

I. Set up

A. Greetings

B. We continue to move through uncharted waters. Previous generations have dealt with medical challenges – such as polio, yellow fever, smallpox – and survived. And others have dealt with economic upheaval – and made it through.

C. But this is new for us. And that means it brings some disruption and fear. But also some opportunity – a chance to:

1. Refocus on what matters
2. To grow in our understanding of ourselves – and of God.
3. To serve others.

D. Last week Mike looked at fear – in particular he looked at Paul’s advice to Timothy to have courage. 2 Timothy 1:7 reads: For God has not given us a spirit of ^[f]timidity, but of power and love and ^[g]discipline.

E. Today he is going to take us through Psalm 11 – a short reflection by David that he prays during a time of crisis.

1. We are not exactly sure what crisis David is navigating. As you may know, he weathered more than a few. But this Psalm frames a question that seems appropriate for this moment: When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?

F. Let me read this Psalm:

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

II. Introduction

A. So, last week we were supposed to be at the Genesee, and this Sunday I was going to be in India visiting the church plant we have been helping launch among IT workers in Chennai.

1. Not sure about you, but those plans seem like something from ten years ago.
2. As an aside, I heard about a group of a dozen people who recently returned from a 25 day rafting adventure down the Colorado River – during which time they had no contact with outside world.

3. When they left, Bernie Sanders had a double-digit lead heading into that night's Democratic debate, and cases of the coronavirus were showing signs of decline in mainland China.

4. When they arrived, the man working for a rafting company asked them, "Have you been in contact with the outside world?"

5. When they said no, he said: the coronavirus had spread around the world, Italy was under lockdown; the stock market was plummeting; professional sports were suspended; and schools were closed.

6. They did not believe him.

B. A lot has happened very quickly. And so we all keep adapting. As I said, I was not scheduled to preach because I was going to be in India. And then I prepared a message about Hope from Romans 15:13. And then in my devotional time on Wednesday I ran across this verse and it sort of jumped off the page. I thought, "Wow, that is exactly what I have been thinking about."

C. And eventually I decided to pivot. I do not like to start over on a sermon late in the week. I am too old for that. And I'm generally the guy who knows what he is going to be preaching on six months in advance.

D. But my sense was that Psalm 11:3 was God's plan. And when I tried to protest I realized that I'm hardly the only guy whose schedule has been modified lately.

III. As you may know

A. The Bible is comprised of 66 books, and the Book of Psalms is one of the thicker ones, and it is found in the middle.

B. And for the most part, the 150 chapters in the Book of Psalms are prayers.

1. Some are happy prayers – they express joy and thankfulness.

2. Some are quite sad prayers – we call these Psalms of Lament

3. Some are expressions of raw anger at God – they are primal screams of frustration and confusion. If you are not familiar with the book of Psalms, there is certainly some words in there that would surprise you.

C. But not all of the Psalms are prayers. Not all 150 chapters are words for us to say back to God. Some of the Psalms are meditations. They are words we are to say back to ourselves. They foster reflection – and they are there to help us think more clearly about what is going on. They are there to help bring some perspective.

D. Psalm 11 is mostly in that last category.

E. As Anson noted, it is a Psalm King David writes when he is going through a crisis.

1. David was quite the Renaissance man. He was a warrior, a musician, a diplomat and a poet.

2. And many of the prayers and reflections we find in the Bible were written by him.

3. Hard to imagine today that a King's handlers would let him publish his inner thoughts – especially those where he publishes his inner thoughts, wrestles with doubt or confesses sin. But we get that in the Psalms.

F. And today what we get are words designed to bring perspective in the face of a trial. Lets walk through this line by line

IV. Psalm 11:1: In the Lord I take refuge. David opens with a statement to his advisors – and perhaps a reminder to himself at the same time. My safety, my well-being, my hope is grounded in God. In the Lord I take refuge.

V. We then hear his push back to them, How then can you say to me: He is talking to his advisors. Since God is his refugee, how can you suggest that I “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.

A. David is parroting the panicked voices coming from his advisors – and yes, I have noticed that they sound a bit like the voices coming our way via our 24x7 news cycle. (But I digress)

VI. He continues quoting them. Their panic goes on. “We must run, after all, ‘When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?’”

VII. So, verses 1b – 3 are David repeating what he is being told. Now in verse 4 we get him responding – reminding himself of deeper truths. And letting his advisors know that he is not going to run. The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; his eyes examine them.

VIII. And then we get a wrap up punch. Why not run? Why not panic? Why not adopt an “every man for himself” posture and head for high ground? Because what we do matters and God sees. 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.

