

Peace in the Storm

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: 28 October 2018

[0 : 00] I've only done this a few times, but it's always a privilege to be the one to be able to bring a message from God's Word. And today we're going to be talking on the topic, Peace in the Storm, based on Psalm 46.

As we begin, I want to have you cast your mind back to 2004. And perhaps some of you might remember that in 2004, the third most powerful earthquake in the history of the Earth occurred in the Indian Ocean.

And this started a tsunami that headed inland, and soon the tsunami hit a town called Banda Asia, and it literally wiped that city off the map.

There were 167,000 people who died in those waves. Now, to put that into perspective, in our context, that would be roughly 60% of the population of New Providence.

Six out of every ten people who you know on this island, if it had happened here, likely would have died. And coming a little closer to home, and train it out in Tobago, just in August, they experienced the strongest earthquake that they've ever had in that country.

[1 : 30] And news of that 7.3 magnitude earthquake quickly spread over social media. And we saw videos coming to us of whole buildings that were shaking.

And we saw supermarket shelves rattling and all of the contents of those shelves being tossed to the ground. We saw cars shaking. We saw the shattering of windows in shopping centers.

Then, barely three weeks ago, in Haiti, another earthquake struck. And we were told by news reports that 14 people died in that earthquake that was felt as far up as Inagua.

I'm sure that that earthquake reminded the people of Haiti of the earthquake that hit them in 2010 that killed more than 300,000 people.

If you think of that number, 300,000 people, that's almost the entire population of the Bahamas dead from one single disaster.

[2 : 40] So the question is, what do we do when we are faced with these natural disasters? What do we do when we see this powerful force of nature coming at us?

What do we do when the earth shakes beneath us and all around us? Or when the ocean rushes in after us? The passage we've come to today tells us that we are to be still and put our trust in God. So let's read Psalm 46. I'm reading from the English Standard Version. So if you have another version of us, we'll read it slightly differently.

Psalm 46. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear that the earth gives way, that the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

[3 : 51] Selah. 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 kingdoms totter.

He utters his voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah. 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.

[4 : 48] I will be exalted upon the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Selah. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would open our understanding in this moment to hear your word.

We pray that you would open our hearts to receive it and to know the truths of what you've given us. Father, we pray that you would keep me from error and keep me from excess.

Let your people will hear from you through your holy word today. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. This morning as we look at Psalm 46, in addition to internalizing the iconic 10th verse of the chapter, I hope that we will all absorb the entirety of the message of this chapter. Specifically, I pray that you will understand that this chapter calls us to have the confidence that the Almighty God gives the believer hope in the midst of disasters and enemies who attack. [6 : 13] And to do this, I want us to look at Psalm 46 under three main headings. First, the power of God, that's seen in verses one through three.

And the peace of God, verses four through seven. And the proof of God, seen in verses eight through eleven. First, the power of God.

From the very beginning of the Psalm, the Psalm points us to God's power. He positions God as all powerful.

And he doesn't do that in isolation. What he does is he points to God's power in relation to his people. The Psalmist shows us that God is using his power graciously for the benefit of his people. He says, God is our refuge and strength. A very present help in trouble. So we see right away that God is using his great power for the good of his people.

[7 : 24] We're in the mix from the beginning. The Psalmist makes clear that in life, we need refuge and we need strength. And he immediately lets us know that it's God himself who provides this for us.

Now, we're all familiar with refuge. It's a safe place or a safe shelter. And living in a tourism economy, we have a great example of this daily.

Those of us who have the opportunity to be in the downtown area would notice the cruise ships that come in the harbor. The cruise ships don't choose to stay outside of the harbor and stay in deep water when they visit a port.

What they do is they come into the harbor where it's shelter, where they have safety, where they can anchor and be secure. And we get an even greater picture of this when there's a hurricane that might be traveling in the area.

Cruise ships often would be diverted from one port, one port that's in the direct path of a hurricane. Because they don't want to leave themselves exposed.

[8 : 36] They go and they seek another port that would offer shelter, that would offer them refuge so that they would not be damaged or destroyed. And it's the same with the people of God.

