

## Escaping Escapism

### Psalm 11

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 11-17-2013

#### **Introduction – the difference between escape and escapism**

I've titled today's sermon, "Escaping From Escapism," (an apparently contradictory title) in order to highlight the tension that some people see between 2 Samuel 16 where David initiates a flight from Jerusalem and Psalm 11 where David (apparently on the same day) is resisting the suggestion of other people that they flee. Escaping escapism seems to be contradictory just like Psalm 11 and 2 Samuel 16 seem to be in contradiction to each other. But I hope by the end of the sermon to show that they really are not – that there is a big difference between a tactical retreat and escapism. And in the process of doing this, hopefully we can strike a balance on the issues of responsibility on the one hand and various diversions on the other hand.

Some people speak disparagingly of music and movies and games as escapism. And maybe they are using the term loosely. There is a sense in which those can be a temporary escape from the pressures of life. But is it really any different from what David did when he was overwhelmed and he went to music and to God for relief? Even Jesus had His disciples escape from the crowds and escape from the hectic pace of ministry for a while in order for them to be quiet and to refresh themselves. They were taking a break. But though that is temporary escape from something, I am not defining that as escapism, though some people loosely do.

In your outline you will see three dictionary definitions of escapism:

- 1) avoiding reality through diversions
- 2) or (second definition) refusal to embrace responsibility through such diversions. In other words, rather than doing your housework, you watch TV all day, or play games all day. But the emphasis on that definition is irresponsibility.
- 3) or (third definition) a refusal to recognize danger and naively hoping for the best. That is another form of escapism. I've pictured that as the two ostriches with their head in the sand. That's not going to protect them from the lion. In fact, it will do the opposite.

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So 1) avoiding reality through diversions, 2) refusal to embrace responsibility through diversion, 3) refusal to recognize danger and naively hoping for the best. With those definitions in mind I think you can see that there is a big difference between escapism (which is being described in Psalm 11) and escape (which is being described in 2 Samuel 16). Tactical retreat is not escapism; resting your mind and body is not escapism; relaxing with music over a cigar is not escapism; spending an hour in prayer to regain composure is not escapism.

I was debating whether I should just skip all seventeen Psalms that were written during the Absalom rebellion, but I think it will be worthwhile addressing this issue that has caused such debate in Reformed circles. There is a lot of legalism out there on this issue. And I would say that there is a place for literal or metaphorical escape, though the Bible is against all true escapism.

To those who want to give up on our culture, throw up their hands, and retreat into a ghetto, I would quote the American musician, Alan Saporta, who said, “The best way to escape from a problem is to solve it.” You don’t solve a problem by ignoring the problem. Ignoring it would be a form of escapism. But on the other extreme, to those who are driven by performance and who think that all entertainment, fiction, music, relaxation is sinful escapism, I would quote from C. S. Lewis, who said, “There can be intemperance in work just as in drink.”<sup>1</sup> When people criticized his fiction as escapism, his response was to ask if they preferred to be imprisoned by the driven expectations of others. Some workaholics are actually enslaved to their work, and thus the picture of the guy being chained to his computer. Some people are so driven by duty that they would have felt guilty in obeying Christ’s command to come aside into the wilderness to do nothing “useful,” except for to rest, which of course is very useful. C. S. Lewis’ friend Tolkien responded to the same charge that escape is never legitimate by asking,

“What class of men would you expect to be most preoccupied with, and hostile to, the idea of escape?” and [he] gave the obvious answer: jailers.”<sup>2</sup>

If you were in jail, you should want to escape, right? There is nothing wrong with that. So hopefully this sermon will be a helpful interchange on the difference between escape and an attitude of escapism.

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady* (19 March 1956), paragraph 1, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted by C. S. Lewis in, *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*.

## **I. Faith is contrary to both escapism and presumption (v. 1a with 1 Sam 16-18)**

First of all, faith is contrary to both escapism and presumption because it takes its marching orders from the whole Bible, not just one verse. Verse 1 says, “In the LORD I put my trust.” That is the underlying theme throughout this Psalm. How can you say, “flee as a bird to your mountain” when I have put my trust in God? But on the other hand, faith is also contrary to presumption.

