

Be Still And Know

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[0 : 00] For many of us, Psalm 46 holds a special place in our hearts. We've sung it since we were children. God is our refuge and our strength, in straits a present aid, therefore though the earth remove, we will not be afraid. We've sung it in difficult times and we've clung to it in difficult times.

When all other places of refuge have failed us and we rather feel that we are drowning in this world's disasters, God has been our help and God has been our strength. Though all the world shook around us, he has been firm and upright. We've sung it and we've clung to it because we know that God is our refuge when all around us is burning. But if the words of Psalm 46 verse 1 are precious to us, then the words of verse 10 are no less valuable. Where the psalmist writes, Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am God.

We're living through months of anxious pandemic and restrictive lockdown. Our minds are galloping like unbroken horses and revving like over-roaring engines. And when we read verse 10, we instinctively yearn and long for the stillness of which it speaks. We want to be still in knowing that God is God.

For the experience of him to quieten down the obsessions of our minds and the clamor of our impatient panics. Be still and know that I am God. Which one of us here today does not longingly yearn to experience something of that stillness? All we sing it and by faith we cling to it. We so want to be calm under the pressure of today's anxieties. Well, in some small way, I hope this brief study on this verse will help you to do that very thing. To be still and to know that you're God. The God whom you see in the face of Jesus Christ. He is God. Well, I want us to consider this command in Psalm 46 10 at three levels. First, be still in storm. Then be still in God. Then be still in knowing. Be still, first of all, in storm. Be still in storm. One of the things that we all love about the Psalms is how true to life they really are.

[3 : 09] They deal with every situation we may ever face as human beings. And Psalm 46 adds to our affection for the Psalms because there are times in our lives, are there not, when it really does feel like a storm is raging about us. And sometimes, sometimes even within us. The Psalm uses descriptive metaphor to reinforce just how terrifying and fierce the storm. The earth is giving way and the mountains are falling into the heart of the sea. Verse two. The waters of the sea are roaring and foaming and the mountains are quaking with their surge. Verse three. The nations are confused and kingdoms are falling.

The earth hears the voice of God and melts. Verse six. There are desolations and there are wars. Verses eight through nine. Now, these probably aren't real situations facing the Psalmist. Rather, he's using them as descriptive metaphors to reinforce how terrifying the storms in our lives can be and therefore why we so desperately need to hear the voice of God calling to us. Be still and know that I am God.

Make no mistake. The storm is very real. Many of us will have stood beside the sea on a particularly stormy day and heard its uproar.

In fact, the sea was so loud you couldn't even hear anything else above its roaring. Or perhaps we've experienced earthquakes. The very ground in which you're standing shakes.

Tall skyscrapers and huge buildings are rendered rubble. Perhaps you saw videos of last year's devastating gas explosion in Beirut.

[5 : 04] Nothing compares to the violence of the natural world, to the movement of ocean currents, tectonic plates, meteorological storms.

And that's how the Psalmist feels on the inside. No, the ground is not shaking under his feet, but his feet are shaking on the ground because of how much pressure he feels he's under.

The seas are not roaring in a storm, but his heart is roaring in his chest. He's so anxious. He feels squeezed in by the circumstances of life. The mighty enemies of his people, threatened invasion. The calm and ordered world he once knew and loved has been thrown into chaos and anarchy. His world is no longer safe. His mind is galloping like an unbroken horse.

It's roaring like an over-revved engine. It's working way beyond its capacity. Now, I don't think we need to travel back to 1000 BC Israel and to feel rather like the writer of Psalm 46.

[6 : 16] Instead, we just need to be living in days of anxious pandemic and restrictive lockdown. I'm not saying this is true for all of us, certainly not. But for some of us, at least, these are stormy days.

It's not that physically we feel any better or any worse than we've ever done, but mentally, emotionally and socially, we're struggling.

Hearing our leaders talking about extending restrictions is like listening to a sea roaring so loud you can't hear anything else above it. Reading the paper and learning of new strains of the virus is like standing along the fault line of an earthquake.