We face storms both literally and figuratively in life. And whether we find ourselves in the middle of a hurricane or an earthquake or some type of other storm, verse 1 tells us that it's the almighty God who is our refuge and our strength.

And because of that, because the sovereign God of the universe is on our side and he is our help, that is why we are told that we should not fear.

In verse 2, the psalmist speaks of the earth giving way and the mountains being moved into the sea. In verse 3, it's the waters roaring and it's the sea swelling.

The psalmist is speaking of trouble of great proportions. And sometimes in the Bahamas it's hard for us to appreciate the scale that he is speaking about here.

[9 : 54] Because with our topography being so flat, we can't sometimes imagine what the mountains are. When your highest peak in the whole country is 207 feet, you don't really know mountains unless you've had the opportunity to see them.

But I can tell you that the psalmist is speaking here about peaks that are the height of, say, blue hills, that tractors cut down sometimes for quarry.

He's talking about a much greater scale. I recently took an airplane flight and I went through the Andes and they say that the Andes are 22,000 feet high.

They extend into the clouds. And they also say that the Andes are more than 4,300 miles long. And to give you an idea of what that is, many of us know the United States well.

And that would be the equivalent of running from Atlanta, Georgia towards Los Angeles, California, and then back. So the psalmist is talking about grand scale.

[11 : 07] He's talking about power that is able to move a force even as great as that. But the psalmist positions God once again as all-powerful.

Yes, we know that the forces of nature are great. But according to Psalm 46 and verse 1, they are still of a lesser power than the power of God.

And since this all-powerful being is our refuge and our strength, and he is the one who is on our side, this should give us the confidence to trust in God, even in disastrous situations.

As it says in verse 2, therefore, we will not fail. In other words, God is our strength. Even in the face of powerful troubles, in the face of mighty troubles, we do not need to be afraid.

The point is God is almighty. We will not fear the things that are smaller than him. And the good news is, everything is smaller than him.

[12:26] In one of those videos I told you about, about the earthquake in Trinidad, one of the things that caught my attention was an old lady. And she was standing in the middle of a supermarket.

And all around her, things were shaking and rattling off of the shelves. And all the canned items and other items fell to the ground. In the middle of it, she stood in one space.

And she could be heard crying out to God, asking God to protect her in that moment. So she understood the point of the beginning of Psalm 46.

She knew that she was in the hand of the almighty. And he was even bigger than the trouble she faced in that moment. The psalmist leaves no doubt of where those who belong to God ought to put their trust and their confidence.

It is in God himself, because he is the power on which the believer stands and relies.

[13:32] Second, the peace of God. In great contrast to the raging troubles that we can expect in life, we have the surpassing peace of God.

And the peace of God should naturally flow out of our knowledge of the power of God. Again, we should be reminded that this is the God of the universe we are talking about.

He is on our side. He is our refuge. And he is our strength. That should bring us to a place of peace. Because we should understand, because of that, that he is not only able, but he is willing to see us through our storms, our trials.

And our disasters. So we read about this peace beginning in verse 4. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

And according to John Gill, an 18th century theologian and pastor, the river reference here is either the river Kidron, which ran through Jerusalem, or the waters of Shiloh, whose branches supplied much of Jerusalem.

[14:55] Now after many, many weeks of meticulous study, research and reading, I can tell you with confidence that the river referred to here is one that I really don't know which one it is.

I don't know if it's the Kidron. I don't know if it's Shiloh. But I can tell you this. That there is a more important figurative meaning here that we ought to grasp.

Even if we don't know literally if this refers to one of those rivers, or even another river, there's a figurative meaning that we ought not to miss. The river and its streams are the grace and favor of God flowing to his people.

They're flowing from the throne of God to the city of God. And the city of God is the people of God. The people of God are inhabited by the Holy Spirit.

So throughout this portion of the passage, we get the impression of a smoothly flowing river. It is in great contrast to the turmoil and the chaos that we read about at the beginning of the psalm in verses 2 and verse 3.

[16:12] Instead, this is graceful. This is steady. It brings peace and it brings comfort to the city, which is the people of God.

