

Psalm 11 – The Lord Is In His Holy Temple Small Group Notes for the Facilitator

Opener: Fight or flight (run away)? Which are you most prone to do and can you give an example?

Psalm 11 is a Hymn; it is a Psalm of Confidence.

Read Psalm 11.

Q. In what areas is the Psalmist confident in Yahweh?

A. It's a case of fight or flight – the Psalmist knows that with God behind him he is safe. There are plenty of strong statements that let us know that David feared nothing when he was confident that Yahweh was with him.

Q. What does it mean in verse 1 to take refuge in Yahweh? What was David getting at and what does it mean to you?

A. I don't know that there's a 'right' answer to that question. You can speak from personal experience maybe? But David knows that if God is calling him to do something (like lead Israel) that Yahweh isn't going to suddenly forget about him. If we put ourselves in David's shoes we could say that if we were killed in battle or murdered by our enemies that God would exact revenge for us (judgment) (v6) and we would "see his face" (v7) as long as we were righteous.

Q. In verse 3 we're asked, "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" What are the foundations and what can the righteous do?

A. In order to be righteous, a Hebrew must obey the Law. The foundations would probably therefore be the Law and their heroes of the faith – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc – Israel's identity. In other words, "if we're wiped out of the land or sent into exile what would happen to those who are faithful to Yahweh?" Well, we see this played out first of all by Israel going into exile (722BC – 300 or so years later) and then by Judah being exiled (586BC). Many in Judah were faithful and so returned under King Cyrus of Persia (538BC).

Q. How can David put such confidence in Yahweh?

A. I'm sure you could answer this in a few ways ("Because God has never let him down" etc) but in this Psalm David recognises that the Lord is in his temple (which on Sunday I suggested meant the world he has created) and he sees everything (v4).

Q. What do you understand by the statement, "The Lord tests the righteous" (v5)? Surely the Lord only tests the wicked (v6) because he loves the righteous (v7)?

A. We often look at verses like v6 (raining coals, fire and sulphur) as being a picture of hell – probably because we're used to this teaching to "scare people into heaven." The reality is that we shouldn't need to do that – just like the Psalm says, "the upright shall behold his face" (v7) – the beauty of God is enough to convince anyone who is convincible. Instead, think of testing as being a crucible (a giant melting pot) that impure metal is thrown into. The dross floats on the top and is scraped off, which leaves the pure gold or iron or whatever to be repurposed, shaped and moulded. The wicked are the dross, the righteous are the pure metal – mouldable by God for his purposes – for his original purpose.

Closing: "The Lord is in his holy temple" (v4). We might translate that contemporarily as "Look busy, Jesus is watching!" or "Would you watch that TV show with Jesus?" or [insert some misdemeanour which God will judge here...]. But that's not what the Psalmist is saying. He's not saying – "Stop sinning", he's saying "Sure, the Lord tests everyone but I take refuge in him!" **Do you think we sometimes place too much emphasis on the judgment of God and not enough on the beauty of righteousness?**