

A Mighty Fortress is Our God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, turn back with me to Proverbs chapter 18, page 541 of your church Bibles. I'll read again the three verses I want to focus on this evening, this afternoon.

Verse 10 to verse 12, where we read that the name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous man runs into it and is safe.

A rich man's wealth is his strong city and like a high wall in his imagination. Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honour.

If any of you have ever had the privilege of visiting the small East German town of Wittenberg, you'll know that literally you get off a fast, very fast German train and you step back 500 years.

You go back, as it were, you step back into the past and you go to that town that was so central to the reformation of the church. That town where Mark Luther famously posted his 95 items for dispute, that 95 items for debate, that, as you know, were called the 95 Theses as he posted them on the castle church door.

[1 : 2 2] And, of course, that event that would trigger the reformation of the church according to the authority of Scripture and not according to the authority of man.

That church where Mark Luther posted these 95 items for debate, well, attached to that church is a large tower, the tower that dominates the small town.

And, well, you can't miss it. You see it from miles around. It's really quite spectacular when you walk up the street and you see this tower right ahead of you.

Anyway, the top of the tower, the very, very top of the tower, encircling the tower are words in German. Words from Mark Luther's great hymn, A mighty fortress is our God.

In Festerburg ist unser Gott. It's like great acclamation that in God is our true security. In God, and not man, is our true strength, our true safety, our true security.

[2 : 3 3] It's not in the church per se. It's not in man. It's not in riches. It's not in power. But God, in whom alone you find your refuge, your strength in all times, in all circumstances, but especially in times of trouble and danger and distress.

And whether it's 500 years ago at the time of Mark Luther, when of course there was that trouble, that danger, the danger of a corrupt church, that church that was negating the pure gospel of the Lord Jesus, or whether it's today in today's ever-increasing secular world, that we're secular humanisms threatening the freedom of Christians to speak and act according to Scripture.

We still have the same principle. The principle that your true, our true, my true security is in God. And that is utterly relevant and pertinent for believers today.

It was when it was first written, first even written in Scripture here. And, you know, we're going to look at that truth as it's spelled out in this little group of Proverbs, verses 10 to 12, where we see really three great truths concerning the security that the believer finds in God and in God alone, as opposed to the false security in anything else that's not God, not the one true God.

So three things, you can see them in your notes there. The believer's refuge as opposed to the fool's folly, and I've put the relevant parts of Scripture where we see that, verse 10 and verse 11, the first part of verse 10.

[4 : 22] And then secondly, the believer's security as opposed to the fool's, well, maybe vulnerability, even fool's danger. Again, you see verse 10 and verse 11, where these principles apply.

And then the third point, the believer's safety as opposed to the fool's danger. So first of all, the believer's refuge as opposed to the fool's folly.

One of my favourite psalms is Psalm 46. We've sung the first part just a moment ago. We'll sing the second part at the end of the service. I'm sure many of you know the older version of Psalm 46, but the words are the same, the very opening words of Psalm 46.

You know them. God is our refuge. Then you might ask, well, what precisely do we mean or is meant by that great statement of truth?

God is our refuge. What's it about God that makes him our refuge? Why is it God who's our refuge and not something or someone else?

[5 : 30] Well, this proverb helps us to see what it is in the nature and character of God that makes God a refuge.

When we see that God is our absolute safety and security to all who put their trust in him, especially, as we said, especially in times of trouble.

And what is it about God that's our refuge? Verse 10 tells us. It's his name. It's his name. The name of the Lord is a strong tower.

His name. The name of God. You find your refuge. And now you might be thinking, of course, well, how does that connect? Why his name?

Why doesn't the verse simply say, God is a strong tower? Because, no, we're told here the name of the Lord is that strong tower, is that place of refuge.

[6 : 31] Well, let's work it out from Scripture that interprets Scripture. Because when we think of God's name, God's name summarizes everything that God is.

God's name tells us about his identity. It tells us about his character. It tells us about all that he is, the one true God. And you find that in Scripture.

You find it when God makes himself known through his name. God making his character known by his name. God making himself known by his name that, well, that gives the believer, gives you that absolute confidence that you can trust in God as you know his name.

