

Which Mountain is Your Refuge?

Psalm 11:1-7; Luke 21:20-24

Pastor Nollie Malabuyo • March 22, 2020

Dear Congregation of Christ: In the Old Testament, God's people took refuge in the Temple at Mount Zion. In the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, believers heeded Christ's words to flee to the mountains of Pella. Today, when crises come, to where do you flee with confidence? And when that great day of tribulation comes, to what mountain will you flee?

Our text begins with King David, the author of this psalm, answering a warning by his counselor as his enemies were threatening to kill him. Like Jesus, David's counselor also tells him to flee from his godless enemies. The counselor's warning even has a mocking tone: "When all your defenses are down, can you protect yourself from the arrows of your wicked enemies? Can God now be your refuge from your evil pursuers? There's nothing you or your God can do, so flee like a bird to your mountain refuge!"

These days are strange, difficult and fearful for all of us. Physically, economically, emotionally and socially, many people are affected by the coronavirus outbreak. For us Christians who throughout the week look forward to the Lord's Day as our day of rest from our physical and spiritual labors, this is a sad situation. We long to meet God as his people in the worship service.

When will this end? No one knows, not even the best doctors and scientists in the world. With science and technology, contemporary man thinks he is wise and invincible, unlike those primitive ancient peoples. But are we better than those tens of millions who died during the Black Plague or the Spanish Flu? An unseen virus has spread fear into our hearts and has caused the whole world to come to a standstill, even to brink of an economic collapse. We can only trust God who is sovereign over all his creation, even over this coronavirus. Therefore, we can sing with the psalmist, *"It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes"* (Psa 118:8-9).

But the righteous psalmist in our text also expresses his trust and confidence, not in his own earthly mountain refuge, but in God's heavenly mountain. Today we must answer the question, **"Which Mountain is your Refuge?" Is it Your Earthly Mountain? Or is it God's Heavenly Mountain?**

Your Earthly Mountain?

King David begins the psalm by questioning his friends who counsels him to escape from his enemies by fleeing to his mountain hideout. All his life, David went through many crises and afflictions. His situation in this psalm might be one of those: when the evil King Saul was pursuing him out of jealousy; or when his own wicked son Absalom rebelled against him and overthrew his kingship; or when the surrounding pagan kingdoms attacked his kingdom.

In these situations, his circle of advisers may have assessed that his only hope is to escape and flee to the mountains, like a bird that flies to the mountain forests where it has its nest and where it finds plenty of food for itself and for its young. Like a bird being pursued by hunters with their bows and arrows, they advise David to flee for his life. The wicked hunters, moreover, are treacherous, because they conceive of and execute their evil schemes against righteous men under the cover of darkness.

Sometimes David wavers in his confidence in God when in desperation, he says, *“For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked”* (Psa 73:3). How often do we look at our desperate situation and conclude that God is sleeping and does not care about his people because we see all around us wicked people prospering and people dying of coronavirus. And while multitudes of righteous believers suffer persecution all around the world, we see ungodly and unrighteous enemies of God prosper and multiply.

In the midst of these crises, David's counselors see the very foundations of their lives as God's people crumble into a heap of destruction. In the same way, we see today the wicked enemies of the righteous reject and destroy God's laws as the law of their nation's moral, religious and civil life. The moral laws are discarded in favor of wanton immorality, lawlessness and corruption—lust for money and power, drunkenness, drug addiction, and sexual immorality. The social fabric of our country seems to have been torn apart. Corruption is standard practice not only among those in positions of authority, but also among the rich and poor, employer and employee.

As God's special people called out of darkness into his marvelous light, you must not look at all these things around you and throw your hands up and say, “What can we do? The foundations are destroyed and all ‘the pillars of the land are crushed’” (Isa 19:10). You are not to put your trust in earthly foundations, because if you do, then hopelessness, desperation and resignation set in. You are not to flee as a bird to your own mountain retreat, like the medieval monks who separated themselves from the world's evil ways by living inside their monasteries.

What are some of our earthly foundations that are so easily shaken and destroyed? Material things such as money, homes, cars and other possessions are usually our most treasured foundation. Those are our security, and we continually store treasures, not in heaven as our Lord has commanded, but on earth where moth and rust will destroy them. Our families whom we love dearly are also in the list of our most important foundations. For many, the loss of a spouse or child or parent or brother or sister means the end of their world, with no hope for tomorrow. Our jobs are usually more precious to us than everything else, next to our families. And sometimes, our jobs take even higher priority in our lives than God's word.