Many of us have been working from home for almost a year now. Now, for some of us, working from home is no big deal, but for others, it's beginning to get to them. And then there's the added pressure of having kids at home 24-7 and trying to get them engaged with learning from home.

And I know that as Christian parents, we are to be patient, we're to be loving, but the impact of these lockdown restrictions can cause tension in many of our homes. The lack of social contact is a direct attack on who we are as human beings.

[7 : 37] It is, in every possible way, dehumanising. A few months ago, in a sermon on anxiety, I suggested that although COVID-19 might be treated with a vaccine, the impact upon our mental health is going to take generations to deal with.

Now, I have a number of reasons for painting this dark picture. And becoming more anxious and more depressed is not one of them. Top of them all is to point to our need, to my need and to your need, to listen very carefully to the voice of God in verse 10.

Be still and know that I am God. God's telling us today that even in the heart of the storm of anxious pandemic and restrictive lockdown, stillness in him is possible.

But there's a place to be still, even when the very ground around you is shaking. A place of calm and composure when the mountains are falling into the sea and our leaders are scaring us with their daily briefings.

For those of us of a certain generation, we were brought up on a Saturday evening diet of Dad's army.

[8 : 53] And we remember the words of private Fraser. We're doomed. Now, frankly, we've all got too much of the private Fraser about us. And definitely I do.

I'm not enough of the writer of Psalm 46, who for all the storms that we're raging about him refuses to become negative, refuses to be pessimistic, but calls upon us to find our stillness and our calmness and our composure in God.

Among all the anxiety and the frustration, remember, there's a place of stillness and calm for you today. In knowing God. This place is open to us all through faith in Christ Jesus.

After a difficult day. This is where I want to go. Surely you do also. Be still in storm. Be still, secondly, in God.

Be still in God. The words of verse 10 are translated normally as be still and know that I am God. Actually, the Hebrew grammatical structure of the clause doesn't translate so well and sounds rather clumsy in English.

[10 : 15] It's more like be still and know that it is I. I am God. Be still and know that it is I. I am God.

The original emphasis rests not in our finding stillness in knowing God, but in finding our stillness in knowing this God, the God of Psalm 46.

So the God in whom we find our stillness and calm is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble. Verse 1. He is the most high who dwells with his people.

Verse 4. He is the God who is with his people, helping them. Verse 5. He is the God who is sovereign over all the nations. Verse 6. He is the Lord Almighty who is with us, the God of covenant commitment and our fortress.

Verse 7. He is the Lord who works desolations on the earth and makes wars to cease. Verses 8 and 9. He is the God who is exalted above all the nations.

[11 : 24] Verse 10. This is the I the psalmist is calling us to know and in so doing find our place of stillness and calm.

Not any God. Not a higher power. But this God. It is I.

I am God. The God who is our refuge. Verse 1. And how we so desperately need a hiding place at this time.

The word refuge literally translates shelter, a shelter in the storm. In the American Midwest, deadly tornadoes are an annual occurrence to the extent that many homes have tornado bunkers where people can find shelter when the winds are howling above ground.

And God says to us, it is I. Your hiding place. I am your God. He is the God who is our strength.

[12 : 32] Verse 1. And again, how desperately we need fresh strength at this time. Some of us are at the end of our tether, wondering if we can keep going for even just one more day. We're like bruised reeds, clean, ready to break.

The God in whom we find stillness says to us, it is I. Your strength. I am your God. This is the God in whom we find stillness.

Not some undefined higher power. But the God of Psalm 46. The one true and living God of the Bible. The God we see in the face of Jesus Christ.

Not any God. But this God. The God whose heart was so filled with compassion that he reached out and touched the leper. This is the God in whom we can find stillness.

The God whose word was so powerful that even death was no obstacle to his life-giving voice. The God who loved us so much he gave his one and only son.

[13 : 33] He gave himself on the cross to take away all our sins and griefs. This is the God in whom we find stillness. Not any God. Not some higher power.

But this God. Try and find it anywhere else. You won't succeed. And having failed, your mood will be rather like that of private phrases. What doomed.

