

God with us

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 August 2024

Preacher: John Ross

[0 : 00] It's a shame, isn't it, that set for the Dambusters march?! Do you know the original? It's Luther's hymn. The original was Ein Festerberg.! Would you agree with this?

Have you got your Bibles over? Would you agree with this statement? Would you agree that to live with fear is a devastating way to live? To live with fear is a devastating way to live.

Because all the time you feel that whatever can go wrong will go wrong. I read this about fear recently. Fear weakens our immune system and can cause cardiovascular damage, gastrointestinal problems such as ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome, and decreased fertility.

It can lead to accelerating ageing and even premature death. That's pretty devastating, isn't it? Fear, fear, fear.

I wonder if you've ever been anywhere in the world where there's been an earthquake while you've been there. Daphne and I were in Mexico once when the earth shook. It's a pretty scary feeling.

[1 : 38] Everything around you shudders. You wonder if the buildings will collapse, the roads will collapse. We see the devastation caused by earthquakes on our screens, don't we, regularly.

It looks terrifying. And if you live on a fault line, you must always live with that sense of fear. Well, here in Psalm 46, the ground shakes.

Look at verse 2. Though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, and the mountains quake with surging.

That's an earthquake described there. The ground shakes. And for some of us, we do live with fear. We live for fear much of our life.

Maybe it's not a fear of an earthquake. Maybe that's not your particular issue. Maybe it's the fear of making a mistake. What if I get it wrong? Maybe it's the fear of something going wrong in your life. I'm not in control of that.

[2 : 39] What happened there? Maybe it's fear of the world collapsing all around you. How do we handle fear? And where is the safe place to hide from fear?

The psalmist here tells us. He tells us that we need to flee to God. That's how he starts. God is our refuge and strength, he says.

An ever-present help, the old version used to say, in times of trouble, in trouble. Therefore, see the therefore? Therefore, we will not fear, he says.

Now, this is a very strong God-centered song. Look, for example, at verse 5, when it talks about the city of God. God is within her.

She will not fall. God will help her at the break of day. Or look at the chorus, the refrain. The Lord Almighty, that's the God of hosts. He is with us. That's repeated again at verse 11.

[3 : 44] A God-centered song. The psalmist is telling us that we need to flee to God. God is our refuge and strength.

He's the place of safety. In fact, he himself dwells in safety. That's what I think verses 4 and 5 are about, where there is the city of God. What's the point of mentioning the city of God? Well, God lives there.

Yes, he lives in safety there. God is within her. She will not fall. God will help her at break of day. God is the solid one. I think that's the first thing I want to say from the psalm, that I want to get into our heads.

God is solid. Absolutely solid. He's the big theme. He's the rock of all rocks. He's our refuge and strength. He's our ever-present help in trouble.

The Lord Almighty, the God of hosts, God and his army, as it were, God and the big boulder, he's with us. Or look at all the eyes in verse 10.

[4 : 47] He says, Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted on the earth. See all the eyes? This is a God-focused song.

As probably, by the way, all good songs of praise should be, shouldn't they? God-focused. And there is a consequence to God's solidity. Look at the therefore in verse 2.

Because God is like this, because he is solid, therefore, we do not need to fear. We will not fear. Therefore. So whatever happens around us, there is a secure and safe place to go.

That's what this song is all about. God is solid. And because of that, it is possible that we do not need to fear. But God is not only solid in this song.

God is also safe. Is he safe? Yes, God is safe. Because it's true that this world has its earthquakes and its floods. There's instability among the nations.

[5 : 53] Did you notice that in verse 6? Nations are in uproar. Kingdoms fall. He lifts his voice and the earth melts. There is instability around the world. That's true, isn't it?

We see that. But notice that we run to God for refuge. He is our ever-present help in trouble. He is safe. You see, for all earth's troubles, God is the one stability. He is strong and he is in control.

He is safe. So in verses 1 to 3, you have his power over nature. God is our refuge and strength, and ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear that the earth give way, and the mountains fall into the heart of the seas. Though its waters roar and foam, and the mountains quake with surging.

[6 : 49] That's the creation. Rumbles. Quakes. God is secure. God is safe. Then God is in his city. Second section of the psalm, from 4 to 6, there is a river.

Changes tack here. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her. She will not fall.

