

God is our Refuge

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[0:00] Let us now turn to the passage of truth that we read. The book of Psalms and Psalm 46. Reading again at the beginning of the psalm, 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.

First of all, by way of introduction, A word about the background and the structure of this psalm. I think I can make the statement safely, without contradiction, That the church or believers do not live in an ivory tower.

We are not immune from the difficulties and the troubles of life. And this psalm, this psalm of praise, speaks of times of trouble.

But it also sets before us the confidence of faith, In a time of extreme trouble.

[1:30] It was a psalm that was apparently a favorite of Martin Luther, During the dark and dangerous periods of the Reformation.

Times when he himself was given to bouts of discouragement and depression. And in these times he would turn to his friend and co-worker, Philip Melancon, And say, Come, Philip, let us sing.

Psalm 46. His version of the psalm, Is not what we have in the Psalter, It was a hymn based on Psalm 46.

And the first verse in particular of Luther's hymn, Is probably closest to the original. A sure stronghold, Our God is he, A timely shield and weapon, Our help he'll be and set us free, From every ill can happen.

And the reason that he gave for singing this to the praise of God, Was that he believed God was with them.

[2:49] And that he powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends his church, And his word, Against the implacable hatred of the devil, And against all the assaults, Against all the assaults, Of the world, The flesh, And sin.

Well, in looking at the background to the psalm, The key is to be found in the title to the psalm, To the choir master of the sons of Korah, According to Alamoth, A song.

It was meant to be sung, And to be sung to music. And I have to say that although, This is the key to the background, It would be conjecture on my part, To be precise as to the nature of the troubles, That are spoken of in the psalm, Or the troubles that are the background, To the composition of the psalm.

There are a couple of views, That are put forward by commentators, But my own personal view, Is that it is difficult to be certain, As to the precise events, That lie behind the trouble, Of which the psalm speaks.

The first view is based on events, Recorded in 2 Chronicles, Chapter 20, Where you read of the destruction, Of the armies of Ammon, Moab, And Mount Seir, During the reign of King Jehoshaphat, In that narrative, It is not the fighting skills, Of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, That bring about the defeat, Of the invading armies, But the soldiers of Ammon, And Moab, Turn against the soldiers, From Mount Seir, And you have them, Fighting against each other, Destroying themselves, So you read in that chapter, When Judah came to the, Watchtower of the wilderness, Or the place, As it might be translated, That overlooks the desert, They looked toward the horde,

[5:19] And behold, There were dead bodies, Lying on the ground, None had escaped, In that chapter, You find the sons of Korah mentioned, Celebrating, God's promise, Of deliverance, And some would argue, Strongly, That that is the background, To the composition, Of Psalm 46, Others, And, I think it would be fair to say, That many of the commentators, See the background, Based on the narrative, Recorded in the second book of Kings, Chapter 18, And chapter 19, And there, The narrative speaks, Of the forces, Of Syria, Of Sennacherib, Surrounding Jerusalem, And how the field commander, Of Sennacherib, How he boasted,

That none of the nations, Were able to stand, Against the, Assyrian armies, Again, Through divine intervention, There is, Almighty carnage, Hundred, And eighty-five, Hundred thousand, Assyrian soldiers, Perished, Most, As I say, Seem to think, This is the, Background, That lies behind, The composition of the psalm, Personally, I find it difficult, To say, But what does come across, Is that the, Composition of the psalm, Sets before us, A real experience, From the very, Crucible of life, Believers experiencing, An extremely, Turbulent providence,

In the real world, It's not, Merely, Theoretical, It's not language, That is spoken, In a vacuum, In such, Turbulent, Providence, Faith states, God is our refuge, And strength, A very present, Help, In trouble, And it appears, In the psalm, That there is, The expectation, Of deliverance, But there is also, Anticipation, Of further, Great trouble, If you look, Further down, In the psalm, The nations, Rage, The kingdoms, Totter, That is, Opposition, To Zion, You may read that, As opposition, To the church, Of Christ, In the world, And then, Further down, It speaks, Of wars,

