hate all that do wrong.

[22 : 00] So we need to be careful. These clichés get common in evangelicalism and they get passed on from one to the next as if it's truth. We ever need to be coming back to let God tell us who He is and what He does.

And let Him tell us His heart toward the wicked and those who love violence. And because He hates the wicked lovers of violence, look what He will do to them.

Verse 6. On the wicked He will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur. A scorching wind will be their lot. In other words, judgment's coming for them.

Those shooting at the upright from their hiding places will be brought to justice. And why? Verse 7 says, because the Lord is righteous. For the Lord is righteous.

The one reigning on the throne in heaven over all things is a righteous one. And righteousness is His determination to punish sin wherever it's found.

[23 : 10] Righteousness is His determination to put every wrong right. And He'll get it. Because He is righteous. Now, David knows this about his God because of His acts in history.

David has thought about the past. And from what he's seen about God in the past, he's able to draw certain conclusions about His abiding character. What did David see when he looked back?

Did he ever see anything about him raining fiery coals and burning sulfur on the wicked? What did that recall to David?

Sodom and Gomorrah, at least, if not other. So, he's seen the pattern.

God hates the wicked and brings them to justice and judgment and fire and brimstone is their lot. And from that consistent behavior of His God, He sees that His character is righteous.

[24 : 20] It's not just that He acted in righteous ways in the past, but He is Himself righteous. He is a righteous judge who expresses His wrath every day.

So, the Lord is righteous. Secondly, in verse 7, He loves justice. Now, justice is another word like righteousness. So, He is righteous.

He loves righteousness. righteousness, justice. Righteousness, then, is what He is and what He loves. In other words, He has an emotional attachment to righteousness.

God is not a force, an impersonal force. He's a personal being. And we see that in these couple verses. He hates and He loves.

He's a personal being. He hates the wicked because He loves justice. And they love injustice.

[25 : 28] And so, David is sure of the coming judgment on the wicked because of God's righteous character. Now, a right view of God is absolutely essential to a right praying. If we've learned any lesson in the Psalms so far, I trust we've learned that.

We won't pray a right unless we've got a right view of God. And so, David is before this God who hates all who do wrong and who loves righteousness.

Now, once again, then, God's judgment is good news to the persecuted righteous. And we've seen that theme throughout these Psalms as well. Davis gives this illustration.

For the last few months, the right front tire of my pickup truck has been losing a bit of air every so often. You have one of those tires at your house? Maybe three to five pounds of air pressure every week or two.

So, about every week, I have to check the air pressure in the tire and often inflate it a bit. Well, I was in Singapore recently for a couple of weeks. I'd left my pickup at the airport when I left.

[26 : 34] When I came back, the first thing I did in the airport parking garage was to put my air gauge on that tire. I even had my portable inflator in the truck in case I needed it.

I hate doing that. Pampering along a slow leak tire. I can hardly wait till it goes flat or gets ruined or wears out so that I can replace it with a new one that doesn't need nursing care.

He says, that's the Bible's position. This tweaking has to stop sometime. God's people will only have ultimate comfort if they know that He is going to take care of their oppressors.

And that's been the lesson week after week that we've seen. Until the enemy is destroyed, they have no lasting and final peace.

If the new earth is to be the home of righteousness, then the unrighteous must be removed from it. And that's exactly what they're going to do, God is going to do. And that's where the psalmist finds comfort.

[27 : 45] So, do we live by fear or faith? And most often the difference is where you're looking, where you're looking. What fills your vision?

Is it like David's counselors? Oh, the wicked, look what they're doing. They've got their bows bent, the arrow and the string? Or is it, look at the Lord, He's high and lifted up on His throne, reigning, loving righteousness, hating the wicked, a just judge.

The key to steadfastness is fixing our eyes on Him. When all the foundations are crumbling around us, here is a firm place to stand. And that movement from fear to faith is just a look away, just that look up, seeing Him for who He is.

Davis says, not long ago I received a report from a friend who does mission work in one of our Midwestern cities. He had taken a Christian man, an immigrant from Egypt, to an appointment with a doctor.

Now this man had been in the hospital six times in three months for liver failure and was a candidate for a liver transplant. In answer to the doctor's questions at this appointment, the Egyptian brother replied, Jesus here, pointing to his heart, everything okay.

[29 : 08] He was simply saying that there is something basic that controls the outlook on anything else in life. And that's the same principle here in Psalm 11.

If verse 4 grabs hold of you, then you can say, Jesus is there. Everything okay.

He's there on the throne. Everything's okay with me. So when we turn our eyes from the wicked to the Lord himself, what do we see? We see his character. We see his omniscient.

We see his wrath, his justice, his righteousness, his sovereignty. He's on his throne. So don't fear because his throne is in heaven.

distance is no problem for him. He can see everything from there just fine and his hand of power is not too short that it cannot save and can't reach us wherever we are.