In 2 Samuel 16-18 David avoided both extremes. He immediately left Jerusalem because he knew that he could not win the battle holed up in that city and he knew that a lot of people in Jerusalem would needlessly die if he did not escape. It would have been presumptuous for him to think that his meager troops could win the battle from within Jerusalem. Absalom could just starve them out. So David sought to find a place to fight the battle successfully away from the main population where too much collateral damage could happen. He was thinking through the best strategic ways to win.

And in this he stands as a caution against those who act with presumption, thinking that that they are actually engaging in faith. The children’s crusades were a case in point. In 1212 AD Nicholas of Cologne led about 30,000 children on a crusade to the Middle East. Their cause was good – convert the Islamic hordes. But they hadn’t thought through how to get to the Middle East in one piece (absolutely no logistics - many starved to death) and they hadn’t thought through what to do once they got there. So it was not really faith; it was presumption. Many of those young boys were kidnapped and sold as slaves without ever having reached the Middle East. They thought that if their cause was good and they believed in God, that they would win. There was no Biblical strategy involved, and so many needlessly died. Genuine faith takes the whole Scripture into its scope, including all the means to the end, and not just the end goal in mind. True faith will work, practice, plan, strategize, regroup, and (as Jesus said in Luke 14), true faith will think through all the logistics needed to decide whether to fight a battle or sue for peace, and whether they had the resources to finish a tower before they start building a tower.

One time we had a person come by the house wanting a meal to eat. He claimed that God had called him to travel to California and he was trusting God to provide for him. I asked him if he had started with any

savings. And the answer was, “No. I’m trusting God to provide.” Did he plan to work to save up some money for the next leg of the trip? No. Did he have a plan on how he would make the next leg of the trip and what city he was going to go to? No. How was he going to protect himself against thugs when he was sometimes sleeping outside? He had no plans. Would he like some work to get money for his next leg of the trip? I was willing to hire him for a very generous hourly wage. But no, he said that he was going to trust God to provide. That’s not trust; that’s air-headed presumption that is quite contrary to Scripture. Faith follows all God’s instructions, including instructions on diligence (“if a man work not, neither shall he eat”), precaution (the many “watch out” or “be on guard” passages), anticipating potential problems and hiding himself, etc. So faith avoids presumption.

But faith also avoids escapism. Escapism would look at such a hopeless situation as what David was facing and would give up on his calling to be the king. It would not try to fight against the huge odds that he would face in chapter 18. But faith is always pressing toward success in God’s calling, even if the odds are against us. 1 John 5:4 says,

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith

Faith overcomes. While it is responsibly seeking to minimize risk, it never seeks to avoid all risk. Instead, faith anticipates potential obstacles and trusts God to do the rest. You’ve heard me give Oliver Cromwell’s advice to his troops many times. He said, “Trust God, and keep your powder dry.” Do what you can to avoid defeat and leave the results in God’s hands. True faith avoids escapism as well as presumption. And I think 2 Samuel 16-18 demonstrates this balance in the life of David. And God did the impossible through him.

## **II. Some unknown people tempted David to escapism (v. 1b)**

But the second clause in verse 1 shows that David was being tempted by some people (the “you” is plural) to flee from Israel, from his calling, and from his responsibilities. He was basically encouraged to go into exile by himself for the good of the people. And David resisted that. David says,

How can you say to my soul, “Flee *as* a bird to your mountain”?

"Your mountain," not "our mountain." For our good, you need to find some place else where you can hide and retire. Commentaries point out that “your mountain” is in opposition to the phrase, “In the LORD I put my trust.” It’s a humanistic mountain, not a mountain authorized by God. And David in effect says, “No. I’m not going to trust my *own* mountain, I am

going to trust the Lord.” To flee Israel completely would be to abandon his calling and would show a lack of trust in God. But God had not yet released David from his calling, so he could not abandon his post and still claim that he trusted God. Even though it later made him feel very badly that he was fighting his own son (and you can definitely see that in chapter 18), he did it because God’s call upon his life mandated it. So here are John Calvin’s comments on this passage. He said that to follow their advice,

... would have doomed him to remain for ever in a state of exile from his native country. This verse teaches us, that however much the world may hate and persecute us, we ought nevertheless to continue steadfast at our post... and that, however much and however long we may be harassed, we ought always to continue firm and unwavering in the faith of our having the call of God.<sup>3</sup>

That’s the key issue – is David going to flee from his call to be king. Calvin was certainly tempted to engage in escapism – to flee from his calling. He could think of nothing better than to hole up as a scholar for the rest of his life. It was miserable staying in Geneva, but based upon this passage he remained steadfast to his calling. Now, he did have to have a couple of tactical retreats, but he never abandoned his calling.

