

SKC Kickoff Sunday

Scripture: Psalm 11:1-7

Message: "When the going gets tough..."

August 12, 2018; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON

When the going gets tough, what happens? My mother-in-law wanted to show her admiration and respect for me in a present she gave some years ago. It was a t-shirt saying, "When the going gets tough, the tough go fishing." There are other variations: "When the going gets tough, act ostrich, stick your head in the sand." Or "When the going gets tough, delegate, make someone else do it." Or "When the going gets tough, blame the other person."

Of course we all know what the original saying is: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." Difficult circumstances can challenge us to work harder, to put out a greater effort. It's a great saying for those who believe in the power and ability of people to answer all their own problems. When things get difficult, a person only has to try harder and they'll make it through.

But does life really work that way? Each one of us faces tough situations at some time or other in our lives. You can probably remember the details. Or maybe you are going through such a time right now. I can almost guarantee that you will face a tough situation of some kind some time in the future.

It might be related to the economy. Income is low; expenses are high, and it's tough to make ends meet. Getting caught in that kind of a pinch makes life tough.

Some parents find themselves in a tough situation with their children. Parents say one thing, their children ignore them and do another. The parents don't know what to do and throw up their hands in despair.

Or maybe it's problems within a marriage. It's hard to agree on more things than you disagree on. It's hard to remember the love that was there when you first got married. Is it worth the effort of trying to rebuild the relationship?

There are many times when the going gets tough. What do we do?

King David, who wrote Psalm 11, must have raised these same questions. He found himself in difficult situations more than once. This psalm was written in one of those times, although we don't know the exact circumstance. Perhaps it was when David was playing his instruments in Saul's court and Saul threatened to kill him. Or it may have been after he had become a successful army captain. Saul's jealousy and hatred of David forced him to become a fugitive, fleeing for his life. Or this psalm may have been written at the time of his son Absalom's rebellion, when David again fled for his life.

In Summer Kids Club this week, we will be looking at events of the story of Joseph,

found in Genesis 37-50. Joseph would have been able to relate to this psalm. As a young boy, Joseph was thrown in a pit by his jealous brothers. He was sold as a slave to Egypt. While trying to do what was right, he was falsely accused and thrown in prison. Even though he helped others, who then promised to help him, he was forgotten and left in prison.

In those difficult times experienced by David, or by Joseph, or by any one of us, the question comes up: What now? When the going gets tough, what are we to do?

We could follow the advice of David's friends, "Flee like a bird to your mountain." Get out of here. It's not safe to stay here anymore. The wicked are armed and ready to kill you. They're beyond the point of thinking about it; they have their arrows on their bowstrings already. Foundations are being destroyed. Whatever was stable is now ready to collapse. And there is nothing you can do about it. There is no hope anymore! So run for your life!

David's friends were probably right. His enemies were beyond the stage of reason or discussion. They were out to kill. The foundations of justice and honesty were being demolished. No one cared about right or wrong. Might makes right. Ignore God. Do your own thing. Get rid of anybody who gets in the way.

Have you ever heard that kind of advice? Ignore God and all this faith stuff. Do your own thing. Choose for yourself what is right or wrong.

When that choice is made, what happens to the foundation of the home and family, the foundation of faith, the foundations of right and wrong, of accepting responsibilities as well as demanding rights?

The destruction of a foundation doesn't happen at once. It's more like having termites eating away at the floorboards of your house. Or it's like worms eating at the roots of your plants. You don't notice it right away. Then, gradually, you get that sinking feeling as the foundation starts to give. You scramble to investigate and you find out the extent of the damage. Your marriage is on the brink of collapse. Your children won't talk to you anymore. Your health has deteriorated beyond recovery.

Now what? Flee like a bird to your mountain. Stick your head in the sand. Run and hide till it all blows over. Escape reality. Get drunk. Do drugs. Commit suicide. Run and hide.

We know that none of those are actual solutions. They don't make the problem go away; in fact, they will only add to the problem. No, when the going gets tough, don't run and hide. Listen to the wisdom in Psalm 11:

"In the Lord I take refuge." That is David's statement of faith. That was the trust that Joseph learned. God is in control, upholding all things. When the going gets tough, go to the Lord for help.

