

Father in heaven, all scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for doctrine, for proof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God might be thoroughly equipped unto every good work. We pray this evening, O God, that your law that is perfect in all of its parts would come open to us this evening with power that we might have a deeper understanding of who you are and who we are and the grubby and grimy paths that often lead away from you to the citadel of self where the fear of man and unbelief and disobedience hold precedence. We offer these prayers, oh Lord, that we might stand fast against this trinity of evil and hold fast to you as you keep us fast in Christ, in whose name we pray, amen. If you would, please turn with me in your copy of the word of God to the 11th Psalm. And so I don't mess with my memory bank this evening. I'm gonna read to you from the New American Standard, but you'll find it very similar to the ESV, which is a great translation, and you'll find that in your pews. Now in her psalm this evening, we'll see David have a conversation with doubt. Someone is tempting David to flee as a bird to his mountain. You're a bird, David, you're a helpless bird, a harried bird, and you need to run as fast as your wings will carry you to a mountain. And the mountain, of course, is a metaphor of a place of safety and security and stability. And it's your mountain, it's a place of your own making, you might say. It's a metaphor for all of those places we look to and run to in trouble rather than turning to God. And we hear that voice coming from all different sources. We hear it at times coming from friends like Peter coming to Jesus and encouraging him to avoid the cross and to receive the stiff rebuke, get thee behind me, Satan. At times it'll come from a foe like the devil will come and whisper in our ears, flee as a bird to your mountain, and as times it'll come from within our own hearts as we face the temptation to take counsel from our fears, which Robert E. Lee said famously, never do that, never take counsel from your fears. And we'll see David wrestle with this voice and then respond to this voice by looking to God. Let's read the scriptures together this evening. This is the word of God. Please take heed how you hear. For the choir director, a psalm of David. In the Lord, I take refuge. How can you say to my soul, flee as a bird to your mountain? For behold, the wicked bend the bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, to shoot in darkness at the upright in heart. If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? That's the arguments that the voice of unbelief is bringing to David, right? Here's the voice of faith. The Lord is in his holy temple. The Lord's throne is in heaven. His eyes behold, his eyelids test the sons of men. The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence his soul hates. Upon the wicked he will rain

snare. Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup, for the Lord is righteous. He loves righteousness. The upright will behold his face. Amen. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but this is the word of God, and it endures forever. So how are you to respond as a Christian when all you can see is trouble and all you feel that you can do is run, and yet running is the last thing you ought to do? Now there's times when it's right to run, when Bloody Mary was wreaking her havoc. in the 1550s back in England and slaughtering Christians left, right, and center. Many Christian ministers like John Knox and others fled to Frankfurt and then to Geneva to escape her murderous tirade. And R.C. Sproul, sorry, J.C. Ryle, in one of his famous books about the English reformers, makes the comment that there's no virtue in being martyred unless you have to be martyred, right? It's not wrong at times to try and escape martyrdom, and many righteous men did. And if more of them had done that in the days of Bloody Mary, they might have escaped certain death at her hands and lived to preach another day, which is not always a bad thing to do. But in this situation, David is unable to run. It's clear reading the psalm that the counsel to run would repudiate his commitment to trust. He's saying, in the Lord I take refuge. How can you say to my soul, flee as a bird to the mountain? What are you to do in those moments? And such arguments can be persuasive. and they can penetrate right down to our soul. It comes beneath David's skin, beneath even his heart and his mind. It gets right down to the nitty gritty of his soul. This is a powerful argument and David has to marshal all of the logic of faith to stand firm and hold the line against this temptation to turn tail and run before the enemy. So what? How can you stand in such times? How can you hold the line? How can you remain true to God? And there's two things. First of all, you must learn to recognize the voice of doubt. You gotta learn to recognize the voice of doubt. You gotta have your feeder systems up and be ready to spot the tempter's logic. And if you notice from verse one, To verse three, as David hears the voice of doubt, it speaks nothing of God and it speaks only of trouble. That's always a red flag. When the temptation comes and it says to you nothing about God, it doesn't remind you of the character of God, it doesn't remind you of the promises of God, it doesn't remind you of the precepts of God, it speaks nothing of your duty, it speaks only of danger. That's a red flag. If you look here at the voice of doubt, that's all it speaks about. Flee as a bird to your mountain. For behold, why run away, David? Well, do the math. Behold, the wicked bend the bow. They make ready their arrow upon the string to shoot in darkness at the upright in heart. If the

