

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, November 11, 2018

### God is our Refuge

Psalms 46:1-11 “1 **God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.** 2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. 4 There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. 6 ¶ The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. 7 **The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.** 8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. 9 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. 10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. 11 **The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.**”

Psalms 91:1-16 “1 ¶ He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the LORD, **He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.** 3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. 4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. 5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; 6 Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. 7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. 8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. 9 ¶ **Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; 10 There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.** 11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. 12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. 13 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. 14 Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. 15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. 16 With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.”

Beloved, the scriptures are full of encouraging truths like those that we just read, regarding the fact that God is indeed a refuge – THE ONLY REFUGE – for His people. My aim today is to help us all to be comforted by this truth; perhaps more importantly, to

see it as a very practical and tangible provocation as we make our way through the dangers and snares of this sin laden, waste howling wilderness.

Topics:

- What is a refuge?
- God is our refuge!
- The nature of our refuge in Christ
- The inevitable conclusion of temporal refuge
- The literal refuge for the redeemed of Israel

### **What is a refuge?**

The dictionary defines refuge as:

- A place of shelter, protection, or safety from danger or trouble
- Anything to which one has recourse for aid, relief, or escape
- A place of security or survival

Further, I think it is helpful to pull in several other scriptural words that are largely synonymous with refuge. If you look at the underlying Hebrew words in passages like those above, you will quickly come to the following synonyms for refuge: fortress, shelter, strong hold, castle, defense, hope, trust, high tower, covert, etc. While each of these words has some different nuances that are helpful and instructive, I am going to focus on them as a similar whole for the purpose of our analysis today – they all contain an element of this attribute, and name of God: Refuge.

These words are not merely fodder for “Christian” wall art – they are full of life and hope for us! One major takeaway that I hope we all get from this sermon is a mental image to help us call upon this name of God meaningfully, in the moments of our lives wherein we particularly need that help. Toward that goal, imagine yourself in this scenario:

- You’re a farmer, living in a village outside of a great walled city – those walls represent refuge.
- Within those walls is a strong hold – a castle, with high towers. Again, refuge.
- You’re out working in the fields one day, and you look up to see a deadly, fast moving storm approaching – or – you see banners and clouds of dust, and you hear the thundering of horses and the blast of trumpets – the terror of an invading army. Bake that moment of realization into your mind: you’re standing there in the midst of your work, and this trauma is suddenly upon you.
- What do you do? You FLEE FOR REFUGE! You drop EVERYTHING that encumbers your flight – instantly – and you run to the refuge, encouraging everyone in sight or sound to flee with you. You flee with a singlehearted purpose - you know where

the refuge is, and you know it's your only hope – your only salvation. Imagine that scenario, and feel that desperation down to your toes. This must be the same desperation with which we flee to God for refuge. We have no alternatives! There is no option to “ride the storm out”, or “stand your ground” – either of those things equals certain destruction.



**God is our Refuge!**

My friends – we have no strong hold, no shelter, no help, and no hope that can be devised by human means. There are no walls and no castles that can save our never dying soul. Our refuge is in God alone, and He is more than sufficient for the job! He is not a secondary refuge, that we should look to when all other means have failed – to the contrary, He is our first, primary, and ONLY refuge. Any secondary means that we use

to help our flesh will only be properly understood and utilized by a spirit that is firmly sheltered in the Almighty.

- Psalms 9:9 “The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.”
- Proverbs 14:26 “In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.”
- Psalms 48:1-7 “1 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. 2 Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. 3 **God is known in her palaces for a refuge.** 4 For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. 5 They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. 6 Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. 7 Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.”
- Psalms 59:16 “But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble.”
- Psalms 62:7 “In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.”
- Isaiah 25:4 For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

Refuge is one of the names of our God – His attributes. We are to call upon each of His names distinctly, and meaningfully in the moments of our lives when they are most applicable. When we do that, we magnify and glorify Him with specificity, and we also get help – instruction and comfort for our hearts that is fitting for the circumstance at hand. Consider the scripture:

Isaiah 50:10, 11 “10 Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. 11 Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.”

We find ourselves in these hours of darkness, where we don’t know what to do, or what to think, or how to pray. We find ourselves afflicted, grieved, pressed, and afraid. In those moments we are most prone to try to think, or talk, a “solution” into being. We are prone to grab onto any perceived “help” within reach to alleviate the distress that we are feeling, when we ought rather to give glory to God for appointing it, and FLEE to Him for refuge – recognizing Him as the source of help, and waiting patiently for Him to show us

the goodness of the affliction that He has appointed, and the deliverance that He has planned.

