

The Ever-Present God In Our Ever-Changing World

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[0:00] Psalm 46, if you're looking for the text, you can find it in the Bible in front of you, but you can also find it on the back of your bulletin. So that might be the easiest way to look! At some point in the service, toward the end of the service, we're actually going to read together the last stanza of this Psalm, beginning in verse 8. So just kind of have that ready and we'll do that in a little bit. So how do you respond when trouble comes? If it hasn't visited you recently, it will soon. My oldest son's wife was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and had to have surgery a couple weeks ago. We're grateful that things are going well there, but that was a trouble.

Last week or so, a week and a half ago, a float hung up on an ejector pump in my home and a toilet flapper valve decided to hang up at the same time and sewer water flowed into our finished basement for hours without anyone noticing and cleanup continues. I can hardly wait to see what will come this coming week. So how are you doing? See, when the earthquakes of life in various forms come crashing in on your world, what do you do? What will you think? What will you pray? How will you act?

I think maybe this Psalm provides some exceptional counsel that if followed can give us a surprising stability as our world slides into chaos. Now, if you have some familiarity with church history, you know the name Martin Luther. This Psalm, Psalm 46, was actually Luther's favorite.

And with all of the things that were encountered in his life, he spent a good deal of time in this text. During some of the dark and dangerous days of the Reformation, Luther became discouraged and depressed. When that occurred, he turned to his friend Philip Melanchthon.

He said, come Philip, let's sing the 46th Psalm. Well, we know that song. In fact, we sang that song last Sunday. The mighty fortress is our God. I'll review actually Luther's words at the end of this message just to kind of get a context of that. One writer, one scholar wrote this, few Psalms breathe the spirit of sturdy confidence in the Lord in the midst of very real danger as strongly as does this one. Having taken a closer look at Psalm 46 this last couple of weeks, I would heartily agree with that. Psalm 46 actually contains three stanzas, one through three, verses one through three. In the first stanza, four to seven, the second, and eight to 11 is the third stanza. The second and third stanzas, if you look at that, actually conclude with the same line.

[3:14] The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. And the end of each of the three stanzas is a word that we don't use today, really, probably. It's the word *selah*, or *selah*, depends on how you pronounce it. I doubt that anyone knows for certain what that term means. But there are two strong possibilities. One is that it's a musical directive of some sort, whether it's instruments or certain things like that. The second is actually a call to consider, to ponder. So we're going to use that possibility today as we work our way through this psalm. So here's the first stanza.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*. I think what that is telling us is that when troubles surround us, God is our constant shelter and he is our sufficient strength.

I'm going to examine some of those terms a little bit to help us to figure this out a little bit more carefully. A refuge is a place where we would go to hide for protection. God alone is that refuge, according to the psalm. Notice what I said. He doesn't provide the shelter. He is the shelter.

Nothing in this universe compares to him. He is our refuge. He is also our strength. What's needed when we're alone, weak, outnumbered, and overwhelmed? Well, we need the source of strength by which we can face the calamities of life. The psalmist declares that he is our strength. He is also our very present help. When at any moment we are unexpectedly overcome, he's always there with us. I don't know that that was my first thought when I was standing in water, but he's always there.

He is our right now refuge and strength and help. Very present help means God is immediately present and instantly available to his people. Trouble? Trouble describes a very tight place. It's a place like where you're cornered. It's the proverbial between a rock and a hard place. That's what he's saying.

[5:57] Have you been there? My guess is you have. When you are there, and we are sometimes, he is too. He is with us. So what is the expected response for us when we're in these troubles?

Well, often our ability to know and trust God, I think God uses that sometimes to actually enhance the recognition of his presence when we're going through struggles and pressures of life.

If it's true that God is always present and that he is our refuge and strength, it should also be true that we ought always to face the terrors of life without fear. Now that may not be personally true, but it should be if we believe the message of the psalm. So what are some of those troubles?

Again, in the first stanza, he gives us a sample of those. And basically it's saying to us, whatever happens, look at what's happening here. The mountains are trembling and moving and being cast into the sea. That sounds like a trouble. The waters are roaring and foaming and swelling and we're shaking and drowning in it all, but we need not fear. Does that make sense to you? When all those things are going on? Well, perhaps what we need to do is to take a little Selah moment here to ponder. You see, because of who God is, we can rest in him without fear, regardless of what's going on around us.