If you try to find your calm in faith or in knowing, you won't succeed. Mere faith doesn't still our hearts. It is the God in whom we have faith. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is he who stills our hearts. In verse 7, this is the God who is the Lord Almighty. Not a plaything or a fantasy creature.

But the awesome God who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth. And who at the sound of his voice, the earth melts for fear. This is the God in whom we find stillness and calm.

[14 : 34] The God we hear in the words of Christ commanding the demons to leave the man they called Legion. And they were forced to go.

There's an expression that we use in English. Any port in a storm. Any port in a storm. That when things are tough, we'll try and find help whenever we can.

Well, the psalmist totally disagrees with any port in a storm. There's only one place you'll find help in the storm. And that is in the Lord Almighty.

Trying to find help. Anyone else is like flapping about in sinking sand and grabbing hold of a twig. We don't need a twig when we're sinking into sinking sand.

We need a solid rock underneath us on which we can stand. He is the Lord Almighty. The eye in whom we find stillness.

[15 : 32] And then in words of just inspired genius in both verse 7-11, we read, The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

He is with us. Our great Lord of hosts, our strong fortress. Let's face it. Although all of us are equally as frustrated by the pandemic, the reality is that each one of us feels very much alone with our own thoughts and our own anxieties.

I haven't spoken to anyone who doesn't have, on occasion, days where they feel a little bit low. We try to explain how we feel.

We can't quite find the words. We suppose that even those we love most don't really understand the way we feel. And maybe we're right. Maybe those we love most have enough worries in their lives, don't need to hear about our anxieties all the time.

There are times when we feel very much alone with our thoughts. But in an unspeakably mysterious way, these are the times when we are most definitely not alone.

[16 : 50] For the Lord of hosts is with us and the God of Jacob is our fortress. They might be the times we feel most vulnerable, but it's precisely then God closes in and protects us from greater harm.

Or we may not be conscious of his presence, but he is with us nonetheless. We all saw this, did we not? At the funeral service of the late Georgina Alla, when Kenneth, her husband, and Precious, her daughter, spoke about her from the front of the church.

They were not maybe aware of it, but I was as I sat behind them watching them. That in the coldness and in the emptiness and in the grief of that austere St. Vincent Street building, they did not stand alone.

The Lord of hosts was with them. As he will be with us. Think of how our Lord Jesus, when he met with the sister of Lazarus, according to John 11, 33, it says he was deeply moved in spirit and greatly troubled.

And yes, he performed what was perhaps the greatest of all miracles that day by raising his friend Lazarus from the dead. But never forget that though the most powerful thing he did was raise Lazarus from the dead, the most loving thing he did was being with and listening to the grief of Lazarus's sisters.

[18 : 30] The poignancy of Jesus' last words in Matthew 28 must never be lost on us. Behold, I am with you to the very end of the age. He, Jesus Christ, the Lord of hosts, and the captain of Israel's army is with us throughout this pandemic and all the anxieties we might be experiencing.

Surely with him at our side, we can more than cope. We may even be confident. As I said before, mere faith doesn't still our hearts.

Having faith in faith is not the answer. It is he in whom we have faith who brings calm and peace in the storm.

It is the object of our trust, the God who was our fortress and our refuge. It is he who brings stillness and tranquility into our experience.

If you remember nothing else from this sermon today, will you remember this? I cannot give you better advice than this. I cannot show you a better road than this.

[19 : 48] That we can only find true stillness and genuine peace in the loving and powerful face of Jesus Christ.

Time doesn't permit us to draw out every implication of every description of God from this psalm, how we see it in the face of Christ and how we can apply it to ourselves.

But surely we, as adopted children of our loving Heavenly Father for the gospel of His Son, know enough to know this. He is our refuge and our strength.

He is our ever-present help in trouble. Be still in storm. Be still in God. And then third and lastly, be still in knowing.

Be still in knowing. For most years, I don't really think I understood what God was calling us all to do in Psalm 46, verse 10.

[20 : 53] I had always thought that in this verse, God was calling us to down tools, as it were. To let Him do the work.

To ourselves stop so that He may start. To stop trying to save ourselves so that He can get on with saving us.

