

Safety and Sovereignty

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Date: 09 August 2026

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[0:00] So these are songs from the heart of God. The Psalms are emotional. They deal with our emotions. I'm anxious than we've been for many, many years. The pressure is on. We want to be well cared for and well looked after. We want to be able to find sufficient jobs, particularly for our younger people. Younger people want to get onto the housing ladder and they can't do so easily. And would you agree that we want the UK defended properly?

But those things are not happening and we are anxious. You see, at one time, the moral law was upheld in this country. There was respect for Sunday. Marriage was honoured. In fact, you got tax breaks if you got married. Dignity was given to human life and stealing was punished.

But those moral foundations are eroding fast. And without those anchors, we are all at sea. How then do we calm our anxieties? How do we live for Christ in a world of wickedness?

I trust that this Old Testament song will help us handle our emotional anxieties better. Look at verses 1 and 2. In the Lord, says David, King David, I take refuge. He protects me. How then can you say to me, 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 of the upright of heart. David is one of the upright.

But David is in trouble. But David is in trouble. And the pressure is on, desperately on for him. Run, baby, run, they shout at him. But he refuses to flee.

[2:15] Even though the wicked, hiding in the shadows, want to shoot him with their arrows. In fact, they're already pulling the bow tight, the string tight, and ready to fire. They not only want to dethrone the king, but any who are upright, verse 2.

That is, genuine believers who trust in God from their heart. What is David to do in the midst of such misleading voices, never knowing when he might next be betrayed?

Well, we're told in verse 1 that he takes refuge in the Lord. That's his protection. But look at verse 3. David has already decided that God will protect him. That's his safe place.

But he says, when the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? The foundations of life are crumbling away. Where will he find his safety? He's told us he'll find his safety in God.

But these foundations, these are the basic moral code that enables society to function. These are the institutions, the laws, those things that uphold the moral order of society.

[3:24] And it's this moral structure that's at stake here. David is feeling the pressures of the world around him. And his question is our question.

At the end of verse 3, what can the righteous do? How can we live healthily in an ungodly world? Do we just shrug our shoulders? Do we just capitulate? Do we just say, well, that's the way it is? Or do we turn somewhere? Where? The answer from the psalm is this.

Be clear about God and turn to him as your refuge. Be clear about God and turn to him as your refuge. You see, in this world there are two kinds of people.

There are the wicked and there are the righteous. And that's the language of this psalm. Just glance through it at the wicked. You see them in verse 2. They're bending their bows.

[4:27] You see them in verse 5. As the Lord is examining the wicked. And you see them in verse 6 where they'll be judged. On the wicked will rain down fiery coals of burning sulphur.

They're the wicked. But also in the song are the righteous or the upright. There they are in verse 2. The upright in heart.

We saw that earlier. There they are in verse 3. The righteous. There they are in verse 5. As the Lord examines the righteous. And there they are in verse 7.

As the Lord himself is righteous. And he loves righteous people. Justice. And the upright will see his face. You say, that's a bit harsh, isn't it?

Either wicked or righteous. There's no middle way. Really? Well I'm not that wicked, you know. I'm not that wicked. And I'm certainly not that righteous. I'm somewhere in the middle, aren't I?

[5:21] So I'll just walk down the neutral zone. Wrong. Wrong. There are only two types of people. And we all start on the wicked side. And so to become righteous involves a cultural, willful, emotional leaving.

And a cleaving to Christ. But we will still be surrounded by the wicked. How then should we live? With wickedness all around us.

And even wickedness within. I think the song breaks down into these three sections. First of all, we should long for safety. We should long for safety.

That's one to three, isn't it? In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me, 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 of the upright in heart.

When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? And the answer is in verse one, isn't it? It's to flee to the Lord and take refuge.

[6:26] David was quite clear about the essentials of life. He knew where safety could be found. He knew who would look after him. Who was his refuge. And he turned to God regularly.

