

Jesus is Our Safe Place

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[0 : 0 0] we have been working our way through the letter of James, but I was conscious that with government restrictions, we don't know for how much longer we'll be able to meet before we have to sort of curtail activities.

And so as much as I was enjoying working through James, decided for today to switch our attention to Psalm 46.

So let's hear God's word. You'll find it on page 570 of the Church Bible, Psalm 46, and we'll read this whole psalm.

God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, 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 their surging.

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.

[1 : 1 2] God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar. Kingdoms fall. He lifts his voice. He lifts his voice. The earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us.

The God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the shields with fire. Be still and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord Almighty is with us.

The God of Jacob is our fortress. One of those psalms that encourage the people of God to strong confidence and faith in God, even when crises emerge.

[2 : 1 9] Another psalm that reminds us of God's protective care that we're going to sing now is Psalm 121. We'll find this on page 416 of our blue 46 in your Bibles, page 570 in our church Bibles, as we think about trusting in our powerful and gracious Lord.

This is one of these psalms where we find, in this case, the sons of Korah confessing faith in the heat of a battle. And we're not clear exactly what circumstance triggered the writing of this psalm, what particular trouble, if there was a particular trouble in mind.

As we go through the psalms, we see various dangers and fears are mentioned. Natural disaster, political turmoil, enemies coming from outside Israel to wage war on the people of God.

But there's no specific focus here. And that perhaps is part of its purpose. And certainly for us today, it's part of its value, because it means that you and I, regardless of what situation we find ourselves, regardless of what trouble we might find ourselves in, we can take hold of this psalm and its truths, and we can make it sing in our own hearts and lives.

So today, we're all sort of caught up collectively in the trouble of the coronavirus. But there will also be situations and circumstances beyond that in our own personal lives, at home, at work.

[4 : 0 8] And there is truth, and there is comfort, and there is hope for the people of God in this wonderful psalm. It causes us to ask, can we honor God when trouble comes by trusting His power?

Will we find confidence in a crisis as we draw comfort from looking to God's past acts of salvation? Will we be among those who can stand confidently on the promises of God when the floods and the storms of life come to us?

Many people in our world today, and we know this to be true, are feeling overwhelmed, overwhelmed by all the information that's coming, overwhelmed by all the decisions that have to be made, overwhelmed by the consequences of those decisions.

For us today, will we give attention to God and His Word? Will we find comfort and strength from His voice?

[5 : 15] Will we listen to Him more than we listen to those news reports? Can we catch hold of the character of God and the work of God so that we might have peace even when others panic because we have found this place of safety that the sons of Korah sing about?

For us in the New Testament age, can we find peace as we look to Jesus as our Savior, as our Lord, as our King? I just want very briefly to look at this in the two sections.

So we find a repeated refrain in verses 7 and 11, which serve as section markers for us. So in verse 1 to 7, one big point that we can see the psalmist making is that there is only one safe place in a dangerous world.

The Bible is honest. The Bible will say to us that the world was created perfect, but because of sin, there's dislocation, brokenness, all is now not good, and now there is danger.

But there's also confidence and hope presented in the Bible. We find it here in the psalm, beginning in verse 1. God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble.

[6 : 41] Here is the source of true security. It's God and God alone, not God plus our natural resources, not God plus our opportunities.

It's God alone. And sometimes it takes a national and global crisis to draw us back, even as the people of God, to a simple loyalty to God as Lord.

So we have our true security here. We are told of God as our refuge, the refuge that we run to, a salvation for us, providing shelter.

We find God as a source of strength, positively the God who is acting and working for His people. Not only is He a shelter for us, He also acts for our good.

And in verse 1, we're told that God is an ever-present help in times of trouble. God is always ready. God is always willing to be found, to be relied on, to be our rock and our refuge.

[7 : 55] We put our trust in other people and other things. Sometimes we find that they come through for us. Other times they're not able to for one reason or another. God is not like that. He is always an ever-present help in times of trouble.

Our section alternates between these truths that we can find safety in God and also sections that show us danger in the world.

So the first of these, verse 2 and 3, there are pictures of dangers in the natural world. Therefore we will not fear, 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 their surging.

Here is a clash at one and the same time of the most unchanging and solid forces in our world, the earth and the mountains, with the forces of chaos, with surging waters.

Even when it seems like the world is coming undone, the psalmist is saying, the people of God are safe and do not need to fear. Even in the midst of all the turmoil of natural disaster, the people of God are known, loved, and kept by God's care.

[9 : 19] There is another danger that the psalmist, they refer to in verses 5 and 6. Not this time, the raging of the forces of nature, but the raging of men against God and his people.

In verse 5, 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.

The earth melts. So the picture here is of a city under siege. Jerusalem, the city of God under siege. The enemies of God attacking in their pride, looking to do away with God and his people.

But here again, there is strong confidence for the people of God. Verse 5, God is within this city, ensuring that the people of God will not fall, ensuring the protection of his church. And in verse 6, when God lifts his voice, when God speaks in power, there is defeat of those rebel powers.

[10 : 35] There is nothing and no one greater than our God in all creation. Therefore, there is cause for faith. Israel, in their history, were taught to look back to their time in Egypt when God delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh in his determination to destroy the people of God, to remember God's redeeming power, to remember God's good salvation.

And it's always good for us to look back, for us, from our vantage point in history, we look back to the cross and to see Jesus win that decisive victory over sin for his people.

But when these storms are raging, whether it's natural disaster, whether it's the rage of people and opposition to God and his purposes, where is the safe place?

Because there is a safe place in a dangerous world, we're told in this psalm. And the answer is pictured as verse 4, the city of God.