God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar. Kingdoms fall. He lifts his voice, and the earth melts. God's in his city. It's a very beautiful city.

It's a well-watered city. It's his eternal home. It's where he dwells. Now, please don't think too physically here. God isn't sort of up there in a city beyond us.

He's not beyond comprehension or away from us like that at a distance. While we here are toiling below in all our troubles, and he's sitting there just enjoying himself.

[7 : 46] It's not like that. It's true that he has a city. It means there is a safe place to go. But look how the eternal home is described here.

In fact, better than that, if you can put a finger in the bit of the Bible, come over to Revelation chapter 22. Look at the city of God again in the last book of the Bible.

Revelation 22. And look at the city of God, where God dwells. Revelation 22. I'm sorry, I can't give you the page number. It's just a few clicks away in my Bible.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

[8 : 49] No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads.

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of a sun, for the Lord God will give them light and they will reign forever and ever.

That's our eternal destiny for the believer. That's where God is right now and that's where we can be in the future. The eternal city of God. The water of life means it's a living city, just like the watering in the Garden of Eden.

The city of God is the eternal destiny for God's people. There they will live in safety and security with no harm and with no enemies. It's a glorious picture of the future with God's eternal protection. Yes, God is all-powerful in creation. Yes, God is well-secure in his eternal city. And therefore, he has sovereign power over all the world.

[9 : 58] Come back with me to Psalm 46. However wild this earth is, however rebellious his people are, or what Christopher Ash calls the forces of chaos that exist on earth, we are not independent of a sovereign creator God.

Because we are told in verse 7 that the Lord Almighty is with us. That's the Lord of unbeatable armies. He is with us.

Now, notice that verse 6. You see, when the troubles come, it's because God lifts his voice. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall.

God lifts his voice and the earth melts. It's a bit like the flood in Noah's day. The chaos caused by the flood was God's work.

He lifted his voice. His judgment on the world. That's where this world is, under the judgment of God. It's been so ever since Adam acted independently and rebelled.

[11:12] So where is the safe place to hide? Where would we find a refuge? In God. In God alone. In his holy place. In his city. We hide ourselves in him.

That's why in the New Testament, the phrase in Christ and Christ in you are so crucial. We are in him. Safe. Secure. Now, Jesus on earth transformed the chaotic sea into a calm.

He took disease and he cured it. Yes, he was powerful, was Jesus, but he was also safe. Safety from judgment is found in Jesus. That's where the waters of chaos are transformed into the life-giving waters of the river of life.

That's why 4a, part of 4, in Psalm 46 says, there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.

And since the city is glad to have such living water, shouldn't we also? So we have God in creation. We have God in his city.

[12:22] And then at verse 7, the psalm changes again with the first part of the chorus or the chorus the first time.

Because up to now, we've only had the facts about God. We've had the fact that he rules over creation and we've had the fact that he's in his holy city. God is solid and God is safe.

But from 8 onwards, there is action for us to take. Because when we are confronted with the greatness and the power of God, we are called to make a response.

So verse 8 says, come, come and have a look. Come and see what the Lord has done. The desolations he's brought on the earth. And at verse 10, he's going to say, be still and know that I am God.

He's going to give us some instructions as to what we should do from 8 down to 10. And interestingly enough, it dawned on me early this morning that that last section is framed by the repeat of the refrain.

[13:28] So I knew the Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. 7. Why repeat it as 11? The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Why twice? Why there? And I want to suggest it's the frame, that last section. What's inside the frame? Well, it holds it all together with chaos all around us, maybe even within us, with all the fears that we all have.

The psalmist says, look, look, look, and think, think, think. Look and ponder. I've called it Stop and Look.

Look at 8 and 9. Just stop what you're doing. Come. Come, he says. Come and have a look. See what the Lord has done. Look at the desolations he's brought on the earth.

Look how he's made wars cease to the ends of the earth. Look how he breaks the bow and shatters a spear. Look how he burns the shields with fire. Look how God stops wars. We need to look at what God has done.

[14:35] We've mentioned Noah. Think also about God holding back the Red Sea. The Jews would have thought about that as they sung this song. That's what God did. He held back the waters of the sea so the Jewish people could get across.

And then he opened the waters, or the floodgates, and the rest were drowned, the Egyptians. God did that. Well, think how God led his people through the wilderness.