IX. Like many Psalms, this one has the Psalmist working and praying themselves into a better space. In Psalm 11, David is reminded that God is in control and that things will end well for His people and that he needs to do the right thing. To have a perspective larger than the immediate problem.

A. Now, as an aside, let me remind you, that saying that things end well for those who are in Christ doesn’t mean things will be easy or even easier for Christ-followers. That is not the promise. God’s horizons extend beyond the grave. When I say things end well, I am factoring in eternity.

B. But, the great thing about a Psalm like this is that David gives voice to a common experience. He has to think his way back from a trial to some of his deepest convictions.

C. We need to do that right now.

X. Which means, we need to circle back to the key verse for today. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

XI. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?”.

XII. I want to note three ways this question can be framed.

- A. The first is with an appropriate level of humility. Think James 4:13, which reads:
1. Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.”¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil
 2. One of the things this last week should have reminded us of is how deeply we have absorbed the “illusion of control.” How much we are dependent on God’s mercy and care. How fragile our lives and our society is.
 3. We often do not see this. Case in point, two years ago, Yuval Harari – one of the young, liberal elite, a Jewish atheist whose writings (such as Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow) and whose TED talks everyone was marveling over. He wrote: having conquered our three ancient enemies, human beings are now set free to pursue the project of becoming like unto God.
 4. What are those enemies being, in Harari's words, "famine, plague, and war." Well, Yuval, I am not sure we have those conquered. And there is also the limitation of death.
 5. So, one way we could – and should – hear a question like, “When the foundations crumble, what can we do?” is “realize how dependent upon God we actually are. Because, ultimately we cannot do much.
 6. But that is not supposed to be our take away from Psalm 11:3.
- B. The second way is the way this question is being articulated by David’s advisors in Psalm 11 is with an attitude of fear. Things are bad, so all we can do is run and hide. Or hunker down. Buy all the toilet paper.
1. This is the response of many. It’s some cross of Chicken Little and Me First.
 2. And we should admit, while there is always some subset of the population that is decrying whatever: culture or politics or the state of education or the young or whatever. It’s never hard to find negative news.
 3. At this moment, it is especially easy to join this group. Given the pandemic and the economy. Schools and restaurants are closed, Our state is in a lockdown. It sure feels like the foundations are being destroyed.
 4. This is the gist of the way David’s advisors are voicing it. Things are bad. There is nothing to be done. Run
 5. And in fairness to those in this camp, let’s start by noting that:
 - a) The foundations are important.
 - (1) A guy I grew up with had his home taken by a tornado
 - (2) Because the foundation was still there they could rebuild. But if the foundation is destroyed, you are sunk.
 - b) And it sure feels like they have been undone.

6. But David's counter is, the real foundations are secure. The false foundations are crumbling. But, vs: **The Lord is in his heavenly Temple. The Lord is on his throne. The foundations stand. There is no reason to run and hide. There is no reason to panic. There is no reason to give up**

C. Which brings up the third way we can read this question. And that is as a legitimate question. What should I do now?

1. Given all that is going on: the pandemic, the economic disruption, the lock down.

2. And given who God is, and his promises, the real foundations.

a) In his treatment of this, Spurgeon wrote:

(1) Our foundation book is the Bible

(2) Our foundation doctrine is justification by faith

(3) Our foundation fact is that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself

(4) Our foundation work is the blood of Christ

b) He goes on, but you get the point.

3. The false foundations are crumbling, the real foundations are still secure. So now what do we do?

XIII. Let me suggest five things. Four things that emerge from the Bible, and in particular, from the Book of Psalms. When the foundations are crumbling, what should the righteous do?

A. What – instead of binge watch Netflix for the next month - should you do?

B. This has undoubtedly become a thing people will be talking about for years to come. I was born in 1960. So,

1. I sort of remember the Moon landing. But I was too young to be paying much attention to Vietnam or the civil rights movement, or the assassination of Kennedy or Martin Luther King.

2. When people ask, “where were you when you heard?” questions, the first I can weigh in on is, “where were you when the US beat the Soviets in hockey? to my regret, in the library.

3. Where were you when you heard about the 9/11 attack? At work.

C. There is a related question: What did you do during... the war, the Civil Rights movement, whatever.

D. It strikes me that this will be a question. What did you do during the Coronavirus pandemic?

XIV. Right now the blogs are full of advice about:

A. How to work from home: what to wear, how to master Zoom calls, how to supervise employees remotely.

B. And there is all kind of video programs being rolled out for to keep children entertained.

C. And there is even advice about creating rhythms and boundaries – how to pace yourself. How to capitalize on the time you gain not commuting. Everyone has advice about what you should be doing.

