**Refuge in the righteous King** 19/6/22 dkm

Read: Psalm 11, Matthew 7

Text: Psalm 11

Psalms: 33:1-11, 45:1-6, 17:6-9&14-15, 117

People living in mansions around the beaches of Australia are fearful of their house crashing into the sea. Huge seas have undermined the foundations of houses built on the sand. Huge seas have been around since the time of Jonah, so blaming rising sea levels is pointless. Moreover, Jesus warned about building your house on the sand!

Jesus used the picture of a foolish man building his house on the sand, and a wise man building his house on a rock, in his sermon on the mount (Mat 7:24-27). He was not talking about a literal house on Collaroy beach, of course; Jesus was talking about life and the foundations or principles by which we live. The wise person is the one who hears the words of Jesus and does them, while the foolish person hears Jesus’ words but does not do them. Jesus’ words are, of course, founded in the law of God.

We are looking at a psalm from the OT. When the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, he made a covenant with them and gave them the law. He said, ‘I will be your God and you shall be my people’. When they rejected God and his covenant, they got into all sorts of trouble. Society broke down as the rich and powerful exploited and even killed the weak and the poor. Bribery and corruption became the way of life, as every man fought to get ahead in life. But what was life all about anyway?

Taking their eyes off the Lord, they lost their way. Have you taken your eyes off the Lord? Our society certainly has. I think the Lord’s Prayer is still said at the opening of our parliament, but for how much longer? Pagan ‘smoking ceremonies’ threaten to take the place of prayer to almighty God. ‘If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?’ The words of this psalm speak to us today, but let us listen to what David had to say when wicked people tried to kill him and overthrow the rule of God’s law in the land.

**1. Voice of despair**

The psalm begins with a confession of faith in the Lord: ‘In the Lord I put my trust’ (11:1). We must keep this confession in mind as we listen to what David listened to. We are not told the circumstances in which he wrote this psalm, but the time when he fled from his son Absalom comes to mind. We are thankful for a peaceful transition of government in our land because in many places, and in the days of David, changes of administration were often a bloody affair. Just being king was dangerous because there was always someone looking to assassinate the king. Just being a Christian is dangerous is it not? Satan or one of his agents is always looking for a way to bring you down. You will be ridiculed and told to keep quiet when you speak of Christ and his love. Remember Peter and John being told this by the Jewish authorities (Acts 4:18).

David heard advice telling him to, ‘Flee as a bird to your mountain’ (11:1). Was it his friends or advisors telling him this, or was it an inner voice of fear? The advice was well founded from a world’s point of view. David was in grave danger. The wicked had him in their sights, with their bow stretched tight ready to release a deadly arrow. Not that he could see this arrow being aimed at him. The wicked may be lurking in the shadows or a secret place. He did not know when or where the wicked would shoot ‘at the upright in heart’ (11:2).

We have had some gang violence on our streets of late, but we still think it safe to walk the streets. People in the USA are more apprehensive, not knowing when or where the next mass shooting of innocent school children will be. The threat of terrorism is not as great as it was but a few years, but we were apprehensive about going to crowded places for fear of a suicide bomber. Still today, there are many places in our world which are not safe.

David was faced with a choice: follow the advice and flee, or find refuge in the Lord. Talk about bows and arrows is probably metaphorical. These are aimed at the ‘upright in heart’. The godly or righteous man is the target of the wicked in a world without foundations, a world without principles or laws to govern people’s hearts.

The book of Judges ends with the words, ‘Everyone did what was right in his own eyes’ (Judg 21:25); go back a chapter and read what life was like in Israel at that time! Go much further back in the Bible and read of similar circumstances in the city of Sodom. Perverted men wanted to rape Lot’s visitors (Gen 19:5). The foundations are destroyed when violent and perverted people rule, and when marriage and life lose their sanctity. What can the righteous do in such a society? Do they retreat or give up in despair? David began by saying, ‘In the Lord I trust’ or, in the Lord I take refuge.

**2. Violence judged**

Our nation, like others, has seen periods of political turmoil and a constitutional crisis during the last seventy years, but to some degree we have come through because of the throne of England and the stable reign of Queen Elizabeth II- a rule which is coming to an end. The throne of our Lord is in heaven and his rule will never end. David refers to the ‘holy temple’ in which God’s presence was symbolised in the Ark of the Covenant, but he knew that God’s throne is in heaven, and that from heaven he rules over this world (11:4).