foundation are destroyed, what can the righteous do, right? Not a word about God. All it speaks about is the danger and the trouble and the instability of the times. But this argument is persuasive, isn't it? David, think about it. Your situation is so unjust. It's the age-old conflict, the wicked against the upright in heart. It's so unfair. You better run away. The danger's also unstoppable, unavoidable. The arrow is bent. It's ready. All they need to do is relax their index and their middle finger, and you're dead. It's not a question of if the arrow will be loosed. The only question is when. And when it's loosed, it's going straight into the middle of your chest, center mass, and you're a dead man. It's unjust. The danger's unstoppable. Worse, it's unseen. They shoot in darkness at the upright and hard. If you could see them, you could maybe avoid them. You could angle yourself to maybe avoid a death shot. But you can't see, you don't know where they're, they're a hidden sniper. It's like that time back, I forget when it was, whenever Muhammad, whatever his name was, had his rifle and was shooting out through a hole cut in the back of this old car, you remember? In America, and he was shooting mothers and fathers out shopping, filling gas, and people were terrified. Everywhere they were going, they felt as if there was a sniper's crosshair on their chest or on their head. And it couldn't be seen, it couldn't be prevented. They were terrified, it was insecure. That's the situation here. You can't see them, David. You don't know where they're coming from. It's unjust, it's unstoppable, it's unseen. And that were not bad enough. Everything is unstable. The foundations, David, the foundations of law and order, All of the places you normally run to find some semblance of security, maybe your bank balance, maybe your job, maybe your marriage, maybe your family, maybe your own wit and wisdom, maybe just law and order in society, all of those things are in free fall, and you feel as if you've got both feet firmly planted, yes, in midair. There's nothing left to do but run. And again, notice, all that logic, as persuasive as it is, As penetrating as it is, getting right down beneath the skin into the soul, it says nothing of God, it speaks only of trouble. And you'll find yourself, when you and I are tempted to take counsel from our fears, you'll find yourself, as Lloyd-Jones says, sometimes the greatest problem we face is that we listen to ourselves far too much when we should be talking to ourselves. And by and large, when I'm listening to myself, I'm listening to words of doubt that say nothing of God and speak only of trouble. And if you listen to those voices too long, you'll find yourself in free fall. All the things you can't do, all the things the wicked are doing, all the things you need, all the things you haven't got, how difficult your situation is, how tough it is, how overwhelmed you feel, all of these things, When they speak only of trouble and when

they say nothing of God, they're leading you away from the light, out into the darkness. And their chief responsibility then is to get your feet under you, and you do that, not just by learning to recognize the voice of doubt, but by learning to see the God you can't, right? And that's the second half of the psalm. The psalmist turns away from all of the trouble, all of the danger that he can't see, and he steadies himself by seeing the God he can't see. And in particular, he focuses his mind on three theological realities, the throne of God, the eye of God, and the character of God. First of all, God's eye, God's throne. Verse six, here's his answer. And the Lord, I take refuge. How can you say to my soul, flee as a bird to your mountain? Well, all of this trouble. And David says, well, what about this God? The Lord's throne, I'm sorry, the Lord is in his holy temple. The Lord's throne is in heaven. His holy temple, holiness describes God's nature as cut off. He belongs in an entirely different realm than we are. He's cut off from all that is sinful, yes, but he's also cut off from all that is created. We've said this before, but it bears repeating. We often think of God as a much bigger version of ourselves. As Karl Bartsom says, you can't speak of God by speaking man in a loud voice, but we often do that, we think of ourselves. We kind of go from molecules to microbes to mammals, mice, and then men, and you keep on going down the great chain of being, and eventually you get to angels. ordinary angels, the teenage ones, and then all the way through to the cherubim and the seraphim, right? And the archangels, Michael and Gabriel and so forth. And then we think, go a little bit further and you get to God. No, that's not what God is like. You get to the archangels and you get to the end of all that is created and you come to a hard stop. And if you were to take the wings of the dawn and fly faster than light out into the abyss separating the creature from the creator. And you flew across that abyss forever and a day at 186,000 miles per second, or warp 9.9, which is even faster than that exponentially, in the Star Trek universe. And you fly forever and a day. The gap between the creator and the creature doesn't even close by an inch. It remains infinite, eternal, and unchangeably far away from us. And God's temple, our place of refuge, is God's holy temple. There's a place in heaven, a temple, a place of worship, a place, by inference, where sacrifices are offered to purchase a sinner a just mercy. It's far, far above. It's in heaven, a place that's unassailable to the wicked on earth. Easier for an earthquake to bring a plane down flying at 33,000 feet than for the wicked to even scratch the outer outskirts of God's throne. Our place of refuge is better than any earthly mountain. As tempting as such a mountain might be, The place we run to is forever and a day, far away from the wicked, but it's near to the voice of faith. You can't

