

The Song of the Steadfast

Psalm 11

The book of Psalms runs the gamut of human emotion and experience while always directing us to trust God. This is no glib or easy faith, but one that looks to the Lord and remains steadfast when everything seems to be crumbling.

Summary of the Text

Forty percent of the Psalms are laments, and they teach us how to deal with adversity including our own sins and failings, hard providences, enemies, threats, and even death. In this psalm, David makes no request but focuses on who God is. It's a confession of faith. In the first three verses, his companions urge him to flee like a bird to the mountain, away from those who have their bows bent and arrows nocked to the string, ready to secretly shoot at him, the upright heart in heart (vv. 1-3). What can the righteous do, his counsellors ask, if the foundations are destroyed (v. 3)? But David's faith is not in the foundations. They see no way to avoid the schemes of the wicked except by running way in panic; he sees no way the wicked can touch him because he trusts the Lord. The second stanza describes where God is and what He does there. He is in His holy temple, on the throne in heaven, where His eyes see and His eyelids test the sons of men (v. 4). He tests the righteous, but His soul hates the wicked who love violence (v. 5). He brings judgment upon them according to their portion (v. 6). The Lord is righteous, and therefore loves righteousness. He beholds the upright and the upright behold Him (v. 7).

Keep Your Head

We don't know for sure, but it's plausible this psalm was written in the time when Saul was trying to kill David (1 Sam. 18:11). The issue is not that running away is necessarily a sin. Sometimes David did (1 Sam. 19:10). There were times when the apostles took off for the next city after being persecuted, and others when they stayed and insisted on making their case (Matt. 10:23; Act 16:37). David doesn't argue that the wicked aren't really bending their bows or secretly plotting against him. His friends are not paranoid even though they are panicked. But he will not react merely to the circumstances or threats to his personal safety. To an atheistic evolutionist, survival is the ultimate value—survival of the fittest. But that's not David's god. He trusts in Yahweh, in the one who will be called the Son of David, and lives in light of God's faithfulness and sovereignty. Not only will he not be dominated by their panic, he presses them in the opposite direction: "How can you say to my soul?" This kind of composure will appear reckless to the cowardly, Christians included, who don't operate on biblical principles. We are called to take up our *crosses*. Paul responds to the brethren in Caesarea who tried to keep him from going to Jerusalem: "Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). He doesn't say he will die, but he is ready to. Sometimes you leave your job, other times you wait to get fired. Sometimes you walk away from a conflict, other times you start one. But you always keep your head, your eyes focused on the Lord Jesus Christ, praying in all faith to discern what you ought to do.

God Tests

The panicked look at the intel ("The wicked are making their move!"), but David looks at the character and actions of the Lord. He therefore can answer the question: "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" God is in His temple/palace, ruling on the throne. He is not like King Theoden in *The Two*

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Towers, an old and bitter king, out-of-touch and frustrated by the state of the world. His eyes *behold*: “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). With perfect knowledge, God tests the righteous (v. 5). People are plotting David’s murder, the foundations appear to be crumbling, is this a good time for a test? Yes, and this is the test. We might wonder why this sort of thing is necessary. Can’t we learn to trust God without fearing for our lives? Can’t we grow in our marriages, in love and respect, without having to deal with conflict and humbling repentance? Can’t we disciple and raise our kids in the Lord without falling our knees and begging for God’s grace and mercy, and seeking help from others? Apparently not. Our trials are not necessarily the result of specific sins. Adam should have fought the dragon even to death before sin entered the world. But we are sinners and regardless of what brought the trial, we do need to grow in holiness and be shaken out of our pride, complacency, presumptions, willfulness, fear, weakness and God knows what else. We will judge angels and the world (1 Cor. 6:2-3), so the Lord prepares us. Think of your trial not as a demonstration of what you know and love, but an exercise to increase your love for and wisdom in Jesus Christ.

God Judges

God tests the righteous and hates the wicked (v. 5). It’s not true that He loves everyone the same. Those plotting David’s death are under His judgment. This is not a temporary Old Testament doctrine, but part of God’s enduring character. Jesus Himself says, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:36). Because God is righteous, He has to be against unrighteousness. Since He is the author of life, He must hate those who love violence. These necessarily go together. You can’t be for justice and against judgment. We must not draw the conclusion that because God doesn’t immediately bring justice, He doesn’t care or never will. The wicked plan to shoot David, so God rains coals or snares down upon them. Fire and brimstone follow, and finally a burning wind, like a tornado streaked with lightning (v. 6). God judges evil, and for those who care about violence, sex trafficking, and the 40 million people enslaved on the earth today, this is good news.

God Loves

But this is not the end of the story or the psalm. Outside of Jesus, God hates the wicked, but in Him He loves the righteous. This is an imputed righteousness, but one that works true faithfulness and uprightness in the believer (Ps. 32:2). David is not doing abstract theology. Remember, Saul’s plots against his life were foiled and after Saul died in battle against the Philistines, David became king. He sang this song and stayed steadfast, trusting God and blessing Israel, including his enemies. It turns out the foundations were not as destroyed as his companions thought.