Well, we can, as I say, we can find the evidence for this in Scripture, that revealing of God's name that tells us, his character, God's character. We see, well, let's look at two examples.

Let's look at God's self-revelation in the book of Exodus. Exodus. And two occasions when God met with Moses. The first time when Moses was about to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, that you read off in Exodus 3.

[7 : 43] And the second time when God met with Moses after the Israelites had, remember they'd made this golden calf that they worshipped. And you find the second time God making himself known by his name.

You read that in Exodus 34. So, let's look at the evidence from Scripture concerning God's name. Exodus 3. I'm going to read verses 13 and 14.

Then Moses said to God, If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, What is his name?

What shall I say to them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. He says, Say this to the people of Israel. I am. I sent me to you.

So, there's Moses facing the greatest challenge of his life. I mean, God's asked Moses to confront Pharaoh. God has asked Moses to be his messenger, to declare to Pharaoh that the children of Israel must be allowed to leave Egypt and leave the land of oppression and go to the land of promise.

[8 : 56] Moses is afraid. I mean, first of all, how can he convince the Israelites that it's really God who's called Moses to do this task, to go to Pharaoh and declare that the people must be let go.

And Moses anticipates that the Israelites are going to ask him a question. And they're going to ask him a question concerning the name of God. What is the name?

What's this name? What's the name of this God who sent you? In other words, is the God who sent you the God who can be relied on?

I mean, if you say that God has called you to lead us out of Egypt, can you assure us that God really is the God whom you claim is the God of our fathers?

So, they're saying, what's his name? What's his character? Can we depend on him? The name will tell us. That name that you give us, and that name will tell us if he is the God whom we can trust.

[9 : 57] If he is the God who will bring us out of our troubles. And God declares his name to Moses. I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel. I am who has sent me to you.

And that's where you see the words of the passage here in Proverbs. It can be seen in all the relevance. If God has made himself known by his name, I am.

What does that tell us? It tells us that he is, that he exists. And it tells us also that he's eternal. And so, if he exists, since he exists, since he is eternal, well, he's never abandoned his people.

And that means that he'll be utterly committed to all who are his. Now, bring that to yourself. Doesn't that truth give you that confidence to find your refuge in the God who is?

The God who is. The God who's real. The God who alone is God. The God who's utterly committed to his own. The God who's utterly committed even to you as an individual.

[11 : 06] Even to his church here on earth. And remember this. You who know the Lord Jesus as your Savior. Well, you have the full revelation of God in Jesus.

Remember what Jesus said to his opponents who were questioning him? Jesus said, you read in John 8, 58, Before Abraham was, I am.

Now, when Jesus uttered these words, the Pharisees thought he was blaspheming, making himself equal with God. using that expression of God's name. But there's no blasphemy.

The Lord Jesus is the Son of God. He is equal with God and power and glory. So when Jesus says, Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I'll give you rest.

Do you have that confidence to find your rest in him? Do you have that confidence that, yes, he truly loves you? Do you have that confidence? You who put your faith in him, Do you have that utterly assurance that, yes, you can go to him who calls you to come to him?

[12 : 12] And you find your refuge in him. You have that absolute confidence in God. And again, you know, I think we'll look at one more example just to, you know, confirm what we've been thinking of the name of the Lord that is that strong tower.

When we think of God and his faithfulness to his people, We mention a second example when God met with Moses after the Israelites had made the golden calf. And remember Moses had taken the stone tablets in which the Ten Commandments had been given and Moses broke them.

And they will be renewed. The tablets will be renewed and God meets with Moses. And let's read Exodus 34, 5-7. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with Moses there and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children's children to the third and fourth generation.

God's name revealed in his character. The name of the Lord revealed in what God has given to Moses. Now, of course, even that passage itself is a sermon in itself.

[13 : 41] But you know, when we're looking at this in relation to the text here in Proverbs, you can see how the name of the Lord is that strong tower. However, the name of the Lord is that refuge that you access by faith.

I mean, if the name of the Lord, if the name of the Lord tells of his character, well, you know him as Lord, as the covenant God, as the God who's faithful, God in whom you can find your refuge in time of trouble, in your time of need.

