

What to Do When You Are Just a Little Birdie in a Big, Bad World

By Steve Burchett



If you've ever been in a minor car accident, you might have called a loved one and started off by saying, "Hey, everything's okay; I'm not hurt. But I've been in a wreck." David starts off Psalm 11 with "everything's okay" type of language: "In the LORD I take refuge." He was living in a society in which "the foundations" had been decimated (v. 3), probably meaning something like, "The foundations of law and order have collapsed" (New Living Translation). It was chaos all around as

"the wicked" targeted "the upright in heart" (v. 2). Still, he begins by saying, "Everything's okay. Yahweh is my place of shelter."

How did David get to this point of confidence in God? It wasn't easy because he was confronted with bad counsel:

(H)ow can you say to my soul,
"Flee like a bird to your mountain,
for behold, the wicked bend the bow;
they have fitted their arrow to the string
to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart;
if the foundations are destroyed,
what can the righteous do?"

The counsel could be summarized like this: "You are just a little birdie in a big, bad world. Fly away to a place of safety away from this danger!"

Who was saying this to David? It doesn't seem to be the wicked because they are talked about by those giving the counsel (v. 2). It's possible that David is referencing an inner discussion with his own thoughts. We've all been there, staring off in the distance, playing out scenarios in our minds, contemplating dramatic moves, even rationalizing unbelief. But the counselors in this psalm might be well-meaning friends who sounded really logical: "The Lord would want you to be safe. After all, you can do more good if you get away and come back once the storm has passed!"

When might something like this happen today? Imagine an opportunity to stand for Christ at work, and you know that if you speak the truth or act in accordance with what the Bible teaches, you might lose your job. Wisely, you share your situation with some believing friends

who really love you. Their advice? "It's not worth it, bro. The Lord wouldn't want you to be unemployed. You have a family to provide for!" In other words, "Fly to the mountain of safety!" And it all sounds so reasonable. But it's also dead wrong. The Lord reigns and is our refuge, not money, not family — not anything else!

This bad counsel is countered, then, with truth about God. In verses 4-7, David is reassured by God's character. Four words will summarize what is said about the Lord in these verses. Verse 4 begins, "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven." First of all, Yahweh is *transcendent*, meaning he is on a completely different level than people; he is exalted and beyond us as he rules from heaven. God's people should love this because it means he is in control, sovereign over all things, able to do whatever he pleases.

From his transcendent, exalted stature, the Lord makes an *assessment* of people.

(H)is eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.
The LORD tests the righteous,
but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. (vv. 4c-5)

God observes and evaluates what is going on in people's lives, both the righteous and the wicked. He sees your faithfulness; he beholds the transformation he is working in you. Alternatively, he not only sees the sin of the wicked, but he hates those who do such evil!

Therefore, third, this points to his *judgment*: "Let him rain coals on the wicked" (v. 6a), which is not a prayer but has the sense of, "He will rain coals on the wicked" (NAS). And then in language meant to make us think about Sodom and Gomorrah, David pronounces that "fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup" (v. 6b). This is the future for any who oppose this righteous God (v. 7a) and his people.

David concludes his reflections on God's character by noting, "(H)e loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face" (v. 7b-c). This points to the idea of *enjoyment*, both Yahweh's *now* and ours *in the future*. God "loves," so he enjoys, "righteous deeds" in the present. And the promise is that those who have been saved by grace through faith in Christ, demonstrated by a changed life (seen in "righteous deeds"), will one day be with Jesus and "behold his face." Eternal joy is coming for God's people!

If we are going to endure desperate times, we must keep our sovereign Lord and his future plan in sight and keep trusting in him, even as the arrows are flying at us in the darkness (v.2). Author Dale Ralph Davis tells of an Egyptian man who was living in America and had been in the hospital six times within just a few months because his liver was failing. In one of those appointments, when the doctor would ask him a question, he would just point to his heart and say, "Jesus here; everything OK" (*The Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life*, chapter 11, "Crumbling Foundations," Kindle). Psalm 11 is reminding us, "If you behold and take refuge in Yahweh, everything OK."