We've been reading through numbers, and reading and reading and reading through numbers, and reading a bit more through numbers, haven't we? And we had to do that at home, didn't we, even before we got here. And we saw, you just got to the point where the people are starting to get to moan and groan for about numbers 10, 11 onwards.

But God didn't let his people starve in the wilderness, did he? God looked after them. So pause, the writer is saying. Pause, come and see. See what the Lord has done.

What has God done for us, for our people, for this world? Look how he's put down rebellious nations. Read Psalm 2 if you want to see that.

[15:40] See how God has put a king on the throne. Stop and look. See, one of the reasons we read our Old Testament is to see how God acted in history to bring his people into his promised land.

It's not their rebelliousness that startles us. It's God's undeserving, miraculous action that we should marvel at. Come and see what the Lord has done.

The desolations he's brought on the earth. He makes wars to cease to the ends of the earth. In other words, just stop. Just think. This world isn't out of control.

It's certainly off balance. It's certainly out of sync. But God has his hands firmly on the controls. Surely that stills our fears, doesn't it? Jesus' control over nature is a wonderful assurance that he's the one to trust.

Just stop. Stop and look. Come and see. Secondly, almost saying the same thing but I think in a little different language. Stop and think.

[16:49] Be still and know that I am God. That's ten. Be still. Stop again. Stop. And think. Think. Think. Ponder.

Who runs the show here? Who's in charge? Who made this world? Who rules it? Who can lift their voice? And everyone stops.

Even the nations, he says, the earth melts at his voice. Who can do that? Who is greater than the nations and greater than creation put together? Is it not the Lord Almighty?

The Lord Almighty. The covenant God. Notice it's Lord. Do you see the capital letters there? At 7 and 11? Not just God in general but Lord specifically.

The personal name for God. If that's who he is, we should stop. We should think. We should repent. We should cease our rebellion if we want God to be our friend.

[17:53] You see, the world really is a fearful place. But God runs the show. That's what the psalm is saying to us, isn't it? That's why we will not fear.

That's why we'll not be afraid. Because God runs the show. Did you know that Jesus' most common phrase, the most used phrase from his lips was do not be afraid, do not fear.

Now Martin Luther, as I mentioned, liked this song or certainly liked verse 1. He put that to the tune Ion Festerberg.

When he and his friend, Philip Melanchthon, were feeling down, they would sing this psalm together which Luther had put to music because it lifted them from their discouragement.

A safe stronghold, our God is still. It helped them gain confidence, gain perspective in God's sovereignty amidst all the upheavals of nature and history.

[18:56] They were in the 16th century in the middle of a huge upheaval in Europe. Remember too, Jesus would have sung this song when he went to his home synagogue, when it was time for the singing of songs, this would have been one that they would have sung.

And as a good Jewish man, it would have been written into the Jewish songbook. He would have known something worse than earthquakes on earth. He would know about the judgment of God to come, the wrath of God against all human sin.

And he would know as a young boy, as a young man singing the song, that he was sent to do something about it, to avert it, to soak it up, to destroy death.

And he would have done that. He had an enormous love for the people in front of him, people at the side of him, and for the people down the ages, you and me. So where is a safe place to run to?

We run to Jesus. is that where you place your trust today in Jesus and if you're not building your life on Jesus as your solid foundation what is the foundation of your life is there any at all why not run to Jesus and find eternal safety and security the God and Father of our Lord Jesus place Jesus on the throne in his holy city life on earth is pretty precarious isn't it so please please escape to Jesus for your eternal benefit you'll find he can handle your earthly fears with greater ease and even joy when your trust is in him numerous people have told me that when they've started to walk Jesus ways and trust him a real sense of peace has overcome them you see it's in Jesus that our fears are stilled and our strivings cease go on trust him today let's pray together dear heavenly Father we thank you for holding this broken world together we thank you for your strong and solid hand we are troubled by all the chaos around us all the ringing of bells and alarms that go off all the time even within us and we need your help we do thank you that Jesus was sent as our rescuer may we truly trust him with our whole life we ask maybe starting this morning please hold on to us we pray help us to walk with you in all the circumstances as your holy spirit accompanies us through life on earth

for we pray in jesus name amen thank you dave thank you thank you