

Summer in the Psalms

Psalm 11

In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me: “Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?” The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; his eyes examine them. The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion. On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. For the Lord is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face.

Psalm 11 begins with a state of ambivalence, a theme that is often present in the Psalms. The psalmist believes strongly in the faithfulness, justice, and goodness of Yahweh, but these beliefs are tested again and again by what he sees, what he hears from others, and what he experiences in the world around him. The psalmist is torn as to whether to stay where he is and trust Yahweh to be a refuge for him or to flee to some mountain stronghold for protection. The question being put forth is this: Is the Lord truly a refuge for his people? Will he keep me safe? Will he answer me when I call? Are these just fluff and meaningless clichés that we tell ourselves? Can I really trust God with every part of my life? Although God has worked in the past and promises to restore all things in the future, our God is also the God of the present—visiting sin and wickedness with judgment and visiting righteousness and the upright with blessing and mercy in the here and now.

The psalmists recognize that Yahweh is actively involved in their lives, and they frequently testify to this involvement. Psalm 11 declares a conviction about this. God’s mercy and judgments are not only for the past and the future; they are also at work for ordinary individuals in the here and now through his radical grace in Jesus Christ. God does not promise us ease and comfort, but he does promise his power and presence for the journey.

Reflection 1

Reflect on this statement from Eugene Peterson:

“Do you think the way to tell the story of the Christian journey is to describe its trials and tribulations? It is not. It is to name and to describe God who preserves, accompanies and rules us.”

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction



Reflection 2

Do you expect God to answer your prayers, to deliver you from your fears, to bring mercy and goodness into your life in the here and now? Do you believe that God is good, that he alone is the place of safety, and that he truly loves you?

Reflection 3

What is something that resonated with you from Psalm 11?

Psalm 12

Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race. Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips but harbor deception in their hearts. May the Lord silence all flattering lips and every boastful tongue—those who say, “By our tongues we will prevail; our own lips will defend us—who is lord over us? Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan, I will now arise,” says the Lord. “I will protect them from those who malign them.” And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times. You, Lord, will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked, who freely strut about when what is vile is honored by the human race.

This psalm seems to begin as a cry of both exasperation and desperation. In most translations, the consistent first word of this psalm is “Help!” Here, David is lamenting the lack of faithfulness in the human race to God and one another; he paints a picture from his own life of a world that is empty, arrogant, deceitful, and corrupt. How many of us have felt this same way? How many of us even now have come to the end of our rope because of this same emptiness and the arrogance we see around us? There comes a point in our exasperation where we must decide: will we allow our response to become resignation? Or will we press into the Lord even deeper? David seems to choose the latter. He says, “Enough is enough! I know where real power, real safety, real worth is!”

See, too, the Lord’s response to this same emptiness, arrogance, deceit, and corruption. He promises protection and provision to those who are oppressed and needy. David, in turn, affirms God’s promise. Even in his desperation, he acknowledges the veracity of the words of the Lord, comparing them to the purest silver and gold. He knows what God says he will do, he will do, and that his word is good and true. Like Peter, we can say in faith, “Where else can we go? You alone have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68, paraphrased).



Reflection 1

In our world, there is so much noise. This week, try to take a few moments to simply sit or walk with God. Get outside, sit or walk somewhere quiet. Ask the Lord to bring his Word to remembrance. How did God speak to you?

Reflection 2

Ask: “Are there ways that I am adding to the noise? Are the words and thoughts I’m speaking and thinking aligned with God’s? In what ways do they need to be refined?”

Reflection 3

What is something that resonated with you from Psalm 12?



Schedule

June

Week 5: Psalm 8

* Available Thursday, June 5

Week 6: Psalm 9

* Available Thursday, June 12

Week 7: Psalm 10

* Available Thursday, June 19

Week 8: Psalms 11 + 12

* Available Thursday, June 26

July

Week 9: Psalms 22 + 23

* Available Thursday, July 10

Week 10: Psalm 46

* Available Thursday, July 17

Week 11: Psalm 73

* Available Thursday, July 24

Week 12: Psalm 103

* Available Thursday, July 31