get there with the wings of the dove, but you can get there in a moment with the hand of faith. You can lay hold of this God. He's not just a God, he's your God. He's on your side. His throne is in heaven. And David is reminding himself that while things might not be stable down here, the universe might be in free fall. America, maybe in a few years time, torn apart by civil war, law and order collapsing. All of the normal structures that made life possible gone. But none of those can undo, undermine, or in any way diminish the fact that the Lord's throne is in heaven. He is in control. Spurgeon tells the story of a

little girl on a ocean liner. And there's an almighty storm comes down. They're in the middle of the Atlantic. And the sea is being tossed up and down in these titanic waves. Lightning is flashing. Thunder is crashing. And she's woken from her sleep. And she stumbles out into one of the galleys in the ship. And one of the crew member runs past. And she says, where's father? And the crewman recognizes her immediately and says, oh, father's on the deck. He's at the helm. And the wee girl nods her head, smiles, heads back into the bunk and curls up under the comforter and falls fast asleep. Because of course her father's the captain of the ship. And in her little mind, as long as daddy's at the helm and daddy's in control, all's right with the world. The storm can be the storm. Daddy's on deck. And we need to remind ourselves in troubles big and small, whether it be the tiny trouble of a pastor trying to find a house in a down market, all the way through to the much more significant and massive troubles that are clawing at your mind even now this evening and that are resisting your best efforts to listen to this sermon, you've got to remind yourself, your father is on the throne. His hand is on the tiller. He is the gubernator of the universe and you can trust him. Where's your father? He's in control. He's always been in control and he always shall be in control. That's the first thing. And it's really hard because David keeps on saying this in the Psalms and I'm running out of ways to illustrate it. We're only in Psalm 11 and it's been the constant reference point of David's worship. And that should tell you something. You need to be reminded of that because you constantly forget that. Thy due to, the Lord's through. Secondly, the Lord's eye. Verse four, his eyes behold, his eyelids test the sons of men. His eyelids test, what's that mean? Well, you know, boys and girls, when you pick up something really small, like maybe a wee bug in the garden, or maybe you've broken something, one of your toys, you've broken maybe the controller on your Nintendo Switch, and you bring it to your daddy, and he's trying to fix it, and you get old man eyes like me, you have to pick it up and you screw

your eyes up, even when you're not old, you do this, you screw your eyes up when you look at something very small, so you can see it in all of its detail. Your eyelids help you focus on things that are very small so you can take it all in. And that's the idea here of God. He screws up his eyes and looks at the wicked individually. He fathoms their thoughts, the intentions of their heart. Nothing is hidden from them. He knows them in the minutest detail. And that's of great comfort. and it should be a great comfort to you. Not only does God see, he sees your situation and the kind of depth that You can't even begin to imagine. Whenever I was in my first ministry in Yazoo City, I was going through a really tough time. I was feeling a bit homesick, and I discovered the delights of Google Earth. Now, back then, it was entirely new, but it was really amazing. You could go from this globe, the Earth, this size, and you could zoom right into Belfast. Right in Dulcerville Gardens where I used to be as a student in medical school and see the house and you can zoom right in, it's incredible. You go from like space and you can zoom right in and you can see where you used to live, the road you used to walk on and it brought me home in an instant and I spent all afternoon going about Northern Ireland and Google Earth and just looking at the sights and sounds. I could even almost smell it. It was wonderful, the sea air. The details, you zoom in, and it's like, we can only zoom in on one street at a time, but God can see the whole world. He sees every human being. He knows all of our stories in exhaustive detail. The good, the bad, and the ugly. And that should be a great comfort. Remember the wicked? Often forget that. One of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 94, Remember in Psalm 94, the wicked are pouring forth words, they're speaking arrogantly, they're vaunting themselves, they're strutting about like a rooster in the farmyard. And the psalmist complains, they crush your people, oh Lord, and afflict your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger and murder the orphan. And what comforts them in their mad career? They have said, The Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob pay heed. And do you remember what the psalmist said? Pay heed, you senseless among the people. When will you understand, stupid ones? That's not a good word, children, but when the psalmist uses it, it's okay. When will you understand, stupid ones? He who planted the ear Does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see? He who chastens the nations, will he not rebuke? Even he who teaches man knowledge, for the Lord knows the thoughts of a man, that they are a mere breath. It's amazing how people forget the eyes of God. the wicked forget it, and even the righteous forget it. Remember how in Psalm 31, the end of Psalm 31, David says, blessed be the Lord, for he has made marvelous

