

Prayers

To God

Weekly theme: Accepting the future

We honour You, Lord Jesus, for the wisdom and the insight by which You guide the world and bless those who turn to You. Bring Your world to its appointed conclusion, we pray; and prepare Your people for the coming judgement You will make between good and evil, and save them from the perils of this life that distract them from their eternal destiny. Come, Lord Jesus, come, **AMEN**

For myself

Pray and confess your sin. If you cannot think of any, look back on the last occasion in which you were at odds with someone else, and confess your part in the disagreement. Let God reveal the inner heart you too easily hide.

For others

Continue to pray for those who have suffered in the Atlantic hurricane / storm Sandy, especially those who have been bereaved.

Meditation

Brother, sister, live your life to the full,
But never forget that God is Judge.

Make your decisions, make your judgements,
But do not point the finger; God is Judge.

Enjoy your work, your living and loving,
But He who gave you life is God; and He is Judge.

Take your choices, select what is best,
But do not exploit the poor; God is Judge.

Use your earnings, enjoy the fruits,
But your eternal reward is God; and He is Judge.

Choose to let Him be your friend, this Judge,
Lest He become your enemy.
The choice is yours and yours alone,

He longs to be your friend;
Do make it so.

Bible Passage

Psalm 11

To the leader. Of David.

- 1 In the LORD I take refuge;
 how can you say to me,
 'Flee like a bird to the hills;
- 2 for look, the wicked prepare to use their bows,
 placing arrows ready in the string
 to shoot those who are honest from the shadows.'
- 3 If the foundations are destroyed,
 what can the righteous do?

- 4 The LORD is in his holy temple;
 the LORD's throne is in heaven.
He looks with his eyes,
 his gaze examines everyone.

- 5 The LORD tests the righteous,
 but he hates the wicked and the lover of violence.
- 6 He rains down fire and hot coals on the criminal;
 their lot and cup will be a blistering wind.

- 7 For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice,
 and those who are upright will see his face.

Review

This psalm is different from all that have gone before. It is the first example in the Book of Psalms of a psalm that does not address God directly or call on Him to do anything, it simply talks 'about' God. Overall, it is about the faith of the 'righteous' and the evil schemes of the 'wicked', and concludes by describing confidence the psalmist has in the Lord when evil is near.

The first verse poses a conundrum similar to that faced by David twice in his life, when he was on the run from Saul (1 Samuel 20-31) and when he was forced out of Jerusalem by his son Absalom (2 Samuel 15-18). We face similar problems today when our security is threatened by evil, should we stand firm in the Lord's strength ('in the Lord I take refuge') or should we get out of an evil situation to recover our strength ('flee ... to the hills')? To begin with, we hear the natural reaction of a man of faith in difficult circumstances, someone such

as David. He would want to trust in the Lord, and not run away a problem (11:1). However, someone else recommends an alternative course of action, which is to run away from danger, so David replies 'how can you say to me, flee like a bird to the hills ...'!

Whether or not David wrote the psalm, the example of David is particularly helpful. When faced with the threat of death by King Saul in the early part of his life he did indeed flee to the mountains (1 Samuel 20ff). Indeed, he was a good example of a swift bird able to escape the enemy with speed and altitude. Wherever he fled, however, his enemy followed with deadly intent, vividly described in our psalm by the picture of the wicked holding a bow and arrow in preparation to let fly with an arrow to kill the fleeing bird (11:2). If we look carefully at these stories of David's flight from Saul in the mountains, we will find that he also learned that flight from his enemy was not the whole answer to his problems. There came a time when God told him to stand firm and remain in Judea (1 Sam 22:5), and he also stood firm 'in the Lord' by consulting the Lord whilst on the run from Saul (1 Sam 23:2). When David said 'if the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?' he rebuffed the person who has suggested that 'flight' might be an answer to the problem of evil. In the midst of evil times people have to take unplanned action, but as far as David perceived it, the righteous person has only one option, which was to stand firm and 'take refuge' in the Lord.