[30:07] You remember the man who had the sick servant at home and people sought to have Jesus come to his house and heal that servant. And he says, Lord, I'm not worthy to have you come into my home.

Just speak the word. My servant will live. In other words, you don't have to be there. Your word carries authority right through the airwaves into my sick servant's condition and body.

And distance is nothing. That's what we learned in that story, that encounter with the Savior and the Gospels. So he's on his heavenly throne and distance is nothing to him.

So when the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? Well, maybe not much, if anything. But there's always much that the Lord can do. For he reigns and that's where the righteous take refuge.

If the Lord was not my refuge, I would have no other recourse but to be ever on the run, fleeing like a bird to the mountain. But I'm in the Lord like a man in a safe castle and he's reigning and is fully capable of looking after me.

[31:18] So we've seen the advice that faith receives. We've seen the answer that faith gives. And now lastly, the assurance that faith holds. As often the psalm ends with great certainty, upright men will see his face.

Now again, upright is another synonym of righteous. So we've got three words here for righteous. The word itself translated by the NIV as righteous, justice, and upright.

Follow the progression of thought here in verse 7. Follow the logic of verse 7. The Lord is righteous. He loves righteousness.

Therefore, righteous men will see his face. Upright, righteous men will see his face. This is a reference to what theologians have called that beatific vision of seeing the Lord face to face.

Seeing his face in heaven. You have it in Psalm 17, 15. And I, in righteousness, I will see your face.

[32:31] When I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness. Isaiah said it, your eyes will see the king in his beauty. John said it, when we see him, him will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

And again, John said it in that vision, Revelation 22 and verse 4. They will see his face. Now, that's the promise here given way back here in a thousand years before Jesus was even born.

David's clinging to this promise. The upright will see his face. face to face. The upright man not only wants protection from God, a refuge, he also wants fellowship.

Face to face fellowship. Communion. The upright are not just longing for a safe place, but for the loved one. The Lord himself to see him face to face.

And know that this is where we're headed. Because the Lord reigns and nothing can separate me from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ my Lord, and I will see him face to face.

[33:41] Now, Peter says, though you have not seen him, you love him. Now, that's an unusual thing that's true of every one of you who are believers here this morning.

You have never seen the Lord Jesus Christ. You've only heard of him from afar. But every one of you who are his people love him. You love him more than life.

Not having seen him, you love him. How is that possible? That's just quite amazing. It's the work of the Holy Spirit that makes him real to us, so real that we love him, though we've not seen him.

And here, Davis tells a story. Back, years back, there was a story in the Presbyterian Journal about a certain William Dyke, a Britisher, who was blinded in the earlier years of his life by an accident.

No handicap, he threw himself into things, studied hard, made an enviable academic record. He also courted a beautiful girl who, in spite of his disability, consented to unite her heart with his.

[34:52] some time before the wedding date, Dyke's case came to the attention of a skillful surgeon who suggested that there might be something that could be done for Dyke to recover his sight.

He put himself into the hands of the surgeon. The surgery was performed. And on the very day of the wedding, the bandages were removed.

The surgery had been successful. He could see once more. Hence it happened that he saw his bride for the first time when they met at the front of the church sanctuary.

What a moment of joy. And yet, in one sense, it was simply the proper fulfillment of all that had gone before. He had already held her hand, heard her voice, prized her love.

Now, he saw her face. But he loved her before he ever saw her. And that's the condition that we're in.

[35:58] We haven't seen him. But the sight is coming, and we need to remember this when all is dark and we seem to be doing little more than dodging the arrows of the wicked.

Remember, that day is coming. When the righteous will certainly see his face, wicked men not withstanding. So what's Psalm 11 saying to us?

Faith needs discernment to detect counsel of despair and fear. Faith needs vision to see our righteous reigning Lord.

Faith needs hope that looks forward to waking up and gazing on the face of Jesus. And all of this should prove most helpful when the foundations are being destroyed and everything is falling apart around us.

We take our stand, our refuge in Christ. So we come to the end of another psalm. Any further thoughts, additions, insights, questions, comments to Psalm 11?

[37:07] Amen. Yes, there. Amen. Faith or fear? Well, he's not given us a spirit of fear.

Spirit of power and love and a sound mind and his own Holy Spirit teaches us faith and the look of faith. Let's pray together. Lord God, lift up our eyes to the hills where our help comes from.

Help us to not just look up to the mountains where the birds can find a safe place from their predators but to look right on up into the heavens and see you upon the throne.

With a loving attachment toward the righteous. Help us to see what you've prepared for us. One day we will see you face to face. There will be no more of the unrighteous in our view.

No more adversaries seeking to bring us down. There will be only the atmosphere of righteousness. Best of all, we'll see you face to face.

[38:13] Show us more of your glory this day then and teach us to walk by faith and not by sight. Strengthen that very faith in yourself today. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.