But some people will hear that and laugh. That's no different than sticking your head in

the sand. Just a bunch of dreaming. God's dream team is only made up of those who avoid reality. Believers have wishbones instead of backbones. They are so inadequate they have to manufacture a "God" to help them cope. Faith is a joke for narrow-minded people who haven't or won't acknowledge reality. God is an escape, but a poor, non-existent one at that.

But David doesn't back down. As a matter of fact, he sets the record straight right from the beginning of the psalm. "In the Lord I take refuge." Therefore it makes no sense to run or be afraid or give up hope. The Lord is my foundation. He does not move, though every other foundation is being destroyed. Trusting in money or business or gold or intelligence or anything else puts you on a shaky foundation. They fall away when the economy shifts or problems come up or sickness strikes.

The Lord is the only sure foundation. By trusting in the Lord, a person can hold up the shield of faith to deflect the arrows of the enemies. If God is for us, who can be against us? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. What do we have to fear if our trust is in the Lord? We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father.

How can we be so sure? It sounds nice, is it realistic? In times of struggles, those troubles are too real. They are so big and we feel so helpless. We certainly don't feel like conquerors. To say "trust in God and you will overcome" sounds nice. We'd like to say it. We'd like to believe it. But can we? Do we?

Our problem is that we easily focus too much on the wrong things. We spend too much time looking around us at our struggles and difficulties and at our weakness and helplessness. We so clearly see enemies armed to destroy. We so clearly see the crumbling foundation. We so clearly see that we can't do anything about it. But then we are not seeing the whole picture. We only see one level and it makes us want to run for our lives.

Psalm 11 reminds us to stop looking only around us. We must remember to look up. We lift our eyes away from the earthly reality and by faith we also see the heavenly reality. That doesn't mean we *deny* the earthly reality. We can't. It's part of us. But we see it in the perspective of the heavenly reality.

What difference does that make? Well, what do we see when we look up in faith? (v.4) We see the Lord in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne. He is observing what is happening on earth; his eyes examine them. He hasn't changed his address. We get the idea that God is paying close attention to what is going on. But he's not just some big brother looking over our shoulder. He is a caring God and Father who lovingly watches over his own. His almighty and ever-present power is upholding all things.

We can add a beautiful richness to the truth in this psalm. It was something that David

and Joseph could only look forward to. As they looked up, they saw the Lord, Yahweh. They saw the one whom they trusted, the Creator of the world, who had called them and took care of them.

As we look up we can see the same Yahweh, the Creator Lord who has control over all the earth and everything in it. But we see and know him as our Father in Jesus Christ.

When our eyes focus on that heavenly scene, then the circumstances in which we find ourselves are put in the proper perspective. Pat ourselves on the back for success? Run from trouble? Are you kidding?! God is in control. God sees what's going on. He cares for me, in every circumstance.

How can I be so sure? Because even while I was a sinner, God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for me. There can be no greater guarantee of his love than that. And if God loves me that much, I know that he will take care of me. I know that even in this present situation, as awful and terrible and overwhelming as it seems, God is in control. I am more than a conqueror!

v. 7: God's business is putting things right; He loves getting the lines straight, setting us straight. Once we're standing tall, we can look him straight in the eye.

For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face.

What a beautiful promise! What a wonderful hope! To see the face of God! To be in the presence of God and see his loving eyes, to see his tender smile. Yes, those who believe in Jesus Christ have this assurance—they shall see God. We will see God at work, including in the tough situations that we face.

This week at Summer Kids Club, we will see how Joseph came to learn this lesson of trust. It was not always easy. He was not always the best student. But he came to see that the God of heaven was in control and he could trust in him.

The memory verse that we will focus on this week is Psalm 46:1: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

With eyes of faith we can look up to heaven and see our Father; see our Saviour watching over us, all the time, in the good and the bad times. Take refuge in the Lord. Trust in the Lord, and serve him.

Amen.