his loving kindness for me in a besieged city. David was hemmed in, he was trapped in a city, besieged, no way out. And he said, as for me and my alarm, I said, "'I am cut off from before your eyes.'" That's David, the psalm singer. God's forgotten, David's forgotten the lessons of Psalm 11. "'As for me and my alarm, I said, "'I am cut off from before your eyes. "'Nevertheless, you heard the voice of my supplications "'when I cried to you.'" How vast the difference between our feelings, our fears, our insecurities, and reality. As for me and my alarm, I said, I'm cut off. But you heard when I cried out to you. It's one thing to feel forsaken. It's one thing to feel hidden from God's sight. But it's quite another thing for a Christian to be forsaken and to be hidden from God's sight. And we need to remind ourselves whatever trouble you're facing this evening, Christian, the Lord sees it and understand its beginning, its middle, and its end. He knows it far better than you do. And what's more, he knows why he's allowed it into your life at the moment to grow in you character and perseverance and hope. The Lord's throne, the Lord's eye, and the Lord's character. The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked. And the one who loves violence, his soul hates. We've said this before recently, but isn't it true? In our trouble, we often, our deepest insecurity is that nobody is in control, that nobody sees what's going on, and nobody cares. And David reminds himself, no, the Lord is in control, and the Lord sees, and oh yes, the Lord cares with a passion. The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked. And the one who loves, literally, Hamas in the Hebrew, his soul hates. He hates him. And he will take action. Upon the wicked, he will rain snares. Fire and brimstone and a burning wind will be the portion of their cup. David reminds himself, I'm not the one who's really trapped. They're trapped. This is their destiny. Upon the wicked he will reign snares. Fire and brimstone and a burning wind will be the portion of their cup. Why? Because of the Lord's character. Verse seven, for the Lord is righteous. He's straight up and down. He's not crooked. He's not twisted. He's not perverse, he's as straight as a die, we say in Northern Ireland. I'm not sure what a die is, but I'm sure it's not crooked. For the Lord is righteous, he isn't just righteous, he loves righteousness. And the upright will behold his face. Now there's the problem, isn't it? The upright will behold his face. And maybe the devil comes in and says, but you're not upright, mister or madam. You're twisted yourself, you're perverse. This psalm would be of comfort to you if you were upright, but you're not upright, you're a sinner. Do you not deserve to drink the cup of God's wrath? In verse six. And that's a problem, of course, that'll take the rest of the Bible to explain. But it's a