If you want another encouraging word about that to ponder in the midst of the world that's falling apart around you, consider these words from Psalm 91 verses 14 to 16. These are wonderful words.

[7:53] Actually, God is speaking. He says, because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him. I will protect him because he knows my name.

When he calls to me, I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and honor him. With long life, I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.

I've grabbed hold of that passage many times. You see, when trouble surrounds us, God is our constant shelter and strength. Let's look at stanza number two.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. God will help her when morning dawns.

The nations rage. The nations rage. The kingdoms totter. He utters his voice. The earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah.

[9:06] So, when trouble surrounds us, God is our constant shelter and strength. But when our world is in chaos, God is present and he's in complete control.

Let that sink in a bit. He's in complete control. You see, where God is, there's stability. The psalmist uses familiar scenes to describe this. Whatever the calamity on the outside happens to be, the psalmist pictures a quiet stream, the stream of Siloam in the city of Jerusalem.

The holy habitation, which would probably be the temple mount, as a picture of safety and tranquility. This, however, seems to go far beyond the idea of an earthly city in Jerusalem, with reference to safety and security of God's people throughout the ages, culminating in the new Jerusalem.

That was the city that Abraham looked for. It's the city described in Revelation 22. From now, throughout eternity, God provides stability and peace.

Now, and later. So, where God chooses, he also brings judgment. Verse 6. A good study would be to compare verse 6, actually, with Psalm 2.

[10:33] Where the nations rage against him, but it says that he will break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. See, when the Lord speaks, the enemy folds.

Someone wrote, when the Lord speaks, all nature stands aghast at the sound of his voice. Nature does. Sometimes we don't.

So, where God chooses, there's judgment. But where is God when we're in panic? Where is he? Some have wondered what earthly situation occurred to prompt the accounting of God's protection here.

In Psalm 46. It's not true that we always have a picture of what happened when the psalm was written. If you'll notice, there are little psalm titles in your Bible.

And often those give us a clue as to what took place in the psalm. So, this doesn't. It tells us if we're a choir master and so forth. But it doesn't tell us the historical place where this happened.

[11:37] There are a couple of possibilities here. One is found in 2 Chronicles chapter 20. It would be a good one to read. We're not going to look at that one today. But it would be a good one to read. But that might have been what prompted this psalm.

It involved King Jehoshaphat at the time. But another one, and this is the one I think we're going to look at today. It actually happened during the reign of Hezekiah.

And that record of that is found in 2 Kings chapters 18 and 19. It's also found two other places in the Bible. 2 Chronicles 32 and Isaiah 36 and 37.

Either of those, again, is a possibility. But we'll look at that second one today. It sort of went like this. Sennacherib was the king of Assyria at the time.

Assyria was a ruthless nation. A hated nation by the Jews. Terrible folks. What they did.

[12:38] Awful things. Sennacherib had come in and attacked the northern kingdom of Israel. And took them all captive.

Basically the northern kingdom ceased to exist at that point. And now he's moving toward the southern kingdom. And so he goes and he's going to lay siege against the city of Jerusalem.

And when all this is happening, you can imagine the fright of the people. Because the Assyrian empire was huge and powerful.

And was running over countries one after another. Before attacking Jerusalem, the king actually sent a field commander. It's called the Rabshakeh in the Bible.

He comes there and he brings a letter to Hezekiah. And then he decides he's going to stand. And as people are kind of lined up around the walls of Jerusalem, he begins to speak to them in Hebrew.

[13:37] Which really got their attention. And he basically is telling them, Listen, you need to surrender. Because if you surrender, your life will be so much better.

I mean, all the good things will happen to you if you surrender. Because you can live. But if you don't surrender, you're going to die. That was his message, essentially.

And so Hezekiah took the letter that he had received. And he put the letter in front of the Lord. And he begins to pray. And as he's praying, he's pleading with God. And he concludes his prayer with these words in 2 Kings 19.

Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands. And have cast their gods into the fire. For they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone.

Therefore, they were destroyed. So now, O Lord, our God, save us, please, from His hand. That all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone.

[14:46] That was his prayer. Now, the Israelites were outnumbered. And they had meager weapons compared to the Assyrians. But Hezekiah was calling upon the people to trust the Lord to deliver them.

