

Some people think that believing in God makes it easier when you have hard times, when hard things happen, because it means that you don't really have to think about it. Because you believe that God's in control. But it can actually make things very hard. If everything happens by chance, I don't have to try to understand why one person suffers while his neighbour prospers. It's just the luck of the draw; it's just the way things go.

But Paul says in Ephesians 1 that in everything that happens in this world, God is always working things out the way He wants them to work out. God says in the Bible that He's merciful, and good, and just. And sometimes it's hard to see how a good and merciful and just God would let horrible things happen to innocent people. Every cruel thing, every injustice, every terrible tragedy, becomes a test of our faith in God. We have to decide which is more true: what we see, or, what God tells us about Himself in the Bible.

That's what David is dealing with in Psalm 11. Things were happening that didn't seem to line up with what God had promised. Maybe it was when Saul was trying to kill David, or later, when his son Absalom was trying to take away the throne. The fact is that we don't know what was going on. But things were upside down, things were going the wrong way in Israel. The wicked were strong and the righteous were weak. The wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings, to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. There's something outrageous about this; there's something deeply offensive about it.

We can use those words to describe what's going on in our culture today. The wicked are strong and the righteous are weak. We wouldn't be exaggerating if we said, morally, socially, the foundations of society are being destroyed. For David, and his friends, the situation was even more critical. Because the crisis was in Israel, in the church. And you can hear the confusion, and the fear in the question that David's advisors asked him: When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

David's answer starts out with his confession of faith: In the LORD, I take refuge. David uses the Name, Yahweh. That Name has history; that Name identifies God as the God Who makes promises, the God Who is faithful forever. I am Who I am. And David says, I refuse to doubt Him.

That's where we need to start. By putting our faith in God. We need to say, I take refuge in the LORD. That doesn't mean, I can hide from my problems. It means that I deal with my problems in faith. It means, I decide that what God has said to me in the Bible, and what He has shown me in Jesus Christ, is beyond question. This is how I chase away my panic. I chase away my fear by exercising my faith in God.

I look up. I turn from what I see. And I look up. And I remember how things really are: The LORD is in His holy temple. David's point becomes clear, when he says, The LORD is on His heavenly throne. In other words, The LORD is the Ruler, the LORD is in control.

But not only that. David says, The LORD observes the sons of men; His eyes examine them. The LORD knows what's going on; the LORD sees it all. In one way, that may seem to make the situation even stranger. If the LORD knows what's going, how can He let things go this way among His people?

We need to understand something about the LORD. He has never promised that He'll make everything go our way. It seems like that's what we think sometimes. As if that's what it means, that God looks after us. But the LORD doesn't treat people like puppets. He doesn't have every person on a string, or on a leash, so that He can control every move they make, and make sure they never do a wrong thing. That's not how God watches over us. People make choices, and they're responsible for the choices they make.

So the LORD isn't like those helicopter parents, who try to make sure that nothing bad, nothing disappointing, nothing frustrating, ever happens to them. The LORD observes the sons of men, both the wicked and the righteous. He watches to see what they do.

But He doesn't leave it at that. God isn't just a Spectator, Who's entertained or amused by what people do in our world. He examines, He tests, He judges what they do, both the wicked and the righteous.

This is something that you and I need to think about. Don't draw all of your conclusions from what you see. Don't think that you know the whole truth about what God is doing from what you experience in the world.

When it seems to you like things are upside down, don't give up on God or think that He doesn't know or care what's happening to you. Believe what He tells you: that He observes the sons of men; He sees it all, and He examines it all; He weighs it all. And He's going to set it all straight. You don't have to worry about that.

The LORD examines the righteous. Or, we could translate, The LORD tests the righteous. And then we understand what's going on when things seem to be upside down for God's people. The LORD is testing us, as believers. The LORD is looking to see how we respond, how we handle the trial of our faith. And Peter says in I Peter 1 that God lets us go through those hard times so that our faith will be proven genuine. Jesus' brother James writes in James 1, Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance, and perseverance must finish its work, so that you may be mature, and perfect, lacking nothing.

When you put your trust in the LORD in the midst of your trial, your faith is strengthened; you find out that God gives you comfort, and light and hope. And your faith grows; your faith gets tougher and stronger. The gospel becomes your help and strength. You know God better, you trust God more; you find greater comfort in the love of God in Jesus Christ.

And understand this, too: The wicked, and those who love violence, His soul hates. Never think that God doesn't care what people do to you. Never think that God just ignores all of the injustice and the abuse. God is against the wicked. God is against those who love violence, and those who persecute His people. And He will judge them. On the wicked, He will rain fiery coals and burning sulphur; a scorching wind will be their lot.

That language, fiery coals and burning sulphur, suggests that David is thinking about the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible tells us that in the days of Abraham God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin. And that stands as a warning. It proves that God does observe; God does examine, and, God does judge the wicked.

David says, A scorching wind will be their lot. Literally, he says, A scorching wind will be the portion of their cup. What he's saying is that the wicked bring God's anger and judgment down on themselves by what they do. It's like what Paul says in Romans 1. He says that the wrath of God that is already being poured out, and he says, several times, God gave them over, God gave them over. This is how he talks about sexual immorality, for example. Paul says, That's not happening because somehow God's not able to stop people from doing what they want. God is letting them have and do what they want, and they think that they can sin against God and they'll never have to answer for it. They take that cup, of pleasure, of defiance, of rebellion, and they drink it down with a smile on their faces. But the cup is full of poison. For the LORD is righteous; He loves justice. People destroy themselves by the choices they make.

God is just. So the wicked will be punished, but upright men will see His face. David is answering the question that his advisors asked: When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? David says, I'll tell what we can do: we can put our trust in the Lord. We can keep walking in love, living uprightly, acting in integrity. For the LORD is righteous; He loves justice. He's not going to let the wicked get away with their wickedness, and He'll never let the righteous lose what He has promised them.

If we need proof that the LORD will punish the wicked, and that He will vindicate the faith that we put in Him, we just have to remember the death, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Paul did, when he was comforting the believers who were suffering at the hands of the Roman government. He didn't say, Hey, I can explain why this is happening to you. And he certainly didn't say, God obviously has no idea what's going on; otherwise He wouldn't let you suffer this way. He says, Let's look at what we know about God. Think of what God has done, in Jesus Christ. His crucifixion proves that God is definitely going to punish sinners. When it seems like the foundations are destroyed, when it seems like God is sleeping, like God is indifferent, like God isn't going to hold the wicked to account for their wickedness, know, from the cross of Jesus Christ, that God's soul hates the wicked, and those who love violence. On the wicked, He will rain fiery coals and burning sulphur; a scorching wind will be their lot.

But to the righteous, the cross of Jesus Christ is the guarantee, the greatest proof of God's faithfulness toward

His people. It proves that God will graciously give us all things, that God has declared us righteous. And right now, Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God, interceding for us. So we know that nothing can separate us from His love.

When it seems like things are upside down, like the wrong side is winning, remember, the LORD is righteous. He's faithful; He always keeps His Word. He loves justice. So put your hope in Him, and keep walking in His ways and trusting His promises, no matter what. Because in Christ you know, upright men will see His face.