

1.19.25

The Unshakable Refuge

Psalm 11.1-7

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

This past Thursday, they showed a film at Brewster Ladies Library about coastal erosion titled **No Refuge**, because there's no stopping the relentless erosion caused by the wind and the waves. **No Refuge** is also the title of a 2020 book by Serena Parekh about ethics and the global refugee crisis. The author states that refugees in the 21st century have only three real options--urban slums, squalid refugee camps, or dangerous journeys to seek asylum--and none provide genuine refuge. Parekh argues that we need a *moral* response to these crises--one that assumes both the humanity of refugees and the challenges that states or countries have when they accept refugees. I mention these two examples because they share the title **No Refuge** and our scripture is about finding refuge.

Today, we're going to reflect on a truth that's a bedrock of faith: **that God is our refuge**. This theme of taking refuge in the Lord or making the Lord one's refuge is a favorite and frequent metaphor in the psalms for the act of **trusting one's life to the care of God in uncertain or threatening situations**. It's expressed in **24 of the 150 Psalms** in our Bible (for a few examples in addition to Psalm 11, see Psalm 7:1, 16:1, 25:20, 31:1, 46:1, 61:3, 62:7-8, 71:1,7, 94:22, 141:8, 142:5). In ordinary usage, the Hebrew verb translated as refuge meant to take shelter from bad weather or to seek a refuge from enemies.

Psalm 11 invites us to explore what it means to find shelter, strength, and hope in God amidst life's challenges – whether those are changes in the weather or the environment, changes in one's living situation brought by war, violence, or a natural disaster, or whatever it is we're facing. David probably wrote this psalm during the period when he served in the court of King Saul (1 Samuel 18–19). The psalm has three parts: **(1) the fearlessness of faith (vv. 1–3); (2) the foundation of faith (vv. 4–6); and (3) the fruit of faith (v. 7).**

Psalm 11 *Song of Trust in God*. To the leader. Of David.

¹ **In the Lord I take refuge**; how can you say to me,

“Flee like a bird to the mountains; ² for look, the wicked bend the bow,
they have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart.

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.

His eyes behold, his gaze examines humankind.

⁵ **The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked,
and his soul hates the lover of violence.**

⁶ On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and sulfur;
a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

⁷ **For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds;**

the upright shall behold his face.”

Our central idea today is that **God is the unshakeable refuge**. A refuge is a place of safety, protection, and rest in times of danger or uncertainty. It offers shelter from external threats and provides a sense of security. The famous hymn "Rock of Ages" was written in 1763 by Reverend Augustus Toplady. He was caught in a terrible storm in a gorge known as Burrington Combe, in England. He found a crevice in the craggy cliff that was large enough for him to hide himself and take shelter -- to take "refuge" from the storm. He reportedly wrote the hymn in that very spot: *"Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee."*

In the context of Psalm 11, a refuge is not merely a physical location but a spiritual reality where we entrust ourselves fully to God’s care, sovereignty, and justice. Considering the devastating fires in California, the concept of refuge takes on a deeply practical and emotional meaning. For those directly impacted, like Bill, a teammate I had at Red Sox Fantasy Camp a few years ago whose family lost everything to the fire, a refuge might be a neighbor's home, an evacuation center, or even the promise of help and hope from the community. Beyond the physical, God as a refuge becomes the assurance of the Lord’s presence and provision, even when one’s material world is at

risk or destroyed. In these moments, God as refuge reminds us that while we face tangible challenges, God is our ultimate shelter. God offers strength to endure, peace amidst chaos, and hope for restoration. This dual understanding of physical and spiritual refuge can bring us profound comfort when we're navigating the trauma of such events.

The Fearlessness of Faith

Psalm 11 describes David facing a choice between Fleeing and Faith. When the righteous are threatened by the power of the wicked, when we're in a crisis, we all have a choice between fear and faith. David chooses **the fearlessness of faith**. The psalm begins with a dialogue between David and those advising him to flee. The advisors' words are found in the end of verse one through verse three. The situation is dire: the wicked are actively plotting harm, the societal foundations appear to be crumbling, and fear looms large. I know some of us feel that way today. The advisors' words echo the natural human response to danger: *"Flee like a bird to the mountains."* They suggest retreat, disengagement and self-preservation, a course that may seem logical when chaos reigns. It may feel or seem more desirable to retreat from the world and escape than to face the challenges that exist. David's response which opens the psalm is striking: ***"In the Lord I take refuge; how can you say to me..."*** This is the theme and sets the tone for the entire psalm. David's trust in God transcends the visible threats and the crumbling foundations of his world. His confidence is not rooted in earthly solutions but in the unshakable reality of God's presence.

David's words challenge us to consider where we turn when fear strikes.

The call to *"flee to the mountains"* symbolizes reliance on human strategies and self-made security. *"I'll figure it out myself. I can do it on my own."* Taking refuge in God means that we turn toward God. It means turning from false refuges—all the familiar, self-reliant ways that we seek to solve or escape from life's problems. We must repent of things such as control, perfection, manipulation, withdrawal, anger, and escaping. These responses often feel immediate and tangible, but they ultimately lack the power to address the root of our fears.

David's declaration, ***"In the Lord I take refuge,"*** reminds us that God is not merely a distant observer but an active protector. To take refuge in God is to entrust our

lives to God's care. It means resting in the Lord's promises even when circumstances appear dire.