Do you know what happened? The last couple of verses of 2 Kings 19, verses 38 and 39, say this.

That night, the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians.

And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, departed, went home.

Well, these people were asleep. Can you imagine trying to sleep when an army is around your city and it's going to destroy you? And you think, when it comes dawn, it's going to be there. We're going to die.

[15:48] And they get up in the next morning and the whole bunch of people, 185,000 soldiers, dead. It's time to take a Selah moment here.

Verses 4 and 5 of the text said, There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her.

She shall not be moved. God will help her when morning dawns. The Lord of hosts is with us.

You see, since the Lord is with us and in complete control, do we need to be afraid? Do we need to doubt? There are many threats and wars on the outside, but we can be glad and stand firm in Him.

We should ponder that for a bit. So we've learned something about when trouble surrounds us, God is our constant shelter, sufficient strength.

[16:56] And when our world is in chaos, God is present and in complete control. Now we're going to learn something else in stanza number three. So look at it on your bulletin.

It starts with, Come behold the works of the Lord. We're going to read that together. All right? Let's see how we do in congregational reading. Let's see what happens. Ready? Come, behold the

works of the Lord, how He has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the chariots 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 of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Selah. Well done. So the third idea here is that when we're running in circles, trying to win the battles on our own, God exalts Himself and He commands our attention.

[18:07] So let's consider His works for a bit. Again, if this was a reference to Hezekiah, consider the scene after that 185,000 enemy soldiers' army were killed by the angel of the Lord.

How that battlefield must have appeared. The enemy was completely destroyed, and the armies of Israel didn't even pick up their swords. But they saw the aftermath of what God had done.

I think that probably qualifies as a desolation. Verse 8. And then consider His ways in verse 9.

Martin Luther wrote this in his hymn. Did we in our own strength confide? Our striving would be losing. We're not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing.

Just ask who that may be? Christ Jesus. It is He, Lord Sabaoth, His name, from age to age the same, and He must win the battle.

[19:19] Luther got it right. And He will win the battle. So what are we supposed to do? Let's consider His will in verses 10 and 11. Note that in verse 10, it's no longer the psalmist speaking, but it's the Lord Himself speaking.

Be still and know that I am God. Now, be still seems to be a strange command when we're in the middle of an impossible situation.

Our normal response when trouble comes is to run in circles, not sure what to do. Either we swing at everything and hit nothing, or we try to run and hide.

But the command here is to be still and know that I am God. You might find this surprising, but this is not an instruction for us to lead a contemplation, contemplative, get it right, contemplative life.

However important that might be. Be still and know that I am God means to surrender, to lay our arms down, to know that He is the one and only victorious God.

[20:36] You probably know this. There is such a thing as a negotiated peace. Two groups get together, they make a deal, they sign it, and usually don't keep it. But that's a negotiated peace, all right?

But then there is an imposed peace where one imposes their will on the other. There's peace.

There's also a crushed group of people or nation or individual.

Well, this is an imposed peace. God imposes His will on the enemy around us. And when He does, we drop our weapons as we surrender to His will and purpose.

I was thinking about this this week. Do you remember when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane and the mob showed up? The disciples had been sleeping.

Jesus told them to wake up. The mob gets there. And what does Peter do? Pulls out his sword and goes swinging and he hits Malchus, one of the soldiers.

[21:46] He whacks off his ear. I doubt if he was aiming for the ear, but he got the ear. And what did Jesus do? Did He call the rest of them to get out their swords?

No. In fact, He said, put your sword back in its place. He heals the guy's ear. And there the disciples are.

It was be still and know that I'm God. Surrender your weapons. Watch what's going to happen because this is my will. See, when we're overwhelmed with difficulty, instead of running, we need to sometimes wait.

Instead of panicking, we need to be still in order to gain our perspective, trusting the one who has everything under control. To be still and know that He is God is to take the time to meditate on who He is.

To know that God says to the psalmist and to us, I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. He is the Lord Almighty.

[22:50] He wins. And if we belong to Him, we win too. We need to know and remember that. So what does it mean to know God?

What does the text mean when it says the Lord of hosts? Why is God referred to as the God of Jacob? Take some time to think about some of those questions.