So these men are encouraging David to give up on his calling to be a king, and to take exile as a second best thing. But David refuses. The very fact that he takes his 600-man bodyguard with him shows that he refuses. Yes, he is going to flee from *Jerusalem* temporarily, but he is not going to flee from his calling. Once he has consolidated his forces and gained some time, he will do all in his power to fulfill his calling to be king, no matter how dangerous and uncomfortable that may seem. So again you see the difference between a tactical retreat and escapism. David refuses to listen to the call to give it up.

What about you? Have you ever felt so overwhelmed that you wanted to permanently abandon your responsibilities? There are many forms of escapism that people use. Quitting a job can sometimes be a form of escapism. Divorce is sometimes a form of escapism - an attempt to walk away from a problem rather than solving it. Drugs are often another form of escapism. They can’t handle the world and so they try to blot out the world.

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<sup>3</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), n.p.

**III. These people gave David three reasons to justify escapism (note: quotation mark should end at the end of verse 3 as in NASB, NAB, NIV, ESV, etc.)**

***A. We are getting shot at, and the wicked have the upper hand (v. 2a)***

Whoever these men are (Calvin thinks they are his enemies, and some people think they are his friends – and some people place this Psalm at the time of Saul, though there are indications that it has to be at the time of Absalom), they give David three persuasive reasons as to why it is OK to give up on his calling. And you will find people who are quite OK with your forms of escapism. If you are looking for head counts of people who will justify your irresponsibility, you will find them. There are always plenty of people who can give you excuses.

I should point out that quotation marks are a modern convention and are not in the Hebrew, so it is a matter of interpretation as to where to put those quotations marks. I agree with the versions listed in your outline that make all the rest of verses 1,2, and 3 the quotation of these same speakers. So I have erased the quotation end-mark after mountain, and I have put the quotation end-mark at the end of verse 3.

So the first reason that these guys gave as to why it is OK to engage in escapism is that we are getting shot at and it looks like the wicked have the upper hand. Verse 2 begins:

For look! The wicked bend *their* bow, they make ready their arrow on the string,...

Isn't that the primary reason for escapism? We are getting shot at. Maybe the wife, the kids and the dog have all gotten on your case and you feel this urge to run away, or to sleep in the other room or to get out of there. The pressure is getting too much at work and you find yourself wanting to quit. People have criticized your ideas on the committee and you want to resign. One of the principle reasons for escapism is that life is painful; we are getting shot at. No one is willing to get shot at unless they are moved by the kinds of things that motivated David. And especially if it looks like the enemy is winning. But God calls us not to leave our post or our calling simply because we are getting beat up. A tactical retreat may be fine in some circumstances, so long as it is not an abandoning of our God-given responsibilities.

***B. The conspirators seem to be everywhere and we do not know who all of them are (v. 2b)***

The second reason for giving it all up is that the opposition seems to be everywhere. We don't even know who all of our opponents are. We don't know who we can trust. Verse 2 again:

That they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart.

Literally the Hebrew says that they are being shot at in the dark. "We can't see who is shooting." Because Absalom's conspiracy was done in secrecy, David wasn't entirely sure who to trust or who was the enemy. It's one thing to be fearful, and the first reason reflects fear. But it is even worse to be confused. How many times do people give up trying because they are confused – they don't know what to do? They are in the dark. They can't even see the arrows coming at them, but they feel the pain. David was caught completely off guard because his son Absalom had secretly been sowing discord and slandering his dad. David was confused. "Where is this coming from? I loved my son. I trusted him. I had no idea this was going on behind my back." Many of you have experienced this. It can easily lead to bailing out if we are not prepared.