How do we know? Because of all the songs he wrote. Because of these psalms. He talks to God. He gets clarity on how to live and what he is to do. He has a clear vision of who God is.

And he stands his grounds. Have you noticed also that in verse one, in the Lord I, I take refuge.

How can you then say to me, me, singular. But when we go from four onwards, it's the Lord who takes centre stage. So let's be clear about ourselves.

But let's be clear about God. Especially about God. We'll need to spend time getting to know God.

That's what David is doing in the song. We'll need to turn to him regularly as our refuge.

[7:25] Long for safety. Secondly, look for God. This is the central section four to six. The Lord, Yahweh, capital letters, is in his holy temple.

That's his personal name. The Lord is on his heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth. His eyes examine them. 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 sulphur, scorching wind, will be their lot.

In this central section, we see God in his holy temple and on his heavenly throne. The two things. In the temple, acting as a priest.

And on the throne, acting as king. Derek Kidner says in his commentary, the king is in residence.

He's not in flight. Thus, God is ruling the world.

[8:24] He hasn't abandoned us. He hasn't left us to our devices. He's above us. Ruling from his throne. Of course, sometimes it doesn't feel like that, does it?

More often times, we feel that this world is ruled by the Trumps and the Putins and the Zs of today. In the past, you know, on a long journey in the car, we tried to keep our children occupied by giving them their own little steering wheel so they could join in with the driver.

The child thought they were steering the car. But we all knew who the true driver was. I think in life it's a bit like that, isn't it? Our human world has been given over to us to steer the wicked and the righteous.

We steer our way through the world. But the psalm says, who is the driver? Who allows both the righteous and the wicked to show us what they're made of?

God is the driver. Now, you may think in the car that you can see everything that's going on in the road ahead of you. But the truth is, only God sees everything, doesn't he?

[9:38] Isn't that what you see in verse 4? The Lord might be in his holy temple. The Lord is on his holy throne. But he observes everyone on earth. His eyes examine them. Notice the repeat.

He observes and his eyes. And again in 5, the Lord examines. He's looking. He's watching. He's seeing. He's taking it all in.

The wicked and the righteous. And by the way, the psalmist insists that God is furious with the wicked. Yes, the Lord examines the righteous, verse 5.

But the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion. Look what he plans to do, verse 6. On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur.

A scorching wind will be their lot. This is the language of judgment, isn't it? But particularly judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. When the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah.

[10:41] And it will be echoed again in the book of Revelation. Do we really believe that God sees everything? He sees what the wicked are doing. And he'll judge them for it.

Or do you have a me-centered view of the universe? The universe revolves around you, not around God. The psalmist is saying, how big is your view of God?

What do you think of God compared to you? As you long for safety, do you look to God? Thirdly, do you love the righteous, verse 7.

For the Lord is righteous. He loves justice. The upright will see his face. The Lord himself is righteous and he loves justice. And so should we.

To be able to see his face means that we can stand openly before him. With nothing between us. No sin, no wickedness that stands between us. We are righteous.

[11:40] Or put it another way, we're in the clear with God. We can look him in the eye. We can say, I know I'm not righteous in myself. But your son died for me.

Your son purchased those brand new clothes of righteousness in which I stand. I'm only made righteous because of you. The wicked? The wicked will be wiped out.

They'll be cast into eternal fire. And we will all agree that that is good and right and proper. The Lord loves justice. So we stand with the Lord and we love the righteous.

And we love righteousness. Now justice and love demand that truth is upheld. So Christ died to purchase the people for himself. And by trusting ourselves to him, we can become righteous. And you say to yourself, that must be the most sensible thing to do. Agreed. It must be. We stand with justice. We love and uphold the righteous. We have been made righteous.

[12:41] And we embrace Christ for ourselves. So, there's the psalm and there's the breakdown. What do we take away from the psalm?