I'm not going to deal with them, but just think about that a little bit. Actually, I will speak just a little bit about Jacob just for a second. Have you ever wondered why God identifies Himself with Jacob? He was a third of three patriarchs that are often mentioned. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. Frankly, I would suggest to you that Jacob was the least of the three.

I mean, he was more of a schemer than a man of faith. Read a story. It took him a whole life to learn to trust God, but God claims to be the God of Jacob just as much as the God of Abraham and Isaac and all the rest of us who trust in His holy name.

[24:03] To me, it's a great encouragement that he actually said, I'm the God of Jacob. Jacob, I'm very grateful when I think about that, when I hear it, I'm the God of Les Martin.

Why? Why would you do that, God? But He is. And for those of us who belong to Him, He's our God. And He claims us.

It's time for us to take a third Selah moment here to ponder. This little account comes from James Montgomery Boyce.

He was a pastor in Philadelphia for many, many years, now in heaven with the Lord. He wrote this. The story goes that a newspaper printed the obituary of an American author, Mark Twain.

But, Twain wasn't dead. And when he was told about it, he supposedly said, the reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.

[25:10] The voice goes on, for years, I have heard reports that the church is dying. Christianity is shrinking. Belief in God and of the Bible and the Bible as the word of God is over.

The reports of the death of the church are greatly exaggerated. The author of Hebrews was comparing the scene at Sinai as God was giving Moses the law with the scene in heaven where the saints are in the presence of God.

The author concludes, Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire.

Belonging to God through Jesus Christ under his rule and reign we are in an unshakable position.

Psalms 103 verse 19 The Lord has established his throne in the king and sorry the Lord has established his throne in the heavens his kingdoms rule over all.

Psalms 46 verse 6 our text The nations rage the kingdoms totter he utters his voice the earth melts.

[26:29] Neither God nor his reign are dead and any report of such is greatly exaggerated. We belong to the one who rules over all forever.

End quote. I'm going to conclude this morning with actually reading over the words of Luther's hymn A Mighty Fortress.

I think sometimes when we sing songs we sing them but we don't necessarily think about the words that are being said and sometimes that's probably a good thing because sometimes the words aren't good but most of the songs we sing here I'd say all the songs we sing here are theologically on target.

I think yeah for sure I think this is this is on target by what Luther said so I'll try to say it in such a way that the point comes clear.

Mighty Fortress is our God a bulwark never failing our helper he amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing for still our ancient foe doth work to seek to work us woe his craft and power are great he's talking about Satan and armed with cruel hate on earth is not as equal did we in our strength confide our strength our striving would be losing we're not the right man on our side the man of God's own choosing doth ask who that may be Christ Jesus it's he Lord sabbath his name from age to age the same and he must win the battle though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us we will not fear for God has willed his truth to triumph through us prince of darkness grim we tremble not for him his rage we can endure for lo his doom is sure one little word shall fell him that word above all earthly powers no thanks to them worthy powers abided the spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth let goods and kindreds go this mortal life also the body they may kill

[29:00] God's truth abides still his kingdom is forever amen absolutely so when the troubles come it's time to be still and know that he is God remember it's time to be still as in surrender not to the enemy but to the one who always triumphs instead of what are we going to do it's Lord you are our strength and our shield and our fortress and our ever present help I am excited to see what you're going to do and what I'm going to see and what I'm going to learn as I watch you win the battle and that works even in a soggy basement some of you are going through unbelievable challenges and

problems and issues they're difficult they're hard every day you get up and it's still there and you're hurt that doesn't take away from what the text says

God is ever present he is with us and all those things we've talked about this morning are true about him and he's always our refuge and strength don't put that away have a selah moment okay ponder those things and you'll find that though the trials may not be any less our hope and confidence is overflowing let's pray father in heaven thank you for this song bring it to mind when we struggle when we think we're in a mess and we're the only ones there and nobody can get us out help us to remember that you're with us when we hurt when we're discouraged when we were without hope help us to remember we have hope and help in you and I pray that you would bless this congregation with a confidence in you that's unshakable a heart that's filled with trust and not fear but trust in you and that you would bless us and help us to walk with you regardless of the circumstances knowing that you are our firm foundation thank you that you are our fortress a mighty fortress you are thank you for all that you're doing in our lives thank you for our time together as we sing our closing song may you remind us again that we are safe in you amen you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you