***C. Law and order seem to be destroyed (v. 3a)***

The third reason given is that law and order seem to be destroyed. Verse 3:

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

One translation has it, "If law and order is destroyed what can the righteous do?" The implication is that without the power of the state to back us up, we are powerless. But that is a false presupposition. And unfortunately some people quote this as if the attitude of hopelessness is Biblical. It is not. This is still quoting the guys that David is disagreeing with. Some people fear that without the media on our side, we are doomed. Without the judges on our side, we can't win this war against the GLBTQ cause or other humanistic causes.

But are we powerless? Even if the foundations have been destroyed, that does not change the fact that Christ has claimed all power in heaven and on earth. That does not negate Acts 1:8 which promises that the very power of God's Holy Spirit rests upon believers to enable them to disciple the nations. That does not negate Christ's promise that the gates of hell will not be able to withstand the onslaughts of the church. To give up simply because the foundations of our society have been destroyed is to live by sight and not

by faith. When Christ gave the Great Commission, the foundations of every society had been destroyed. That's irrelevant to the man of faith.

#### IV. David overcomes escapism (vs. 4-7)

##### A. *By faith (v. 1a)*

It is lack of faith that has caused the radical-two-kingdom people to back away from culture. It is lack of faith that has caused so many dispensationalist to bail out on trying to make any changes, and to say, "Why polish brass on a sinking ship?" It is lack of faith that has caused churches to quit preaching the whole counsel of God. It is lack of faith that is at the root of all forms of true escapism. Faith drives us to keep pressing on in our callings despite opposition. "In the LORD I put my trust; How can you say to my soul, 'Flee...'" His faith was incompatible with escapism. In verses 4-7 faith laid hold of eight invisible things which gave him backbone to persevere. If faith is the key, let me define faith briefly:

Hebrews 11 says that faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. With his physical eyes he didn't see a one of these eight things in verses 4-7, and that could have led him to give up. If I can't see them, they are not present, right? Wrong. Faith does not deal with the realm of that which can be seen. Let me read Hebrews 11:1 again, this time from a different version: "Now faith is the title deed of things hoped for, the court evidence of things not seen." Just imagine that a businessman from New York has decided to invest in a major shopping mall in Omaha. He has been receiving reports, plans, figures and evidence of why this shopping mall will work. But until he gets the title deed in his hands, he doesn't dare spend the fifteen million dollars it will take to improve the mall. Everything could fall through despite the good planning. But once he gets title deed to the property, without having seen the property, based simply on the title deed that he owns it, and evidence presented, he can lay claim to that property which he has not seen, move contractors in there and establish his mall. Faith lays hold of the unseen eternal and brings it into manifestation in this world. Faith does not create a thing. Only God can create. And I think that is the mistake that many Christians make in the name-it-and-claim-it movement. They presume upon what is not there. But Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the title deed of *things* hoped for, the evidence of *things* not seen. They are *real things* that are in the eternal realm and faith is the certainty that those things exist and faith brings them from the unseen eternal realm into the visible realm of time and history.

And we will see that David's faith acted upon eight things which could not be seen.

***B. He lives by faith by evaluating everything he does by the character of God (vs. 1a,4-7)***

**1. Faith gives us confidence because God rules (v. 4)**

The first thing that David grounded his faith on was that God is presently ruling and in complete control. Verse 4 says, "The LORD is in His holy temple [The word for temple is not the normal word for temple. Almost everywhere else it is translated as palace. The temple is God's palace, but literally this says, "The LORD is in His holy palace"], the LORD's throne is in heaven." He is saying, "God rules." His soul might be telling him, everything is out of control here and that God is not on the throne, but faith resists that temptation to flee by saying, "No. I will not believe that. God is in the palace, not Satan. God is on the throne, not Satan." He resists his impulse to escapism through faith in God's rule.