Well, that's what I thought. I guess I'd always understood this text in terms of letting go and letting God. Two Italian airline pilots fell into this trap a few years ago.

The controls on their commercial airliner malfunctioned halfway through a flight. And rather than try to fix them, these two devout Catholic men panicked and prayed while all the time the control tower of a nearby airport was trying to talk them through how to fix their controls to the radio.

There's a time and a place to down tools. But it isn't here and it isn't now.

[22 : 07] The way to stillness rests in obedience to a divine command. Be still and know that I am God.

What is required of us is knowing and if that's all that's required of us it's enough to be getting on with. Stillness is a word popularly associated with New Age type meditation where one must empty one's mind of all concerns.

But genuine stillness in the Christian sense does not involve emptying one's mind at all. It involves filling one's mind with God knowing of knowing that the God who we have described for us in the face of Christ that he is our God.

Knowing that he is God is activity. It's intense activity. It's hard activity. It involves fixing your minds not on the things we talked about in the first part of this sermon.

The mountains falling into the depths of the sea. the nations being in uproar and the seas foaming all around us. It involves fixing your mind on the things that we talked about in the second part of this sermon.

[23 : 32] Of God as our refuge and strength. Of him as being our Lord Almighty. Of him always being with us. Or perhaps I can put it better like this.

It involves first filling your mind with the glory and love of God in the face of Christ. And in so doing there'll be no room left for the anxieties and obsessions of this world.

Do you ever get a song stuck in your head? I do all the time. You're trying your hardest to forget the song but the more you try the more it gets stuck in your head.

You're always humming it and you're driving everyone in your house absolutely insane with that song stuck in your head. Well how do you get that song out of your head? As I said you try your hardest to forget about it.

The harder you try the more it gets stuck in your head. Let me tell you the best way to get rid of a piece of music that is stuck inside your head is to replace it with a new better piece of music and get that stuck in your head instead.

[24 : 46] A little example of how the best way to get rid of the anxious thoughts which are galloping around your minds like a thousand horses is to fill your mind with the best of all thoughts.

Contemplation of the eternal and infinite excellencies of God in the gospel of Christ. Let's face it although the world around us has dramatically changed he has not changed he is still as righteous and glorious and loving as he's always been or will always be.

As I said earlier it's not knowing or believing that will still our hearts it's the God we know and the God in whom we believe. It's trusting that just as he is a refuge so he is your refuge just as he's strength for those who believe so he's your strength but just as just as he is with his people so he is with you.

You'll want to find stillness sitting cross-legged on the floor with your eyes closed and your hands in a lotus position. You'll find it in knowing that is in believing and trusting in him.

and so when you're flying a plane and all the controls fail around you by all means pray you keep on trying to fix those controls at the same time.

[26 : 21] By all means pray you keep listening to the control towers instructions at the same time. Pray believe and act don't stop don't down tools as you pray believe and act it is God himself who shall make you calm and still.

As you fill your mind with him he will empty it of the roaring seas and the nations and uproar around you. In the context of this pandemic get out of bed that's really important get out of bed get on with the duties of the day commit all things at all times to God taking every opportunity you can to think about Jesus and his gospel about how he is your refuge and your strength he is your ever present help in trouble.

I'm speaking to myself today more than really to anyone else as my family will tell you but when all the world around you is being tossed about by storms of pandemic panic fix yourself to God as the rock of your stability cling to him when all the world around you is burning under the stress of these restrictions be still and know that it's he who is God and he will be exalted among the nations be still he says to us today be still and know that it's I I who am your God let us pray we give you thanks and praise for such a verse as this a verse oh Lord we pray that you would help us to cling to and claim

Lord may it may help us to let go and let God as it were but to redouble our efforts to fill our minds with the glory of the gospel how we have become your adopted sons and daughters in Christ Jesus the wonder of the gospel putting all other things to the side the roaring seas and the nations in conflict with one another help us oh Lord to know that who you are in the face of Christ you are for us help us to be patient oh Lord we all miss each other dreadfully we all long to be together again help us to be patient and help us to find our patience in you the God who knows the end from the beginning we ask all these things in Jesus name Amen