So that is what it means to make glad in this passage. It is the people of God receiving the grace and favor of God resulting in peace.

An unshakable assurance of God's care. Now we all know that rivers in many cultures were life-giving.

They were life-sustaining. They enabled people to have drinking water. It enabled them to harness water to nourish and grow their crops so they could have food to eat.

So a river was very, very important to survival. It is the same for this river that we experience flowing from the throne of God.

[17:15] It is important to our survival. It is important to our nourishment and our refreshment. God has established the city, the people of God, the church.

And we know that God does not establish anything and allows it to fail. He sustains it. It is the same for the church. He has provided us with all that we need.

He has provided us with his peace. And it should bring us great comfort when we consider that this is the work of God.

It's all him. Everything that God does in our lives, it's him working on our behalf, not us working. And he assists.

And we consider how God has moved in the believer's life. He makes the first move. He calls us. He draws us. By his Holy Spirit, he saves us.

[18 : 17] Totally of his own work. Totally of his own volition. We are not the ones bringing about our own salvation. And here we have a promise of God not only saving, but sustaining us.

And this should bring us great assurance, great confidence, that God does not just save us and leave us alone. No, he does the work in saving, and he continues that work in sustaining us with his peace.

And if you look at verse 5, just quickly, you can see that verse 5 assures us that God is in the midst of the city. He is dwelling with his people, and the city will not be moved.

In other words, we are firmly established. Our foundations are not going to shift. They're not going to be broken. They're not going to be destroyed. This is an eternal and lasting city.

Because its source is eternal and lasting. The church, both below and above, the saints that have already gone on to eternity, they are supplied by this river.

[19 : 36] They're supplied by this peace. God being in the midst of us, shall not be moved. And neither shall we. Notice the personification of the city in verse 5.

It says, God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. The city is not presented as an impersonal thing.

And although it's not uncommon for a city to be referred to with the pronoun her, I believe that it is divinely appointed in this instance that it's used here.

Because it shows that God is personally involved. It shows that God cares for the city with tender affection.

The psalmist could easily have said that God is in the midst of it. But he did not. There's an emotional undercurrent here. It also helps us to see that the city is a living thing.

[20 : 40] Because it's made up of the living souls of the church. Now the source of our peace, the river that flows to us, is God himself.

He is our help. He is personally involved. The second half of verse 5 tells us that God will help her when morning dawns.

And again, that's figurative language. We get the impression of a city that's under siege, under attack. And the assault is taking place in the dead of night.

And we get the impression that this is a time of our most vulnerable moment. It's our darkest and bleakest hour. We feel the enemy pressing in on us.

And our fear may be at that moment at its greatest. But the night does not last forever. There is a daybreak.

[21 : 41] And God himself brings the daybreak. As the day breaks, we have a sense of hope. And it is because God himself brings us hope.

It is God who, through his own power, rescues us. Again, this should give us peace. It should quiet our souls because it is another promise that God does not save us and then leave us to fend for ourselves.

It's a promise that God will save us and he will sustain us. So nations will rage. Kingdoms will totter. According to the first part of verse 6 of this chapter. And who do they rage against? They rage against each other. But also, they rage against the people of God and against God himself.

Not too long ago, we had the privilege of sitting on the teaching of Psalm 2. And you were reminded of how the nations rage against God.

[22 : 54] There's an organized rebellion against God and the things of God. And we just quickly read it as a reminder. And you don't have to turn. It will be projected for you.

The first part of Psalm 2 says, Why do the nations rage and the people plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

He who sits in the heavens, the Lord holds them in derision. So we see an organized rebellion against the Lord.

The nations rage against the Lord. And the Psalm goes on to say that God speaks to these rebellious nations in wrath.

[23 : 56] And it warns the rulers of the earth to serve the Lord rather than rage against him and face destruction. These nations and kingdoms will rise and fall.

We're short of that in Psalm 46. But the eternal nature of God is that he is above all nations always. Verse 6 says, He only has to utter his voice and the earth melts. This points once more to the awesome power of God.

This is the God who spoke, let there be light. And there was light. He only needs to speak things into being.