That thought can be so helpful when you are frustrated with your spouse and want to leave. We need to think through, "Who changes hearts? I don't. And yet we are constantly trying to play God and to change hearts. I can't change your heart, and you can't change the heart of your tough headed neighbor, even if your neighbor happens to be your spouse." God is in control, and we can turn to the one who can change hearts; or who can change politics; or who can change the situation that we are tempted to bail out on. Many of our frustrations come because we are really not convinced that God is doing things right, and so we try to control life - we are trying to take the load of providence or ruling on our own shoulders, and our shoulders are far too narrow for that.

But let's flip it around. When God calls you to take a Sabbath rest, or to take a vacation, or to play a game with your kids, can you do it? Or do you feel like the whole world is going to fall apart if you don't keep working? If you think that, then you are denying God's rule and are acting as if everything depends on you. Some people can't rest. They are too driven. I have tendencies toward that. I have tendencies toward workaholicism. I have to constantly check myself and remind myself that I am not God, I cannot control life, and it doesn't all depend upon me. If I die, life will continue to go on quite well - which means that I am not indispensable.

When I first became convinced of the Sabbath and actually started taking a Sabbath rest, I had to trust God with my workload - that God reigned over my schedule and that He could enable me to rest. And my tendency was to want to take back the reigns. I still struggle with that in my

prayer life. My mind tells me that prayer is the most important work that I can do, but something inside of me tempts me to say that if I escape to God in prayer that I am engaging in escapism, and that I am derelict in my duties. And I have to keep reminding myself that God is the one who reigns over rest and over work, and if I don't let Him call the shots, and if I don't rest on occasion, I will prove to be a very poor king indeed.

So if you err on the side of escapism, and you tend to waste unbelievable amounts of time on games and other things, then preach to yourself the message of verse 4 – that God is on the throne over how much time you relax. And if you err to the other side of being driven so much by work that you don't have time to relax, play a game, pray, or take a Sabbath rest, preach verse 4 to yourself – that God is on the throne over your work schedule, and that if He calls you to take the day off, or spend time with your family, or to pray, that is indeed the best use of your time. I was so driven when I was in college that I felt guilty sleeping eight hours a night. It seemed like such a waste of time. So I kept cutting my time back until I was only sleeping four hours a night. And I did that for a couple of years. But when I finally gave in to my creaturely limitations and slept eight hours because God commands us to get sleep, lo and behold, I found that I was far more productive during my waking hours. I got far more accomplished. Just as David realized that a tactical retreat enabled him to regain the throne, sometimes a tactical retreat from work can enable us to function better. Does that make sense?

## 2. Faith gives us confidence because God knows (v. 4c)

He next reminds Himself that God knows all about what is going on. “His eyelids behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.” Rather than panicking, David asks for wisdom from the God who knows all things. And we have access to the same wisdom that David did. In fact, why don't you flip over to James 1. It's a wonderful promise. It's James 1, and we will begin reading at verse 5:

**James 1:5** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

**James 1:6** But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

**James 1:7** For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

**James 1:8** *he is* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

David needed that wisdom. And that wisdom of heaven is one of those “things not seen” in Hebrews 11, that we can claim by faith. “Lord, I need your wisdom to do the right thing in the tough, tough days that lie

ahead.” And God miraculously gives the wisdom. It is also God’s wisdom that helps us to discern the difference between tactical escape and escapism.

When the Welsh minister Thomas Coke left the Anglican church to be a missionary in Nova Scotia, his ship was caught in three months worth of storms and mountainous waves. It was only supposed to take a month, but three months drug on and he wasn’t anywhere close. The mast broke. They were so crippled that they almost despaired of life. It was like God’s providence was keeping him from going to Nova Scotia. In fact, the ship’s captain had never seen anything like it in his life and he began to wonder if Coke was a modern day Jonah. The records indicate that the captain considered throwing him overboard to see if it would save the ship. He did throw Coke’s papers and belongings overboard. But as Coke asked for wisdom and went to the God who knows all things, it became clear that he was not to go to Nova Scotia. He was to go to Antigua, which is where the ship finally hobbled into. His escape to the Caribbean was the leading of the Lord, and not escapism, and his ministry was so blessed that by the end of his life he had led 17,000 people to Christ. But there was a case where a change in direction was pushing deeper into the guidance of the Lord, not escapism from his calling at all.