What will you chew over on the barbecue today? Well, here we are on earth. While the Lord himself is tucked up quite happily, safely in the heavens.

That's what we discover in verse 4 to 6. The Lord is in his holy temple. The Lord is on his heavenly throne. But what's going on in earth is a battle between the wicked and the righteous.

What are we to do? Like David, we feel great anxiety in this world. We feel that there's troubles around every corner. Well, think with me of a future Davidic king who came our way.

He was often told to flee and to get out. He was unwelcome in certain cities. Think of friend Peter who thought Jesus was brilliant.

[13:52] Messiah even. But no, no, no. He should never go to the cross. What did Jesus do? He took refuge in his father and he pressed on.

How come? Because Jesus Christ had a very, very clear understanding of the plan of God. He would not be distracted. He set his face to Jerusalem.

He knew his father really well. He felt the pain of human wickedness. But he knew the righteous ways of God and he stuck with them. He had very clear vision because his refuge was his father. Now, if he hadn't kept going, we could never keep going. In fact, without Christ's determination to go to the cross, we would be right up the creek.

It's only because he persevered that we can press on. He went to the cross and purchased our righteousness. He took the arrows so that we could face our maker and join the righteous.

[14:54] What should we do then when the foundations are being destroyed? When we feel the heavy pressure from this world? We should look to God as our refuge.

We should love righteousness and we should keep going. Why? Because it will be worth it in the end. The wicked will be burnt up. The righteous will be safe.

Well, you say that's all well and good for God. But he's up in his temple, isn't he? That's true. But in Christ, he's been here. He's unblocked the road ahead.

He's the great priest standing in for us. But he's also the king on the throne. He's ruling over all things. He's ruling in favour of the righteous against the wicked.

And he will make sure in the end that justice will be done. Just be patient. Just be patient. Ask yourself the question, am I on his side?

[15:54] Have I left the wicked and joined the righteous? Jesus, the righteous one, died for us. The unrighteous, we're the unrighteous, to bring us to God. Peter said that, didn't he?

Christ also suffered once for sins. The righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. 1 Peter 3. So have you come to God, the righteous one, yet?

Is he your refuge? Are you clear about God at his rescue? You see, in order to face life's pressures, to live securely in this wicked world, there is no safer path.

Indeed, without being made righteous, we would continue in the way of the wicked, with the consequences that are utterly, utterly ghastly, as the psalm explains.

The wicked will be judged and thrown into hell. Verse 6 is a ghastly verse, as it pictures it in all its horror, isn't it? On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur.

[17:00] A scorching wind will be their lot. Or as Revelation puts it, the wicked will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.

They'll be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. Evil leaders will be thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

It's ghastly. It's awful. It's terrible. Psalm 11 foreshadows this devastating judgment on the wicked.

Now, let's be clear. We are all wicked, aren't we? Until we humble ourselves and turn to Christ. Until he rescues us. Until he covers us in his righteousness.

And that must be the greatest, greatest joy for anybody on earth. To know that you are safe, secure. Your refuge is Christ.

[17:59] And you are safe and significant because he went to the cross. That really encourages me. I hope it encourages you too. And it makes me determined to want to rescue as many wicked as we can to bring them to God.

I think it was the English cricketer, C.T. Studd, a very godly man, who once said this, Some wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell.

I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. Feeling under pressure in this world? Longing for safety?

Flee to Christ and join his rescue brigade? Let's pray together. Dear Lord God, our Father, we are often very troubled here on earth and we need your help and your refuge.

We do want to see things clearly, not merely through the news and our own biases, but through your eyes. We thank you that you do see all things, the righteous as well as the wicked.

[19:06] You are sovereign over everything and we therefore trust you. We want to stand with you this morning. We want to be made righteous. We want to rescue as many others as we can.

How wonderful that Jesus has rescued us and given us an eternal refuge. Help us to be used in the rescue of many, many more, we pray, in Jesus' majestic name.

Amen. Amen.