Maybe when you're attacked by sins within and you come to the God who you know in his faithfulness will forgive you your sins. Or maybe when you're being attacked, as it were, from outside, when the forces of evil just seem to be too strong, when they seem to almost overwhelm you and overwhelm the church.

Well, cling to the Lord. Come before him, as his name tells us. He is that refuge in which you find that rest, that strength. Because the name that God made himself known to Moses tells of who he is, how he is as God.

And if he's merciful, then you know that his name tells of his mercy, then you know that you can find your mercy in him. Yes, when you succumb to sin. Remember the parable that Jesus taught when the tax collector found that confidence to pray to God.

[15 : 06] He said, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. Remember that tax collector knew the God of mercy. He cried out, Lord, be merciful to me. And I mean, if the name of the Lord tells of his being gracious, then when you seek that grace to be gracious, when you seek grace in your life, then you run to the God of all grace.

Grace to love others. Even when they're attacking you for your faith. Grace to love others. Grace to love others. Even when fellow believers in the church are hurting you through, whether it be malicious gossip or pain or whatever.

Seek the grace to love from the God of all grace. And you know that God's name tells of his being slow to anger. That he forgives iniquity and transgression and sin.

You have that confidence to find refuge in him when you confess your sins before God, knowing that he is the God who forgives your sins.

So the name of the Lord is that strong tower that you come before him when trouble afflicts. And of course, you come to God through the name of Jesus.

[16 : 20] Think of the name of Jesus. That name that speaks of salvation. Remember when Jesus' birth was announced, you shall call his name Jesus for, because what his name tells us, he'll save his people from their sins.

We have a communion service in a few weeks' time. You know, always at the end of a communion service, I don't care if it's tradition, we do it, and I think it's important to do this. But you know, at the communion service, we need to remember the Lord's death till he comes.

What do we sing at the very end of the service? We sing from that psalm that tells us, his name forever shall endure.

We remember the death of the Lord Jesus. That death that's won life for you who united him by faith. And you've recalled the cost of your salvation to what Jesus has done for you on the cross.

And so you'll sing of that name, that name that means everything to the sinner who's cried out for mercy and grace and forgiveness. And you'll praise him with these words from Psalm 72, his name forever shall endure.

[17 : 30] Because you know that you've found refuge in the Lord. His name itself tells you of that love of God in the Lord Jesus.

That tells you of what Jesus has done for you in his love, in his loving kindness, in his mercy towards you. And that surely is the solace of the person who's wise in Christ.

But not so the person who doesn't know the Lord Jesus. Because look at verse 11. A rich man's wealth is his strong city.

I mean if the wise man finds his refuge in the strong tower that's the Lord, then as the proverb shows us, the opposite is found in the person who's not wise.

Who finds his whole refuge in his riches. When riches become the idol of the heart. When riches are considered the refuge in times of trouble.

[18 : 32] You know the more riches that a person has, the more inoculated against the troubles and dangers of life. Of course as you know it, that's a false premise. What did you read just a few days ago in the tabloids?

It's the happy couple with the little babies. All because they've won a million pounds in some. I don't know how they won it but anyway. You know this was to show that somehow this young couple are secure for life.

Whether it's a million or a hundred million. Whatever the million pounds won't give eternal refuge. Of course let's get the balance. Let's get the scriptural balance here. Of course we give thanks to God.

When he gives, when he blesses people with riches. When they're used for the glory of God. Where would this building be?

Where would this church be? Were it not for the generosity of people from 40 years ago. Who actually sacrificed to pay for this building. The man, for ministry itself.

[19 : 34] Where would mission be under God's sovereign care? Were it not for supporters who give generously out of their riches? As I mentioned this morning I was at the Christian Institute meeting in Edinburgh.

And much was discussed there. But one thing that was discussed was court cases. And particular individuals having to stand before courts.

It's like when employers have tried to punish Christians for their stance and biblical truth. And as Nigel Kenny was telling us. That there are these very generous supporters who will help pay the legal costs for those who are being put before the courts.

Simply for standing for scriptural truth. And of course who wrote this proverb? Solomon. Solomon himself knew immense wealth. But that's not what the message is about here.