### **3. Faith gives us backbone because God is a God of antithesis (v. 5a)**

Another question we can ask ourselves is whether our actions are consistent with clear-cut antithesis or whether we are muddying the waters with compromise. Too many rationalizations don't come from Scripture. Verse 5 says, “The LORD tests the righteous [and David was being tested and disciplined, right?], but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.” God’s relations to the two are quite different. So there is antithesis between believers and unbelievers, between truth and error, and being righteousness and unrighteousness. And it is useful to ask ourselves if our actions are consistent with that theology. Absalom’s actions were not. He pretended to be loyal to God, but his actions were no different than those of a pagan politician. David reacted differently to God’s providence than Abishai because he knew that God does not treat believers the same way He treats unbelievers. God’s providence was showing hatred for the wicked and was showing loving discipline and testing for David. There was antithesis in a Providence. That knowledge helped David to react to Providence differently. And in doing that David imitated God by maintaining antithesis himself. Now, if you are convinced that God's Providence treats believers and unbelievers in exactly the same way, you are going to be frustrated. You are going to be tempted to escapism. But even though on that day of flight

both believers and unbelievers were living through the same events, the righteous were being lovingly tested by those events and the wicked were being hated.

**4. Faith gives us confidence because God hates what is going on more than we do (v. 5b)**

That same verse indicates that God hates the evil that is happening far more than we do. It says, “The wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates.” I love the doctrine of God’s hatred. It gives me encouragement that God is not apathetic about the evil in our nation. He’s motivated. When we are seeking to bring our nation back to God and we get spit at and abused by the heathen and don’t seem to make much headway, we might be tempted to think that God doesn’t care; that He is apathetic and distantly removed from the horror of our nation’s evil. And if we were convinced of that, we would probably throw up our hands and give up. What’s the point? That would be escapism. But of course, God is not that way. David is saying that God doesn’t like the situation in our country any more than we do. In fact, He hates it a lot more than we are capable of doing.

But (and this is always the big “but” in the church - but) He tests us as to whether we will walk by faith. David did walk by faith. When he wrote some imprecatory Psalms during this period, he was resisting the urge to give up (escapism) and was laying claim to God’s hatred of the evil men in *this* situation. That was a thing not seen that faith was laying hold of in those Psalms. A side benefit is that since faith drives us close to God’s heart, we will lose apathy because we will hate what He hates and love what He loves. We will be driven by His agendas, not simply by pragmatism. David was not an escapist because He believed God hates some things and loves other things. It stirred up his faith.

**5. Faith gives us confidence because God is willing to bring historical judgments in favor of the righteous (v. 6)**

Verse 6 says that God will judge. “Upon the wicked He will rain coals, fire and brimstone and a burning wind; this shall be the portion of their cup.” Commentators point out that this is not simply a belief in a final judgment, but this is a belief that God is willing to bring historical judgments when the church is willing to act in faith. Every one of these requires faith, or God will say that He is not going to do it.

If you don’t believe that God judges in history, you might be tempted to think things are hopeless. You are certainly not going to ask Him to judge in history if you don’t believe that He does judge in history. But when the

church rises up with faith to ask for God's judgments via the imprecatory Psalms, awesome things begin to happen. David's imprecatory Psalms brought these unseen things (these unseen judgments) into space-time-history, and so David saw a great reversal. The question is, "Are we willing to exercise faith in God's judgments, or will we be escapist?" When we pray the imprecatory Psalms, we are calling down the snares and rain of coals in verse 6 for the advancement of His kingdom.

#### **6. Faith gives us confidence because God is righteous (v. 7a)**

Verse 7 gives the sixth reason: "For the LORD is righteous." Do we interpret the Providences that come into our lives as being absolutely righteous? It would have been tempting for David to think that God was unfair, that everything was working together for his evil, and that unrighteousness was triumphing, and that God's providence was capricious. I have seen Christians get extremely angry at God and want to give up the faith for similar providences. They are not convinced that God is righteous in His providence. That's why they were mad at Him.