Psalms 57:1 “ « To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave. » Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: **yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.**”

Afflictions arise in our circumstances; afflictions arise in our bodies; our hearts are assaulted with fleshly distress and worry of every stripe. We tend to fret about our lot – what we have, what we need, what we want, etc. We find ourselves grieved and offended toward one another – our hearts utterly, shamefully consumed by it. When we find ourselves in these circumstances, we CANNOT be creating, fortifying and defending positions – we must be in a mode of flight! Drop everything that keeps you standing still: get to the Lord with great haste, and a heart ready to hear instruction. ***FIRST*** - pour out your heart in earnest prayer to God.

Psalms 62:8 “Trust in him at all times; ye people, **pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.**”

When the violent winds are gathering, get to the **scriptures** and to **prayer** and to **counsel** with specificity, and a heart prepared to receive instruction. Recognize the faithless, prideful, fretting rage monster inside of you, and RESIST. Physically stop yourself from thinking over every perceived option and outcome. Instead, get to the Lord immediately and intensely. With that spirit of faith – sheltered in the Almighty, and armed with prudent, faithful counsel – we are able to effectively lay our hands on any appropriate remedy that the Lord will put before us.

Again, to effectively flee for refuge in Christ, we have to be prepared to drop anything and everything that burdens us down. There is one thing, however, that we must never let go of:

Revelation 3:11 “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

What do we have that we are supposed to be holding fast? We have Christ, and we need no other! We have faith – the earnest of our inheritance that the Holy Spirit has delivered to us. We have His word – His doctrine, His Gospel, His promises, and all of the goodness that flows from those things. Everything else is flesh, and therefore is to be used with temperance – it is to be held with a loose grip. We must be prepared to take it or leave it. We must be able to abound, and to be abased (Philippians 4:12).

Matthew 16:24-26 “24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 **For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.** 26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

This is not a call for voluntary poverty, or any such self-flagellating penance. We don't have to chase sorrow, but we can't run from it either, and we ought to prepare our hearts for it, by keeping always in our minds who is the source and owner of all that we are and all that we have. He appoints the hours and the circumstances that make up the unique trials of our faith. He decides when to require us to run for refuge, and what we will each need to drop to enable our flight of faith. Some examples of things that we must be willing to part with faithfully, and ultimately with a joyful spirit (Hebrews 10:34):

- Health
- Jobs
- Safety
- Worldly goods
- Ideologies and self-righteous habits of life
- Causes against others / offenses
- Friends
- Family
- Children
- Our very lives

I should never compare what the Lord has required me to leave behind against what He has required any of you to leave behind. By God's wondrous design, we are each framed uniquely, and we each require particular trials, affliction, and correction. That's God's business. We often see the good that the Lord appointed for us in a specific affliction *after* that affliction has run its course, but we can never, in this flesh, fully understand His purpose – what it did to help our soul, to keep us from sin, to correct us, to teach others, and to glorify God. However, we can take this to the bank: it works for our good, and for His glory! (Romans 8:24, Hebrews 12:11) We must approach God with that knowledge and spirit, and with a submission to whatever he has appointed for our flesh. Consider these words that God spoke to Moses:

Exodus 33:21-23 “21 And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: 22 And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: 23 And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.”

## The nature of our refuge in Christ:

Our refuge is spiritual, and mighty, to the destruction of all earthly strong holds:

- 2Corinthians 10:3-6 “3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4 **(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)** 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; 6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.”

Our refuge in Christ is uncomfortable to our flesh, and appears to be precarious and weak. Consider David’s typical and instructive refuge in the cave Adullam, as he fled from Saul.

- 1Samuel 23:14 “And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand.”
  - This was a miraculous preservation. He was maintained every day, such that this cave – uncomfortable as it must have been – was a strong hold! It wasn’t a beautiful castle, it wasn’t surrounded by tanks, and yet it was an impenetrable fortress!
- 1Samuel 22:1,2 “1 David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father’s house heard it, they went down thither to him. 2 And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.”
  - God’s people share these same attributes. We are discontented with our own vile flesh. We are distressed in the midst of our sin-earned afflictions – deepened by the prospering of the wicked all around us. We are carrying a Debt that we cannot pay. All of which causes us to flee for refuge under the banner of Jesus Christ, our glorious Captain.
- Psalms 142:1-7 “1 ¶ « Maschil of David; A Prayer when he was in the cave. » I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. 2 I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble. 3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. 4 ¶ I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. 5 **I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.** 6 **Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me**

**from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.** 7 Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.”

- The world views our refuge as weak. The flesh desires policies, laws, governments, armies, fortified buildings, tanks, bombs, guns, jets, battleships, etc., that they can mercilessly wield against their fellow man. The flesh wants things that appear mighty to the eye. The flesh believes that there must be a more attractive, self-promoting way to get salvation and safety. There is not!

