

## Psalm 11

In Psalm 11 we have what we have found in many of the other psalms: a tremendous conflict between the righteous and the workers of iniquity. As we have seen in previous psalms, so we see again in Psalm 11: these workers of iniquity pose a grave threat to the righteous. In verse 2 we read of these wicked, and a picture is painted for us of crafty, sneaky, and violent men. “The wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily [secretly] shoot at the upright in heart.” The wicked are lying in wait with an instrument of death. They are hoping to destroy the righteous.

So grave is the threat to the righteous that in verse 1 the counselors of the righteous, possibly, or perhaps the enemies of the righteous, say to him, “Flee as a bird to your mountain.” If that is the counselors of the righteous, that is, the friends of the righteous, then they are urging that righteous man, “You have to escape. You have to get out of here. Don’t you see the wicked who are coming to destroy you?” Or if that is a taunt of the wicked, then it is a mockery of the righteous: “Why don’t you try to escape? See if you can escape while we have our bows bent and our arrows nocked upon the string.”

So grave is the threat to the righteous that they experience it as the foundations being destroyed (v. 3). The appearance is that the kingdom is fallen and the city is in peril. There are no foundations left—by appearances, now, only by appearances—upon which the kingdom can be saved.

Interestingly, if you look at the Scottish Metrical Version, you will see a little different translation of verse 3. The King James has “If the foundations be destroyed, what *can* the righteous do?” When the Scottish Metrical Version went back to the original Hebrew, it translated verse 3 as “If the foundations be destroyed, what *hath* the righteous done?” Both of those options are possible. The Hebrew just has “What righteous do?” The question can be, what can the righteous do? Then the sense would be “What are we supposed to do when the foundations are destroyed? How can we do anything right if the foundations are destroyed? How can we restore the foundations?” Or if the translation is “What hath the righteous done?” which was how Calvin also thought this should be translated, then the meaning would be something like “The righteous is innocent of the destruction of those foundations. Others have destroyed those foundations but not the righteous.”

So we have in Psalm 11 this grave threat to the righteous that is expressed in very vivid terms. Nevertheless, in Psalm 11 we have the psalmist’s perfect confidence in the Lord. In spite of the enemies; in spite of their fierce, deadly, and secret attacks on the righteous; in spite of the apparent destruction of the foundations, the psalmist has perfect confidence in God. He begins the psalm that way. “In the LORD put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?” Then, in verses 4–5, the psalmist explains that trust: “The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD’s throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.” Although it appears that the wicked have the victory and are preeminent, and although it appears that the wicked shall indeed slay the righteous, the psalmist’s conviction and confidence is that God hates those wicked and that God instead loves the righteous. He tries the righteous; he looks upon them with his eyes; he sets them before his face; he looks into their hearts; and he finds them righteous. But the wicked, whom he hates and opposes, he will utterly destroy. “Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup” (v. 6). It looked as if the portion of their cup would be the kingdom—that they would take the kingdom and destroy the righteous out of it. But the portion of the wicked’s cup is not the kingdom; the portion of their cup is the fire and brimstone and tempest and fury of God’s wrath.

Why? “For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright” (v. 7). And now this is one of those psalms in which you try to figure out where everything fits and who this is talking about; and when you try to fit yourself in there first, then with a sinking feeling you realize, “If I’m going to fit myself in there first, then I cannot fit myself with the righteous. That’s not what I am by nature. There is a certain violence and opposition in my heart against Jehovah, the righteous God.

God, in his shining countenance, does not look upon me as I am in myself with the judgment, ‘He is righteous.’” This is one of those psalms, as all of them ultimately are, that only makes sense when we understand that Jesus is the psalmist and that Jesus is the one about whom we are speaking. In fact, throughout the psalm the word “righteous” is in the singular, not the plural. It’s hard to see that in an English translation because you can say “righteous” to refer to one or to many—it has the same form in singular or plural. But in the original, it is singular throughout. There is one righteous whom the Lord is looking upon. There is one righteous whom the Lord is trying. There is one righteous whom the Lord loves. And that one righteous is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then the psalm makes sense. Then you can go through the life of Jesus Christ, seeing how many said to him, “Flee away as a bird.” When Jesus was going to go to raise Lazarus from the dead, the disciples said to him, “Don’t go now! The Jews are trying to kill you! Stay safe. Stay away from those wicked Pharisees and Sadducees.” When Jesus was being arrested, all the disciples fled from him and by their example said to him, “Flee away as a bird.” The wicked lay in wait for him privily with their bows bent and their arrows nocked on their strings, secretly trying to destroy him, taking their counsels and having their plots about when they could catch him—not on this day for fear of the people but on this day instead. And as you go through this psalm, you can see the Lord Jesus Christ and his perfect confidence and trust in God and his perfect righteousness, so that as Jehovah God looked upon him, there was only one verdict that could be made: “This man is righteous. All the wicked I will destroy, but this man is righteous.”

And then you and I fit in the psalm, not as the primary ones but as the ones who are *in* Jesus Christ. This is part of the beauty of the psalms. We see that Jesus opens the psalms to us, so that knowing that this is about Jesus, the whole psalm is opened to us. We can understand it, and we can go through Jesus’ life and see these things come to pass. But it works the other way too: not only does Jesus open the psalms to us, but also the psalms open Jesus to us, so that we can understand what was in the Lord’s heart and thoughts as he went through all these things.

And what was in the Lord’s heart? What was in his thoughts? His perfect confidence that God would try him and find him absolutely righteous; that the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness, would behold Jesus with his countenance of love; and that God would destroy all of the wicked, so that, though the appearance is that the foundations are destroyed and the wicked are in ascendance, nevertheless, Jehovah God and his cause would prevail. Seeing Jesus’ thoughts and what was in his heart as he went through all these things gives confidence to the church. Now we can face all these things—the appearance of the foundations being destroyed, all the wicked who fight against God’s people—and yet have the perfect confidence of our Lord Jesus Christ that God loves Christ and tries him and finds him righteous, and therefore we are safe in him.