Now, I don't in any way want to deny that the actions of Absalom and Ahithophel were evil. Of course they were. We saw last week that as to the sin it was from Satan, but as to the affliction, it was from God. David was willing to fight against those evil men, but that is different than fighting against God's providence. In fact, it was David's realization that God is righteous in his providences that made him see God's hand of discipline, to humble himself in 2 Samuel 16, and to repent of his sins in some of the Psalms that he wrote on this day. But it was a knowledge that God was righteous that also made him determined not to allow the unrighteousness of Absalom to win out. It is thinking that providence is arbitrary, irrational, and unrighteous that makes us want to give up.

#### **7. Faith gives us confidence because God loves it when we are righteous (v. 7b)**

The seventh thing that the faith of David focused upon was that God loves righteousness. Verse 7 says, "For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness..." It's not just that God hates and judges wickedness. Wherever the church has faith, God loves to establish righteousness. He is more motivated for the church to be holy and righteous than we are. In fact, He is more interested in our righteousness than He is our comfort. The Bible nowhere says that the Lord loves our comfort, but it does say that He loves righteousness.

So we need to ask ourselves, is my desire to relax for the next two hours a reflection of God's righteousness, and is it an obedience to the balance given in Scripture that God would be pleased with? Or am I doing this against Scripture and against conscience? God's providence will never bless escapism (or workaholism), but it will on occasion bless escape, tactical retreats, and diversion. The Scripture talks a great deal about that, and the only way I was able to avoid workaholism was to convince myself first of all that God commands both work and rest, and that God is delighted in my righteousness of being willing to treat my family to a vacation, or being joyful in playing a game with them. I didn't need to feel guilty about enjoying a beer or watching a movie. And once I was convinced that God delights in occasional escape from work, it was much easier to be joyful in diversion. If that diversion is obedience to Scripture, then it is part of the righteousness that God loves. And I have a strong sense that God's smile of approval is upon my work, and my once-a-week game night, and my Sabbath observance. It is so liberating to know that God loves what you are doing.

#### **8. Faith gives us confidence because God watches out for us (v. 7)**

The last thing that David's faith focused upon was that God was looking out for him. I love this phrase. Verse 7 ends, "...His countenance beholds the upright." The word picture is of God looking at us and smiling. But its more than just looking at us and smiling. He is watching out for us. He cares about our tiredness. Think about the way that Jesus cared about his disciples in Mark 6:31 when He said,

"Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

In other words, He is looking out for those disciples. He sees that they are tired. And this too helps us to avoid the extremes of being driven or being escapist. I developed a very distorted picture of God during my first year of Bible School, and I went way overboard on fasting and denying myself every privilege. I would sometimes feel guilty when I enjoyed a piece of fruit or was invited to go to a movie. I didn't feel like I could do it. I thought that the will of God was always the most unpleasant choice of any two that were presented to me. It was as if my conception of God is that He's upset any time I'm having fun. But that is so contrary to Scripture. God delights in delighting His people.

Let me shift gears and apply this in a different area: When I have counseled people, one of my theme verses is 1 Corinthians 10:12-13, which

basically says that God never puts us in a box where we have to sin - where we have no way out. Let me read it:

**1Cor. 10:12** Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. [So we do need to be on guard, but the next verse says,]

**1Cor. 10:13** No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

God always makes a way of escape so that we don't have to give into escapism. That's exactly what the verse is saying. God gives us a way of escape so that we can bear up under the trials so that we don't have to give into escapism from responsibility.

Reader's digest gave a story about pastor Jeff Strite. He used to be a meter reader in rural Oklahoma. And no estimates were allowed. They had to actually read the meters each time. But there was one property that the meter people were not willing to read because a vicious watchdog was tied to a chain that was long enough to give him sway over the entire back yard and driveway. One of Jeff Strite's coworkers had his first day on the job and he came back with the meter reading with no problem. His supervisor called him aside the next day and asked how he had gotten past the watchdog. And the guy said, "That's easy, boss. I parked on his chain." Rather than focusing on the problem and giving up, he focused on the escape from the problem, and avoided escapism. As that American musician said, "The best way to escape from a problem is to solve it."