The advisors' perspective highlights a worldview shaped by fear and pragmatism. Their lamenting question, "*What can the righteous do?*" reflects despair, as if righteousness and faithfulness are powerless in the face of evil. Of course, they are not. David's response points us to a God-centered worldview, where the ultimate power rests not with human schemes but with the Creator of the universe.

The Foundation of Faith

The heart of David's confidence lies in his understanding of who God is. This is the second part of the psalm. After we hear **the Fearlessness of Faith, David describes the Foundation of Faith** in verses 4-6. The psalm shifts its focus to God's sovereignty and justice, which provide the foundation for David's trust. David's affirmation that "*The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven.*" underscores God's supreme authority. Despite the chaos on earth, God reigns unchallenged. David reminds himself, those advising him, and all of us that God sees and examines both the righteous and the wicked. He upholds the righteous while opposing those who love violence.

One of the hard things to grasp about life and faith, is the unrelenting violence, heartache, and tragedy that's part of human history and the human experience and how a loving, merciful, and just God could permit or allow things like the Holocaust or millions of people to die in war or of starvation because of the wickedness, evil, or greed of humanity. We need to acknowledge that these realities are a significant hurdle for millions of people including some of us to believe in God. David, faced with the threat of violence, is not making some pie in the sky statement about how everything is wonderful. He's stating his belief that no matter how dire or awful a situation is, he believes God exists, God sees, and God will deal out consequences in this life or at our death. The imagery of fiery coals and burning sulfur in verse 6 may seem harsh, but it serves to emphasize God's commitment to justice. Evil will not prevail, and the wicked will face the consequences of their actions. We want justice to be done because we want wrongs made right if not in this life, then in the next. The book of Revelation uses

this imagery of fire and sulfur from Psalm 11:6, three times in describing God's judgment in Revelation 14:10, 20:10, and 21:8.

The Fruit of Faith

Finally, after describing the fearlessness of faith and the foundation of faith, verse 7 concludes with a promise of **the Fruit of Faith**: *“the upright shall behold his face.”* This assurance of communion with God reflects the ultimate hope of the faithful. To see God's face is to experience God's favor, presence, peace, and joy in way that transcends any earthly hardship. I'm going to be speaking more about that next week.

Psalm 11 offers lessons for navigating the uncertainties and trials of life. Here are three key applications:

Choose Faith Over Fear

In moments of crisis, it's easy to be overwhelmed by fear. The question, *“What can the righteous do?”* may resonate deeply when we face personal struggles, societal turmoil, or global challenges. Yet Psalm 11 calls us to respond with faith, anchoring our trust by taking refuge in God rather than succumbing to despair.

Build Your Life on the Foundation of Faith

The Lord's presence on His heavenly throne assures us that no matter how unstable our world may seem, God is seeing and examining every person and will deal with the wicked and the violent. This truth invites us to surrender our anxieties and trust in God.

Trust the Fruit of Faith is Real

God's love for justice and righteousness challenges us to reflect God's character in our actions. As we take refuge in the Lord, we're also called to stand for truth, care for the vulnerable, and work toward the restoration of broken systems.

As we close, let me leave you with a picture of what it looks like to live with God as our refuge. Imagine a small child caught in a storm, running to the safety of a parent's arms. The storm may rage on, but within that embrace, the child finds peace and security. This is the invitation of Psalm 11. God's refuge does not promise the

absence of storms, but it assures us of God's presence during them. God is our shelter when life's foundations are shaken, our strength when we feel weak, and our hope when the way forward seems unclear.

Psalm 11 calls us to trust in God and challenges us to reject fear and despair and instead to take refuge in God's presence and justice. As we do so, we'll experience the fruit of faith that the upright will see God's face. This is the hope that sustains us, the refuge that anchors us, and the vision that propels us forward in faith.

May we, like David, declare with confidence, ***"In the Lord I take refuge."***

And may this truth guide and sustain us as we navigate the journey of faith.

May we find refuge when we go God in prayer.

May we find refuge when we commit ourselves to obeying God's Word, no matter the cost.

May we find refuge as we depend on the Spirit of God to lead us, empower us, and sustain us through our trials and tribulations and may you always remember:

In your season of waiting, God is faithful.

In your moments of difficulty, God is faithful.

In your lack of faith, God is faithful.

In your sickness and times of loss, God is still faithful.

In all seasons of life, God will forever remain faithful.

Jesus says in John 16:33 – *"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*

Blessing: *"The Lord is good, a stronghold in a day of trouble, he protects those who take refuge in Him."* Nahum 1:7

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. What does it mean to you personally that God is described as a refuge? How does the concept of God being a refuge for us contrast with other ideas of security or protection in the world?
2. The psalmist rejects advice to flee in fear. How does trusting in God as our refuge empower us to face fear differently?
3. How do you interpret the challenges mentioned in the psalm (such as threats from enemies or moral decay)? Where do we find hope or comfort in the face of those challenges?
4. How does trusting God as a refuge affect our outlook on life's difficulties? Can you share or reflect on a personal experience when relying on God as your refuge brought you comfort or strength?
5. In what ways can we practically apply the concept of God as our refuge in our daily lives? What does that look like in terms of choices, actions, or behavior?
6. How can we as a community of faith embody the idea of God as a refuge for each other? What role does prayer and mutual support play in helping each other find refuge in God?