So the raging against him will end when he speaks. And as I read that, I remember the story that Pastor Moss always tells.

[24 : 58] I don't have any similar stories, so I'll tell his story again. He always used to remind us that he had a hard mouth when he was in school. And he wouldn't back down from anyone.

And then he says, you know, once he sees BJ coming around, his mouth got even harder because he saw his big brother there. And he knew he had to back up. But the passage reminds me of that. We have the ultimate big brother. We have the one who holds the universe in his hands. Who is the almighty God. He is on our side.

Ultimately, it is God who is our fortress. And this should give us confidence and give us peace. He is the one who protects and defends us.

And the psalmist is very descriptive about this God. He doesn't use a generic term and just says, God will leave you to wonder which God he's talking about. He says, the God of Jacob is our defender.

[26 : 02] And this leads us to our third and final point, which is the proof of God. Verse 7 acts as sort of a transition.

It gives a hint to what is about to come in the following verses. See, at this point that the psalmist is writing, this is not the first time that the people that he's writing to are having an experience with God.

They've had a history with God. And this God revealed himself over time as the God of Jacob. God had a history with these people and they already had some experiences through which they knew him.

So the psalmist is pointing to that God who they knew. That God who had already delivered them time and time again. The God of Jacob.

Beginning in verse 8. The psalmist invites us to behold the works of the Lord. And he wanted to look on God's work as proof of who he is.

[27 : 17] The God of Jacob has revealed his power and his will through his works over time. Specifically, we are told to consider how God has brought desolations on the earth.

And we should not look to random calamities for this. We ought to consider the disasters, the desolations in regard to God's promises to his people.

We ought to consider them in regard to his clearly stated purposes. His deliverance of his people. And his judgment on those who rage against him.

So we shouldn't look at just random calamities or disasters. Where we don't really know or understand why they happen. But we should look at them in this context.

So we can consider, for example, the history of Jacob's descendants in Egypt. And we can recall the desolations that God brought on Egypt on their behalf.

[28 : 26] As Egypt defied God. God gave his stated purpose in the case of the enslaved people of Israel.

He looked on their circumstances. And he spoke in Exodus chapter 6. As Pharaoh's heart was hardened, God said to Moses, Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh.

For with a strong hand, I will send them out. And with a strong hand, he will drive them out of his land. So Pharaoh, in this case, symbolizes the might of nations in opposition to God.

And God's people. We can recall how Moses, representing God's voice, went to Pharaoh time and time again. With the phrase, let my people go.

And Pharaoh would reply, who is God? That I should obey him. So in human terms, Pharaoh had no reason to let the Israelites go.

[29 : 33] He had no reason to fear the person or the being they call God. Pharaoh had at his command the mightiest army on the earth. He had chariots.

He had spares. He had bows and arrows. He was in a unique position to wage war. But the problem is Pharaoh did not understand with whom his fight was with.

Pharaoh didn't understand that his fight was not with the Israelites, who did not have weapons to fight against him. But it was with the supreme being of the universe.

It was with the God of the universe who breaks the bow and shatters the spear. The God of Israel burns the mighty chariots.

So here we can see the intervention of God in these things. Where we are powerless to influence them or to change them. And we can infer that where there is peace on the earth and a cessation of war.

[30 : 43] It's God's intervention that brings it about. So in the case of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The Lord pronounced judgment on Egypt.

And through the desolations of locusts, water turning into blood, boils, and many others that culminated with the slaying of the firstborn of the Egyptians.

God delivered his people. So the point of all that is this. In life, if we live long enough, we're going to be guaranteed to have difficulties.

And those are our storms. Our figurative storms. And many times we will come up against storms and against enemies that are far bigger than ourselves.

It will be so big that we have no hope, humanly speaking, of coping with them. Of overcoming them. But we must remember that we don't stand on our own.

[31 : 49] But we stand with one who fights for us. And if he declares our deliverance, we are assured that we will be delivered. Let's look at verse 10.

Verse 10 is unique in this chapter. Throughout this chapter, we are reading the psalm that's speaking to us.

We are reading the third person. And all of a sudden in verse 10, it switches to the first person. So here we have God speaking to us directly.