***C. Thus this Psalm says that total faith in God's Word is the cure for escapism and the remedy for society's ills***

And that's why I have summed things up in point C by saying, "Thus this Psalm says that total faith in God's Word is the cure for escapism and the remedy for society's ills." Faith is God's cure for escapism; not faith in Christianity, or faith in what is happening at a particular time in history, but faith in God Himself.

**Conclusion – both duty and times of escape must be consistent with God's call to victory**

Now this is not part of the text, but I do want to end with an assurance that God has not called us to fight in a spiritual Vietnam or Korea, where they had no intention of winning – they were just holding the line. That was one of the most demoralizing features of Vietnam and Korea – that they had no intention of winning, and often would not allow soldiers to fire until fired upon. The president for sure did not agree with General Douglas MacArthur's statement that "There is no substitute for victory." Let me tell

you, it is extremely difficult to be involved in a war for very long with that kind of an attitude. In fact, it is impossible to win a war with that kind of an attitude. That's why eschatology is so important in our spiritual battles. It gives us knowledge of the unseen victories that we can lay claim to. Paul told Timothy to fight the good fight. Let me ask you, "What is a *good* fight?" I don't know any *good* fight except a fight that you have won. And over and over again, the Bible tells us to win the war, not just to hold some imaginary line.

There are too many people who are trying to hold the line on sin rather than conquering sin. They don't think they have the power to fly over the border into the spiritual China and bomb the real root of the problem. In fact, there are many teachers who do exactly what the president did with General Douglas McArthur by saying that it's not God's will for us to gain victory over sin in this life. They say it is impossible. And thus, they have no faith that the war against sin can be won. That's demoralizing. The fact of the matter is that when it comes to sin, God has commanded us to be overcomers. And in 1 John he tells children, young men, and fathers that they have already been overcomers. It's possible.

Now, there are times for tactical retreat. He doesn't tell you to stand and fight against the lusts of your youth. He tells you to flee from them, just like Joseph fled. That's a tactical retreat. Both Joseph and David fled because they knew that they could not win the war by staying where they were at. And with both Joseph and David it was not escapism. It was escaping a problem by solving a problem. For some of you, it may mean getting Covenant Eyes on your computer, throwing out your TV, and giving up your diversions that lead to sin. For others it may mean something else. But if it takes a tactical retreat to win the battle against sin, do it. And when Satan tempts you to go beyond that and to just give up trying, say with David, "No. Absolutely not. In the LORD I have put my trust; how can you call me to escapism?" May that be the response of each one here. Amen.

## Escaping Escapism

### Psalm 11

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 11-17-2013

Introduction – the difference between escape and escapism; three kinds of escapism: 1) avoiding reality through diversions, 2) refusal to embrace responsibility through diversion, 3) refusal to recognize danger and naively hoping for the best.

- I. Faith is contrary to both escapism and presumption (v. 1a with 1 Sam 16-18)
  
- II. Some unknown people tempted David to escapism (v. 1b)
  
- III. These people gave David three reasons to justify escapism (note: quotation mark should end at the end of verse 3 as in NASB, NAB, NIV, ESV, etc.)
  - A. We are getting shot at, and the wicked have the upper hand (v. 2a)
  
  - B. The conspirators seem to be everywhere and we do not know who all of them are (v. 2b)
  
  - C. Law and order seem to be destroyed (v. 3a)
  
- IV. David overcomes escapism (vs. 4-7)
  - A. By faith (v. 1a)
  
  - B. He lives by faith by evaluating everything he does by the character of God (vs. 1a,4-7)
    1. Faith gives us confidence because God rules (v. 4)
    2. Faith gives us confidence because God knows (v. 4c)
    3. Faith gives us backbone because God is a God of antithesis (v. 5a)
    4. Faith gives us confidence because God hates what is going on more than we do (v. 5b)
    5. Faith gives us confidence because God is willing to bring historical judgments in favor of the righteous (v. 6)
    6. Faith gives us confidence because God is righteous (v. 7a)
    7. Faith gives us confidence because God loves it when we are righteous (v. 7b)
    8. Faith gives us confidence because God watches out for us (v. 7)
  - C. Thus this Psalm says that total faith in God's Word is the cure for escapism and the remedy for society's ills

Conclusion – both duty and times of escape must be consistent with God's call to victory

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