When these are your foundations and your mountain refuge, you are on shaky ground. Because when the storms of life come, your house will be as a house of cards built on the sand, built with weak materials and without a strong foundation. All of these man-centered foundations of the world—*“the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions”*—are passing away. Only

those who “*do the will of God abides forever*” (1 John 2:16-17). These days, God can cause us to remember him with this unseen enemy killing thousands of people in the world every day.

But King David rejects his friends’ counsel to flee to his mountain refuge. “Why would I flee to my mountain refuge where my enemies would find me and kill me? Why would I put my trust on earthly foundations? ‘In Yahweh I take refuge!’ God’s mountain is my refuge!”

God’s Heavenly Mountain?

From his “holy temple” which is his heavenly throne, God actively reigns sovereign over the whole universe. The psalmist is not talking about the earthly temple, but the earthly house of worship is the entryway of God’s people into the heavenly realm. And so when we worship on the Lord’s Day, God actually brings heaven down to us, and the heavenly hosts join us in the worship of God (Heb 12:22-24).

David has complete trust in God because he knows that God is not just allowing and watching events “from a distance.” He knows and controls every big and little event in history. He knows each person who ever lived, whether righteous and wicked. This knowledge gives him total confidence in God, because no evil schemes by Satan and his wicked people are hidden from God’s eyes. And although he suffers from affliction and persecution, David knows that God continually tests his own as a father tests the children he loves to make them stronger.

This is why Paul reminds and encourages us when sufferings come, “*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you*” (1 Pet 4:12). He proves the genuineness of our faith, repentance and obedience, but he also chastises us and uses his rod when we go astray. But the psalmist also reminds us that God also knows the way of the wicked, and he hates them and their violence! David’s enemies plot treacherously in vain to kill him in the darkness of night with an arrow in the heart. This is what God surely hates: when the wicked persecute and kill his righteous people (Psa 5:5; 11:5).

We watch and read many unbelieving politicians, celebrities and news media mock Christians when we say we need to repent of our sin, pray to God for healing and for the coronavirus outbreak to abate. We say trust in God first, and in science and technology second. Sometimes, even our families and friends also ridicule our faith.

On Judgment Day, God will vindicate our total faith and trust in him and in his Son Jesus Christ our Great Healer. All the world will see this and declare, “*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you*” (Psa 89:14). Each one of us will be given a cup filled with God’s just rewards. The righteous will be rewarded with a cup that overflows with chosen portions and blessings (Psa 16:5, 23:5). But the wicked will inherit a cup that overflows with God’s bitter wrath of destruction (Job 21:20).

On that day, all the righteous will enter God’s throne room in heaven and see his face, Jesus himself on the throne as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is what John also looked

forward to, *“But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is”* (1 John 3:2).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters: When perilous times such as these days come, where do you flee for refuge? To your own mountain, founded on the world's security? Or do you lift your eyes to God's holy hill, from where your help comes? (Psa 121:1).

There is a period of time—maybe days, maybe months, maybe years—before Christ returns, when lawlessness, sufferings and pain will be unparalleled in the history of mankind. Wars and rumors of wars, pestilence, famine, persecution, false teachers, earthquakes and natural disasters will come to a terrible climax. The coronavirus is one of these pestilences. In terror, the unbelieving people of the earth will hide in the rocks and mountains and plead to them to crush them so their suffering will end (Rev 6:15-16). Their mountains and foundations will not protect them and hide them from God's wrath. Because all of their lives, Jesus was a cornerstone of offense that they rejected, and the mountain of Calvary was a rock of stumbling for them. Instead, their foundations are built on the sands of human effort and works-righteousness.

What about you? Will you flee to God as your refuge and hiding place? Will you go hide yourself in the cleft of Christ your Spiritual Rock? Will you stand on the only firm and solid foundation of the holy Scriptures, written by the prophets and apostles breathed out to them by the Spirit?

The heavenly city has twelve gates and twelve foundations. The twelve gates have the names of the 12 tribes written on them, symbolizing Israel, God's chosen people in the Old Testament. The twelve foundations have the names of the 12 apostles inscribed in them, symbolizing God's elect in the New Testament (Rev 21:12, 14). Are you part of those 12 foundations holding up the heavenly city? If you have faith in Christ, the Rock of Ages, then you are standing on solid ground. Your Foundation is one that will never be shaken or destroyed during this coronavirus crisis and other perilous times, and even when God shakes up the whole universe at his coming.