God was not going anywhere and neither was David, despite the threats of the wicked and the advice he heard. He turned to the Lord, knowing that He witnessed the works of the wicked, and of all people. The Lord’s ‘eyes behold and his eyelids test the sons of men’ (11:4). Testing conveys the idea of purifying precious metal in the furnace. The apostle Paul speaks of the Lord testing each one’s work in the fire to see if it is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ (1Cor 3:11f). David says, ‘The Lord tests the righteous’ (11:5). God sees the works and the hearts of everyone; nothing escapes his sight and his judgment. But those who trust in him, those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, will find refuge in him and will receive his reward. David’s reward would be protection from the wicked, along with the promise of beholding the Lord’s face (11:7).

‘But the wicked’ (11:5). This is called a lament psalm, but it is also a wisdom psalm in which the righteous and the wicked are contrasted. David knows the Lord hates violence. The very first thing the Lord saw after sin entered the world was Cain murder his brother Abel. He deceived him and then murdered him. The foundations were destroyed by sin right back in Adam’s household.

We mentioned Sodom as a city of corrupt and perverse people. The destruction of this city is referred to throughout the Bible as an example of God’s judgment (Luke 17:28-32, 2Peter 2:6-9). Even Biblically illiterate people know about Sodom and Gomorrah. After rescuing Lot, and telling him to flee to the mountains, the Lord rained down fire and brimstone upon this city, and everyone in it perished. Abraham had pleaded with the Lord not to destroy Sodom, but not even ten righteous people lived there. David must have remembered Sodom as he wrote, ‘Upon the wicked He [God] will rain coals; Fire and brimstone and a burning wind’ (11:6). As he looks to the Lord upon his throne in heaven, David is confident the Lord hates the wicked and their violent ways, and will destroy them.

The burning or scorching wind is another image of divine judgment. The people of Israel knew the destructive effects of the hot wind that would suddenly blow in from the desert. The psalmist and the prophet (Isa 40:7-8) liken this wind to the breath of the Lord blowing upon the wicked, causing them to wither and die. In Psalm 1 the ungodly are likened to chaff that the wind blows away.

Yet another image of divine judgment upon the wicked is that of drinking the cup of God’s wrath. David simply refers to ‘their cup’ or portion, but the prophets speak more clearly of this cup of God’s wrath (Isa 51:17, Jer 25:15, cf. Ps 75:8). Our Lord Jesus pictured himself as drinking the cup of God’s wrath as he prayed in the garden before going to the cross and dying as the propitiation for our sin (Mat 26:39, Rom 3:25, 1John 2:2).

**3. Vision of God**

‘The Lord is righteous and he love righteousness’ (11:7). Righteous is the same justice. The foundations are destroyed when there is no justice, when the weak and the innocent suffer at the hands of the rich and powerful who are corrupt and perverse. Being made in the image of God, man has a sense of justice, and even righteousness, but this sense has been corrupted by sin. ‘There is none righteous, no not one… There is none who seeks after God’ (Rom 3:10, 11). But God is righteous and he demands righteousness in those who enter his presence. God has not lowered his standards to allow for sin; rather he has, in the death and resurrection of his righteous Son, given his righteousness to his elect, to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

David lived a long time before Jesus came to live in this world, but he knew this wonderful truth, this wonderful grace, as the promise of God. David knew the Lord was on his throne in heaven, and like Abraham, looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:10). The last line of verse 7 is translated in the NIV and ESV as, ‘Upright men will see/behold his face’. This may mean that the upright will see ‘God’s presence manifested in his saving deliverance of them’ or, more profoundly, to seeing the very face of God when the Lord comes in all his glory. ‘As for me, I will see your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness’ (Ps 17:15).

Are the foundations of our society being destroyed? If so, what are you doing? Are your trusting in the Lord, knowing that he is on the throne in heaven, watching over you day and night, ready and able to deliver you from the hands of the wicked? Are you confident that God will destroy the wicked and establish his everlasting kingdom? Do you believe you will one day see the face of your wonderful Saviour and Lord?