It's when wealth becomes the focus. Your focus of refuge. You know when riches are equated with true satisfaction in life. But that's outside of the God who provides.

[20 : 43] It's outside of the God who is our true refuge. You see what Solomon's warning against. Is idolatry that gives no eternal blessing.

That gives you no eternal refuge. It's only God who's our strong tower. Only he who's the almighty can give you that refuge in times of trouble.

And if that's the case. Well the next part of the proverb there in verse 10. Well it follows suit. The righteous man runs into that strong tower. And then we'll contrast that with the foolish person for whom.

It says here his wealth is like a high wall in his imagination. So our second part the believer's security. As opposed to the fool's vulnerability.

You know it's one thing to know God. It's one thing to know that God is a God of mercy and grace. That knowledge of God as a God of mercy and grace. It's one thing to know that God shows his loving kindness and faithfulness towards others.

[21 : 52] You know it's one thing to know of God who promises his people a refuge in the storm. It's one thing to know about the name of the Lord. Even one thing to know that the name of Jesus means salvation.

But it's quite another thing actually to come to him. It's quite another thing even to run to him. And to find refuge in his love. But that's what the righteous do.

As we're told here. Those who by grace. And of course you who know the Lord Jesus. A saviour. You know him. You don't remain detached from the saviour.

You'll run to him. Why? Because you know that he gives you that security. That running. In fact notice it's running into. Not just running to.

But running into. That strong tower. Not running into. Because that speaks of your recognising who it is that you trust to protect you.

[22 : 51] You have that full confidence. That he's not going to turn you away when you come to him in faith. You're safe. Safe in him. Why? Because of who he is.

His name tells. As we said of his character as God. The Lord. So you run. That sense of need. That realisation that you're protector is there waiting for you to come to him.

I remember many years ago. When I was one of a team of leaders. Leading a school trip to. Amongst other places to Paris. And we were at Montmartre. And I remember some of the pupils became very frightened.

When strangers started to approach them. And approach them in a very kind of menacing way. And I still remember this. That the pupils actually. With several other teachers. They actually came running towards us.

And they kept shouting out. Our protector. Our protector. Well. We were their first port of call. As their protectors. And they felt. I trust in a way. They felt secure.

[23 : 54] Amongst the small group of Portree High School staff. Well how much infinitely more. Is it God. Who's. Your protector. My protector.

Your shelter. My shelter. In the storm. Our high tower. Our mighty fortress. Because he is the one in whom you have.

That absolute security. From. From the ravages of Satan. From. From the real dangers to your soul. Well run to him. That urgency of.

Of running to your. Your Lord. Your saviour. Your protector. And that wisdom. That wisdom. In running to the Lord. Of running even into that strong tower.

Again you see the contrast there. With the. Foolishness of those who find their. Their eternal security. In their wealth. As verse 11 tells us. You know. Seeking your security.

[24 : 49] Enriches. As the verse tells us. Is an imaginary. Security. You see the contrast given. Look at. Look at the way that. The. The. The. Solomon's written this. If God the Lord.

Is a strong tower. What does the foolish man see? He sees his riches. As a strong city. But there's one strength.

That's real strength. There's another strength. That's an imaginary strength. God's strength. Is real. God's strength. That's. Is that strong tower. That's sure. The other strength. The imagined strength.

the strength of riches is an illusion yes of course riches give you an earthly security no amount of money can buy eternal security only the Lord God gives you that security yes we speak of his riches but the riches of his grace that's the security that you need that's the security mankind needs not earthly riches and yes as I said before we expand yes we rejoice in the blessings that God gives and the earthly resources that help you provide for your family for home, for shelter for food, for clothing I'll be thankful for these gifts that God gives you but as far as your eternal security is concerned as far as your spiritual well-being is concerned as far as your eternal well-being is concerned there's no imaginary security found in God you're safe in him he's called you by name because you're safe in the name of Jesus and so well we need to really bring this all all to a close and as Solomon does here in our third section the believer's safety as opposed to the full danger