- D. Let me suggest we frame this question a bit more eternally.
- XV. At this moment, when it feels as though the foundations are falling, what should you do?
- A. Lament. Grieve. Be sad.
1. Not quite a third of the Psalms are prayers in which the Psalmist expresses sadness, hurt or disappointment over some kind of loss. Typically they are prayers of personal lament. But sometimes they are prayers mourning a collective loss.
 2. The book of Lamentations is an Old Testament book in which Jeremiah expresses his grief over the upcoming fall of Jerusalem.
 3. We do not always grieve well. It seems to me that lament would be part of a healthy response to what has happened.
 4. People are sick and dying. Husbands and wives are losing life partners, Children are losing parents. People are losing jobs and life savings. Waitresses who depend on tips and international students who are stuck on empty college campuses are scared or lonely or both. It is appropriate to be sad about these things.
 5. Some think faith makes life easy and happy – the Bible does not. The Psalms of lament make it very clear that we can express our frustration and sadness to God in prayer.
 6. If you are looking for a Psalm to pray right now, I think Psalm 42 might work. The point is, it is not only OK, it is right to express our sadness and hurt to God. There is value in naming it – in grieving what we have lost.
- B. Rest.
1. The second thing the righteous might do during this disruption is rest – and here I am thinking more restoration and realignment than sleeping in. Hey, if you need to catch up on sleep. OK. But my point is not physical rest as much as it is realignment.
 2. Part of the way God designed things is that our week is supposed to unfold with a time of Sabbath rest – or restoration. And many have lost that.
 - a) We used to have a Sabbath – and stores were closed, and families kept to themselves and the goal was to restore and realign – to reflect and assess life – to review your actions of the past week, look ahead. You spent time thinking about life and work.
 - b) Then, fifty years ago we started to move towards Sundays – which were not for rest as much as they were for relaxing. Amusement. Not thinking about life or work. Just vegging out.
 - c) And twenty years ago we started talking less about Sundays and more about weekends – which were for catching up, and kids sports and there was no time to rest or reflect.
 3. As you may have heard, about six months ago the church received a small grant from the Templeton Foundation to explore how churches should be thinking about Mental Health. And so about a dozen of us have been working on this. And one of the phrases I picked up along the way was “psychic hygiene.” Some one was noting that an increasing number of people have very poor psychic hygiene. And it instantly resonated with me.

4. Well, might it be possible to take some ground on improving our psychic hygiene – of strengthening the spiritual and personal habits that help us think and live well. Could this be a time of expanded Bible reading and prayer and mediation?

5. And if not, why not? If not, what might be wrong with you that this cannot happen?

6. Now, let me offer a pass to the parents of small children, and those in the medical field and others whose responsibilities have gone from X to 10X. Some of us will have less down time in the days ahead, not more.

7. But many will have more. If you will have more, why not leverage it.

8. I am committed to spend more time in quiet and in prayer.. And I asked the staff to do that as well, noting that this would likely become a time that calls for more serving and care and patience. That people around us may be more stressed and angry – and we needed to be more intentionally full of a sense of God’s love so we can absorb that and help.

9. Is it possible that during these days you could take some ground on learning to sit and settle. Like me jar of Mississippi mud water.

C. A third thing the Bible would suggest – especially the Psalms – is that you rejoice. That you engage in thanksgiving and Praise.

1. There are a lot of things we can find to complain about. But there are a lot of things we can find to be thankful for as well.

2. As a quick aside, I am thankful for the advances in medicine that have led to tests and work on vaccines. And I am thankful for technology that allows us to have some connection during a time when we otherwise would have none.

3. We need to develop the attitude of gratitude. It is a skill to be developed. Paul was very good at it. Read Philippians, which he wrote with all of the social distancing protocol enforced in a first century prison cell. And he is full of joy.

D. The final thing I will note is Service.

1. I am convinced that our lives do not have meaning without an opportunity to make contributions. As I often note, Ephesians 2:10 notes that we were created to do good works.

2. What might this look like? Lots of things, big and small. Starting with just being a lot more focused on the needs of others.

E. Well, I could go on. I could come up with other ways for you to spend your time. Such as reading. I am not sure you can be much of a disciple if you do not read. And I promise you, there are lots of classics out there waiting to be read. But that is enough for now.

XVI. I want you to see opportunity in the days ahead. Some of you who were too busy have been given a forced stop.

A. And so, to answer the question raised in Psalm 11:3 – “The Foundations are crumbling, what can the righteous do?” the answer includes: lament, rest, rejoice and serve.