serious problem. None of us are upright. We might look upright to the eyes of men, but it's not before the eyes of men that we have to do. We have to do with the eyes of God, whose are purer eyes than to behold evil. So what hope do you and I have? And the answer, of course, is found in that wonderful sermon that Pastor Henderson preached on Maundy Thursday, at Gethsemane, that the Lord who occupied the throne in heaven, the Lord who's in his holy temple, he refused to stay there, metaphorically. He didn't leave the throne, you understand, but in one sense, he did come down and entered the womb of the Virgin in his human nature. as he became flesh and began that long journey down to Golgotha's darkness and it was one step down after another until he gets to Gethsemane. And there in Gethsemane, he's standing on the outskirts of hell, he's standing on the edge and looking into the pit, the bottomless pit, the appalling cost of your redemption and of mine, what it will cost him to become sin. And in his human nature, he can't fathom it, right? His human mind is finite, like yours is and mine is. Donald MacLeod's got a great phrase that what he became stands in awe of what he was. He's picturing the human nature of Christ, trying to fathom the depths of the divine nature, and his finite mind is blown as he considers the glories of the divine nature. His mind is finite, though it's not fallen. And that's true as Christ tries to fathom the love of God and the glory of God, but it's equally true in Gethsemane as he's trying to fathom the wrath of God. And he literally can't get his arms around it. I think I've used this illustration before, but maybe not here, I can't remember. But it's like a little boy trying to plumb the cosmos. Remember when you were a child, maybe, and you tried to see into the night sky with a flashlight? But the sky was too big and the light was too small. The object, or the subject, was far too great for the object, the little torch, flashlight, sorry. Flashlight. And here's Christ in Gethsemane. His human mind is like a flashlight trying to plumb the depths, not of the cosmos, but of the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable being of God that will be united in hostility against him tomorrow because of your sins. And he's trying to imagine it, though he can't, and the thought of it terrifies him. Now, tomorrow, there'll be no imagining. He'd be left face-to-face with the reality. But in Gethsemane, he's trying to imagine, and the thought of the cup terrifies him. But there's something that terrifies him even more. And that is the thought of you drinking that cup by yourself. He's thinking, Father, is there another way? Let the cup pass by me. And then he thinks of you, putting that cup to your lips and drinking it. And with resolve, he says, Father, not my will be done, but thy will be done. And Jesus drinks the cup of wrath,

the cup of the wicked, that's full of snares and fire and brimstone
and a burning wind, that's the portion of the wicked's cup,
it's the cup of wrath, and Jesus drinks that all down to the dregs. There's nothing
left. I love
coffee. Occasionally I leave coffee in
the bottom of the coffee cup and the next morning I'll get
my fresh cup of coffee and I'm drinking it and then I'll make
a mistake. I'll pick up the old coffee and drink the dregs of
yesterday's coffee and it tastes awful. It's like, oh my word.
And it's like, ah. Because there's a little bit
left in the bottom. There's nothing left in the bottom
of the cup of wrath. Jesus. drank it all the way down
to the bottom, which is why it's so important, boys and girls,
that Jesus was God, because only God could drink a cup that was
full of infinite and eternal wrath and drink it dry. Nobody
else is big enough and nobody else is good enough to drain
it to the very bottom so there's not a drop left for you to drink. And so Christian,
Yet again,
we remind ourselves that Psalm 11 belongs to Jesus before it
belongs to us. And we see our destiny here,
the upright will behold his face. Not because you're upright, but
because Christ is upright. And all of the uprightness you
need is found in him. And the cup of curse has been
done away with. And all that's left for you and
me forever and ever and ever is the cup of God's blessing. So you have before us the
voice
of faith and the voice of unbelief. The voice of unbelief speaks
nothing of God, only of trouble. And the voice of faith speaks
nothing of trouble and only of God, his throne, his eye, and
his character. Which voice will you listen to
today and tomorrow and this week and next week whenever the voice
of faith clamors for your attention? Answer it now and answer it always
with the voice of faith that runs with the wings of faith
to the throne of God in the heavens, where you'll always find a refuge
and a ready place to shelter. in your father's house. It's a wonderful thing. I feel

very at home in America. My dad's 90 years of age. He still lives in my childhood
home in Derryquin in Caltraw. Derryquin's the name of the house.
And I don't go there very often anymore, but it's wonderfully
comforting to know that if ever the bottom falls out and I need
to run somewhere, I can always go home to my father. My dad's
90. Wonder how long he'll be on the
earth. But Christian, your father's eternal. And his home, like his
throne, is always there for you to run to in your hour of need. Let's pray together.
Our Father
in heaven, we thank you for Jesus, who takes sinners like us who
should be the enemies of God and reconciles us so we become
friends of God. We pray, Lord Jesus, that you
will teach us to learn the lessons of these songs of pilgrimage.
They're songs full of trouble, yes, but they're also songs full

of God and full of faith. Teach us, O Lord, to walk by
faith, for we believe it brings great glory to you when we do.
And we offer these prayers. In Christ's name, amen.