I mean again look at how verse 10 gives it to us in chapter 18 verse 10 the name of the Lord is a strong tower the righteous man runs into it and is safe but look at the next verse verse 12 before destruction a man's heart is haughty is high we'll see how the two connect think of this sense of safety we live in a world where I think it's almost gone to extremes you know health and safety you know even gone to and it's important of course it is but at times there are even ridiculous lengths to ensure protection from the littlest possible danger but there's nothing ridiculous about the safety for the Christian because there are dangers all around dangers all around to your soul to your well-being as a believer and if you don't flee from these dangers in such misery and pain of heart when you don't find your refuge in the name of the Lord but the person who does run to the Lord the person who does find the safety in the name of the Lord you know that great blessing that only comes when you turn to God when you approach Him with that urgency and you find your true safety in Him

[27 : 59] I don't think we speak often enough about the Christian safety you know okay we can speak like this in a sermon address but you know what about your everyday conversation you know tell one another of that protection that God gives you yes from the harm of sin from the harm of the evil one from the harm of all who would seek to damage and destroy you because of your holding to the one true faith well you know that safety that's yours in the Lord Jesus you have been saved saved saved kept safe that's safety that keeps you that's safety that guards your life that's safety that ensures that you cannot be snatched from the hand of the Lord when you've run to and face you see the alternative to safety in the Lord the alternative to be safe in the name of the Lord is danger and destruction as verse 12 tells well the first part of verse 12 before destruction a man's heart is haughty and again it's very clever how the passage shows us this the righteous man runs to the Lord the righteous man has every confidence in the Lord and he knows because of that he's safe but notice the word that's used here about safe about safety there at the end of verse 12 it's a word that actually can be exalted exalted above your enemies so that they can't attack you anymore so you're exalted in safety but the foolish person who doesn't run to the Lord he faces destruction why?

because he's placed his confidence in himself why? because his heart he's exalted his heart we're told here his heart is haughty and that man's safety is an illusion because he's not taken as the next part of verse 12 shows us he's not taken the way of humility he's not come before God in humility and depended on God for his safety he's not come dependent upon his saviour for protection and we have then here the wonderful assurance of the love of God for undeserving sinners you run to him you find your refuge your security and your safety in him just take that to heart that's such a wonderful assurance and again think of this sense of being exalted being safe what does God's word tell you?

those who honour God he will honour you who put your trust in him you're promised that you will be exalted you'll be raised to glory yes you'll be given a place of honour in Christ that royal status being a priest in the kingdom for lord and saviour Peter wrote that in 1 Peter 2 9 but you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession exalted in Christ and so the question I leave you with this evening is this have you run into that strong tower have you run into that strong tower that is the name of the Lord that name that's above all names yes that name that one day every knee will bow when the Lord Jesus returns do you find your refuge in him do you find your true security your eternal safety in him are you still relying on other things maybe immaterial things are you relying on yourself as your saviour because these are just paper saviours false friends that save nobody but only

God only God the Lord only he whose name is holy whose name is precious whose name gives you that sure confidence of your salvation only he can truly satisfy and protect you from all harm and danger to that which is most precious to your very soul so come come to him run run to the God of all grace run to the saviour run to the Lord Jesus and your promise that you will be exalted and blessed and you'll know the love of God in your life as you trust him as you keep on trusting him as you trust in his name and so may the name of the Lord be praised amen let us pray oh Lord our God we give praise and thanks that even we can utter your name your name that tells of your faithfulness of your goodness of your loving kindness of your grace of your mercy

Lord we thank you that we have that access to you who are our strong tower that we can sing that you are a refuge and strength that you are our very present help in time of trouble oh Lord we thank you that you do call us to yourself and may it be Lord that your people here even this week will know that you are that refuge that strong tower that fortress oh Lord we thank you for these promises of your care over your people may we never hesitate to come to you at all times so hear us as we continue to sing to you of our praise before you we pray these things in Jesus name amen well let's close in psalm 46 again psalm 46a on page 60 and we'll sing from verse 8 to the end of the psalm come see the works the lord has done the judgments he commands the desolations he has brought to pass in many lands and again the verse 11 the refrain the lord almighty is with us to strengthen and sustain for jacob's god our strong defense and fortress will remain 8 to 11 to god's praise thank you thank you