Consider this amazing and comforting example that the Maker of Heaven and Earth baked into the very creation:

Psalms 104:18 “The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies.”

These mountain goats are weak, vulnerable animals. They are constantly under assault from foxes and big cats. However, the Lord made them with amazing feet that allow them to be some of the greatest rock climbers in the world. They make their habitation at the top of mountains. I’m not talking about regular mountains, I’m talking about sheer rock faces that lead to little caves and outcroppings where they are safe. Whenever they descend for food or water, they watch carefully, ready to flee back to the mountains whenever they sense trouble. As soon as they hit the side of the mountain, they are safe, because their enemies cannot pursue them there. We must have that same watchfulness and instinct for instant flight to God, as we make this pilgrimage; after all, our adversary the devil is a prowling, roaring lion, seeking to devour the precious life.







What a beautiful sight! That refuge looks so precarious, and uncomfortable to the flesh, and yet entirely secure.

- Habakkuk 3:18,19 “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.  
19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. ...”

**The inevitable conclusion of temporal refuge**

Psalms 14:1,6 “1 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. ... 6 **Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the LORD is his refuge.**”

The world think that we are fools – they mock and shame us, because we take refuge in God, rather than rallying around the banners of flesh. They do not have faith imprinted upon their heart, they boldly proclaim that “there is no God!”. They will not tolerate anyone who says otherwise, because it does violence to their delusions.

Think about the endless ways that this nation violently, hatefully and faithlessly searches for safety in the face of chaos and destruction. There is an endless, deafening drum beat going on around us, even as the Lord is UNDOING this nation. Every option is on the table, EXCEPT repentance and obedience to God. They think they can fix this mess with violence, military power, political wrangling and railing, gun control laws, emergency preparedness, border walls, etc. It will all fail! At the blast of the ram’s horns, the mighty walls of Jericho came tumbling down!

- Psalms 20:7 – “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.”

Isaiah 28 is instructive as to how the world views refuge, and what the Lord does, and will do to their refuge. This passage is specifically speaking about what will come to pass shortly upon the Jews, but the concepts certainly apply in a more general sense.

Isaiah 28:14-22 “14 ¶ Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. 15 **Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:** 16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. 17 Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: **and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.** 18 **And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.** 19 From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report. 20 **For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.** 21 For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. 22 Now therefore be ye not

mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.”

- It is a cruel and hateful thing to help your neighbor build and fortify a refuge of lies. It is a great sin against God, and we must strive against it – within and without.
- Even as the world feverishly builds and prepares, God is fighting against them such that they can never feel safe – their feet are always hanging off the end of the bed, and they can never make the blanket quite wrap around them. This metaphor is wonderfully instructive:
  - It shows the utter inadequacy of human refuge. Their strongest fortress will be worth no more than an undersized blanket when the Lord’s fury is poured out.
  - The world doesn’t just want to have strong refuge in the flesh, they want to be at rest while they do it – they want to be at ease, lying in bed. They have no interests in caves and mountain sides.
    - Revelation 18:7,8 “7 How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. 8 Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.”

### **The literal refuge for the redeemed of Israel**

Revelation 12 describes the wilderness – the refuge – that God will prepare for the redeemed of Israel; that place to which those 144,000 penitent Jews will flee for preservation when annihilation comes upon Jerusalem under the banner of Antichrist, and tribulation comes in earnest upon the whole earth, as the trumpets are sounding. Given that scene coupled with everything that we just discussed about our refuge in God, let us consider the words of Christ in answer to the question that the disciples posed in Matthew 24:3 – “Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world?”

Matthew 24:15-24 “15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) 16 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: 17 Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: 18 Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. 19 And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! 20 But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: 21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And except those days should

be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. 23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. 24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

- There can be no hesitation: drop everything and flee to the refuge that God has prepared.
- This "wilderness" refuge that they flee to is clearly not going to be the most comfortable thing for the flesh to endure.
- Think about those little goats precariously perched on the sides of the mountain – in full view of their predators, and yet completely safe.
- They will be continually taunted, and there will be endless "foxes" trying to treacherously lure them from their safe perch.
- Consider these additional words of comfort from Zechariah that speak to these same redeemed Jews:
  - Zechariah 9:12-17 "12 **Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee;** 13 When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man. 14 And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord GOD shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. 15 The LORD of hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar. 16 And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. 17 For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids."

What a joy and a privilege it is to take refuge in this cave Adullam with each of you dear friends – prisoners of hope!

I love you all. Amen.