And that's a safe place because that's the place God is with his people. It's the holy place where the Most High dwells.

[11 : 57] That's the safety that we need to find. That's the one safe place for us to be dwelling where God is, to be united to God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's where safety is found. And then the psalmist goes on to explain who is this God who is with his people and providing safety in verse 7.

He is the Lord Almighty. He is the God of power, the God of strength. But he's also the God of Jacob.

And we've been thinking about Jacob in the mornings. This is a reminder that this is the God of covenant grace. This is the God who in loving kindness commits himself to a people for their good and for his glory.

So there is safety when we are found in this God who is both powerful and gracious when we make him, according to verse 7, our fortress, our high mountain castle fortress that nobody can penetrate.

[13 : 10] God, our only safe place in a dangerous world. John Calvin, the reformer, he said this. He said, if we desire to be protected by the hand of God, and who doesn't want that?

It's not just Christians who pray and want protection from God. If we desire to be protected by the hand of God, we must be concerned above all things that he may dwell amongst us.

For all hope of safety depends upon his presence alone. To be where God is.

To have God with us is where we find strength. What is our hope in life and death?

It's Christ alone. Jesus, our Emmanuel. There's this promise here of the Almighty Lord who is with his people and that promise is fulfilled perfectly in Jesus coming to be our Emmanuel, God with us.

[14 : 19] Now what did Jesus promise his church? He said, I will never leave you or forsake you. I am with you till the end of the age.

So just as the sons of Korah, we are invited to draw comfort from God's past acts of salvation, to look at his strength and grace for and towards his people, especially we are to look to the cross as the source of our salvation and eternal life.

So we look back but just like the psalmist too, we run to the Almighty Lord as our refuge, as our fortress. We run to Jesus, our safe place in a dangerous world.

The second section is both similar and different where the sons of Korah are helping us to see that there's only one safe place from the judgment of God.

In their psalm, they turn to a vision of the future from verse 8 onwards. They're now looking towards the end of time. Verse 8 and 9, come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth.

[15 : 42] He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. This is looking to the end of time and it promises, this section promises peace for the people of God but it's important for us to recognize that peace comes beyond and through judgment.

there is that recognition within this psalm of the suffering that will be our present reality until we go to be with Jesus or until Jesus returns but on that day there will be peace that will break out and will never cease.

The come and see language of verse 8 presumes that the works of God presumes that the judgment of God are good news.

So as the sons of Korah are singing they're inviting the people of God to have that perspective to see themselves as those who have been adopted into God's family and so they want to see God's purposes come because when you think about it when he starts to speak about judgment coming desolation being brought on the earth that judgment would be terror and not hope unless we knew that our future was secure because of our faith in God in Jesus.

but for the church there is certainty being presented here to give us hope that there is a safe place for us beyond judgment.

[17 : 26] there is a promise that the raging of the nations against God and against God's purposes will end. There is a certainty that rebellion against God in the end will be crushed so that after judgment there will be peace.

peace. That wonderful picture of Jesus and his church together in Revelation 21 comes after the defeat the destruction the judgment of Satan and his forces.

Peace comes beyond judgment. And then there is verse 10 be still and know that I am God I will be exalted among the nations I will be exalted in the earth.

Maybe you like me think about that verse in terms of quiet meditation here is an opportunity for us as Christians to be still to take some time to think about God and that's part of it but in the first place those words stand as a rebuke to a restless world to a world that is opposed to God.

It is a way to say you need to stop fighting because this is a fight you cannot and you will not win. So it brings to us this reality that there is a God who is good and loving and gracious but there are also people who stand opposed to God and want nothing to do with him but verse 10 is also at the same time the hope of the church that great hope that God will be exalted and recognized and honored among the nations.

[19 : 28] It's the great hope of the New Testament church the second coming of Jesus when he'll return with glory and we'll see him and there'll be joy on that day and there'll be deliverance on that day as our salvation is complete and we spend eternity with our God.

Jesus the one safe place beyond judgment. And then the refrain returns in verse 11 the Lord Almighty is with us the God of Jacob is our fortress and there is good news that it's this God who is with us this God who will act to judge and to deliver so that the people of God might know perfect peace with him.

And this truth the Lord Almighty is with us again is seen in Jesus our Emmanuel Jesus who said quiet be still to a raging storm.

Jesus who at the cross faced in himself the storm of God's judgment for our sin and guilt to secure our peace through his punishment.

Jesus the one who fulfills verse 4 the one who provides those streams of life giving water as he gives his spirit to the church. So as the people of God we are united to Christ and he lives in us by his spirit and united by faith to Jesus we need fear nothing.

[21 : 19] Our hope is certain our future is secure in him just as we died with him so we have been raised with him and we will go to glory to be with him at the end of our lives.

Jesus the one who has been exalted among the nations the one who will return and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord.

Psalm 46 is encouraging you and me to make Jesus our safe place in whatever we face and we don't know what tomorrow will bring in terms of government regulations and what it will mean to our daily lives.

We may find that we are unable to meet together as a church for a time but here is this wonderful promise that cannot be quarantined.

Jesus our Lord is with us always and wherever we are. And we may find that our life gets challenging and even painful in coming months.

[22 : 42] But we recognize that we have in God a refuge and strength and ever present help in times of trouble. Jesus the one who continues to be with us and for us till the end.

And so we have in this psalm a source of confident faith even in the midst of crisis. And may that be true for us, may it be true for our church, may it indeed be true for the people we love, our nation, our city, our world, that there might be a turning in the midst of chaos to this solid rock, this strong fortress.

Let's pray together. Lord,