Whatever happens to us, and whatever happened to David, the Lord is watching; 'He looks with His eyes, His gaze examines everyone ...', and life is like a test set by the Lord (11:4). But from where does the Lord watch? For many hundreds of years after the time of Solomon, God's people believed that the Temple was the Lord's dwelling, and from there He meted out justice and judgment. This is clearly the theme of verse 4, but the words are enigmatic. Depending upon which half of the verse you emphasise, they allow us to focus either on the Temple or on heaven as the dwelling place of the Lord. Today, we would say God sees and judges the actions of all from His heavenly dwelling place. People at the time of King Solomon, however, would have said that the Temple was God exclusive dwelling place. Nevertheless, the psalm can and has been read either way.

God watches us, ready to act in justice (11:5,6). For the righteous person justice takes the form of 'testing', but the wicked who have rebelled against the Lord face his wrath 'he hates the wicked and the lover of violence' (11:5). Note that the judgement here is by fire, but what does this mean? By looking closely at the ancient roots of the language used here, we can tell that the origins of this lie in the blistering heat of the famous hot dry wind which blows from the deserts of the south and east (11:6). This wind scorched crops like a fire and could render an unripe crop useless. In the past it would have left people destitute, rich and poor alike, and ancient peoples thought of this as divine justice. Also, fire is used as a symbol of the judgement of God (Malachi 3:2,3), refining the righteous and destroying the wicked. It is a tough picture, but perhaps a realistic one. If psalm 11 describes David, he had indeed been refined in the fire of the Lord's judgement, and remained standing to face the enemy. We can also stand against evil ourselves, knowing that by our faith in Jesus we cannot ultimately fail, whatever the present cost.

Ultimately, Psalm 11 is a psalm of confidence in the Lord, reflecting the reasons for this confidence and encouraging the believer to stand firm before troubles of whatever kind, physical and spiritual. There may indeed be times when it is wise to 'fly away', to bide time before assailing the evil one, but for those who know their salvation in Jesus Christ, flight is most certainly not to be a way of life. We learn from this psalm that we must be prepared to stand and deal with troubles as the Lord requires it of us; 'For the Lord is righteous; he loves justice, and those who are upright will see his face' (11:7)

Discipleship

Application

The dangers of everyday living as a Christian

It is all too easy to do things 'for the Lord' in a routine way, without taking seriously the spiritual issues at stake. For example, the regular worship and church meetings we take part in are assumed to be properly led and spiritually prepared for. But the devil gets in all too easily, and problems occur. These may be the 'tests' we must endure, or they may be spiritual attacks that must be dealt with, and we need a certain maturity in faith to discern the difference between these and other possibilities.

In reality, we can find ourselves in the midst of danger at almost any moment, for any number of reasons, and we need to be ready to deal with all circumstance. This psalm is a challenge to all God's people to make sure that they face all things in the Lord's strength, and it guides the faithful to the only source of help for God's people. The Lord Himself.

Ideas for what to do

- The attitude we have when facing certain tasks can be all important. This psalm asks us to face all things with confidence and optimism in the God who has saved us and who leads us into all life's challenges. Pray therefore about the challenges you face at the moment and ask yourself whether you are trusting in the Lord or running away.
- Pray for those who face difficult decisions at the moment, and find it hard to know how to trust in the Lord. Pray for those facing illness or redundancy, or the problems of old age, for example.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Have a look at verses 1-3 of the psalm, and discuss what these verses might mean to a Christian today.
2. How does the psalm help the Christian to be confident in the Lord? Does it challenge us as well?
3. It is all very well to talk of standing firm in the Lord. Can you give examples of how this works out in reality?

Final Prayer

Lord God, you have trusted Your disciples with the message of eternal salvation; help us to follow You and do Your will. You have confidence in Your people to be victorious over the evil one; strengthen our resolve to stand with You against the enemy. In trust, confidence and determination, may we always be doing Your will. AMEN