And all of scripture is God speaking to us. But in the context of Psalm 46, this is a unique address of God to us.

Because it is different from every other verse that we've read so far. This is God's declaration to us. When we face our storms.

[32 : 54] And when we face insurmountable odds. Be still. And know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations.

I will be exalted in the earth. That is God's clear and unequivocal pronouncement. That's his promise to the believer.

And as I prepared, I was reminded of many people in our congregation who have various needs. Many of us are walking through storms.

Or have walked through storms. And I thought of my own storms. And my need to trust God in those situations.

And so personally, I can tell you that when you sit down with your wife and you have to tell her that you have a heart problem. And it's going to take months and months of seeing a doctor and a course of treatment.

[34 : 01] And it's going to take many, many exams and tests. To me, that's a storm. It's a real storm. And it's one that I didn't go through alone.

But I went through it with my entire family and my extended family. Brothers and sisters at church. And when you think about it, if you put yourself in that situation, how do you deal with a storm like that?

When you're talking about your body, how do you will your heart to beat more? Or to beat stronger? How do you will your heart to pump more blood to your veins? How do you make it more efficient?

And yes, we could talk about diets and we can talk about exercise.

But in the end, the truth is, it's really out of your hands. You have to trust God. You have to put your trust in the sovereign God of the universe.

[35 : 08] He alone can do the work that you need in that situation. And there are many others of us who are facing either similar storms or storms of some other kind, but it's a storm.

It may be financial storms. It might be a storm with a relationship. But we face our storms. But we face our storms. So when we face those storms, when it's bigger than we are, let's be reminded that the sovereign God himself fights for us.

He's brought about our salvation. And he will care for us. He will sustain us. We have to be still and leave it in his hands.

As verse 12 says, it's the God of Jacob who is our fortress. And the psalmist, again, refers to the God of Jacob, again directing us to the proven God, again giving proof of God.

We are to recall all the things that he has done for his people and know that he will do it for us as he declares. So we started in verse 1, and I actually want to go back to verse 1 for just a second to point out something that I think goes along with verse 12.

[36 : 44] Because the psalm is written in an interesting way. It's written almost like two bookends or like a circle. It starts in one point and comes back to the same point.

And I thought it might be better to point out this thing at the end of verse 12 rather than at the beginning of when we started. So if you look at verse 1, God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

If you look where it says present help, if you have the ESV, you'll see a note B or some other note.

And if you look in the footnote, you'll see that present help can also be translated proven help.

Again, we're looking at the proof of God. The psalmist is emphasizing that our hope is not based on just blind trust.

Instead, our faith is informed by the many proofs that God has given us throughout the ages. He proved himself with the plagues of Egypt.

[38 : 02] He proved himself by parting a red sea. And then we can look to the experiences of being kept in the wilderness where the children of Israel were preserved from thirst and preserved from hunger.

And we can look at a fiery furnace. We can look at a lion's den. We can look at the slaying of giants. That's the proof that God has given us.

That he declares deliverance for his people. And he brings it about. And then God gives us our own experiences. Whether it's a situation with our health or our finances or something else.

As we walk with God. He will reveal himself in personal ways to us. That he delivers. That he keeps us safe.

Keeps us in his care. When we're in the midst of storms. And when our enemies attack us. So brothers and sisters, the sovereign God of the universe fights on our behalf.

[39 : 13] He holds us in our care. And when we face the insurmountable odds. And when we face the storms that are much bigger than ourselves.

That are sure to destroy us and wreck us. At that moment, let's remember the words of Psalm 46. Let us be still.

Let the Lord work for us. Let us see his deliverance. Let's pray. Our God and our Father, we thank you for your care.

Lord, we pray that we will always remember that you have promised. That you will sustain us. With a river that brings peace to your city.

That calms us. For us. Lord, we ask that you would remind us afresh. That the work of your salvation is your work alone. It's not of us.

[40 : 19] And just as we trusted you, Lord. To give us your eternal life. We can trust you to keep us in life. And into eternity. We rest ourselves in your care.

And pray, Lord, that you would give us this lasting peace. That rests on us now. And into eternity. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.