It makes wars, Cease to the end, Of the earth, He breaks the bow, And shatters the spear, He burns the chariots, With fire, The language, That you would associate, With times of war, And times of battle, And, That is true, Right, To the present out, We are aware, Of war, Amongst the factions, In the Middle East, Drawing in, Other nations, Into, The conflict, That has lasted now, For several years, The fight against, ISIS, The heightened tensions, Over North Korea, With threats, Of the use of armament, Even nuclear armament, But, This factor, Remains a constant, It does not change, For the believer, God, Is, A stronghold, And looking at the structure,

Of the psalm, You might have noticed, That, The word, Selah, Occurs, After verses 3, 7, And 11, The most I can tell you, About that little word, Is that it possibly, Indicates a pause, In the music, Or a pause, For contemplation, In other words, Let what has been said, In each section, Let it sink in, Before proceeding, To the next section, The first section, From verses 1 to 3, Could be, Could be, Said to, To, To, To speak, Of God, As the protector, And sustainer, Of his people, In face of all, And any calamity, The second section, God, The protector, And sustainer, Of the church, In the face of all,

[10:25] Opposition, And the third section, God, The victor, Over all his enemies, In the world, One final, Comment, On this, Part of the introduction, And structure, It's well worth noting, That this psalm, Speaks, To an exclusive people, It speaks to those, Who are in a covenantal, Relationship, With God, It is, The God of Jacob, Who is their fortress, That is stated twice, In the psalm, One preacher, Of a past age, Gave an outline, Of the psalm, Something like this, One, The challenge, Of confidence, Two, The secret, Of confidence, And three, The vindication, Of confidence, But I'd like to present, Just a thought or two, From the first, Three verses, Of the psalm, And the first,

Point I'd like to highlight, Is that there is, A declaration, Made, How the psalm begins, God is, And then there is, A description given, God is our refuge, And strength, A very present, Help in trouble, And then finally, There is a deduction, Formed, Therefore, We will not fear, There is a declaration, Made, God is, Don't you just love, How, The psalm begins, The psalmist, Is not seeking, To enter into, Debate, About, The possibility, Of the existence, Of God, He's not interested, In having a discussion, To, To, To, To prove, That, That God is, Nor, Should we, Set out to prove, That God is, Are,

We are in danger, Of walking into, A philosophical maze, From which we cannot, Extricate, Ourselves, The Bible is content, Always, To set before us, The existence of God, And as the, Psalmist, Contemplates, The possibilities, Of tremendous, Upheaval, And the ensuing, Trauma, In a world, Full of troubles, He begins, With this, Changeless, Unalterable, Fact, That God exists, Reminds you, Of how the writer, Introduces, The very first book, Of the Bible, The book of Genesis, In the beginning, God, We live, In uncertain times, We don't know, The changes, That may take place, That may take place, Currently, We are on the eve,

Of local elections, We are in the run up, To a UK wide election, We are facing Brexit, In some shape or form, Or so we are told, Are these the things, That ought, To fill our mind, The possibility, Of many changes, Should our mind, Should our mind, Not be focused, On the reality, Of an unchangeable God, Although there might be, Cataclysmic change, In our world, So that the apparent, Immovable, Becomes movable, Though the mountains, Be moved, Yet, The language of faith is, God is, And the action, Of faith, The writer, To the Hebrews, Tells us, In chapter 11, Without faith, It is impossible, To please him, For whosoever, Would draw near, To God, Must believe,

What? Must believe, That God exists, He is, In other words, Faith acknowledges, A present God, One who can only, Be compared, To himself, You cannot compare, To any other being, Self consistent, As well as, Self existent, And remember, The picture, That is painted, For us, Of the sovereignty, Of God, In Psalm 2, Where the psalmist, Speaks of leaders, And governments, And even peoples, Colluding in opposition, Against God, And he is anointed, And the psalm, Shows us, How God laughs, In derision, At the efforts, Of puny man, Plotting to overthrow, The rule of God, It is an impossibility, It cannot take place, God, Will forever reign, God,

[15:30] Rules, And you remember how, John the apostle, Was given that vision, In chapter, 4 of Revelation, Where he was, Shown the open door, And the occupied, Throne, In heaven, Well, Here, It is, This very God, Who is held up, In the prophecy, Of Malachi, As the source, Of encouragement, To our covenantal people, Where even Israel, Has been disciplined, For sin, I the Lord, Do not change, Therefore, You, O children of Jacob, Are not consumed, All that he is, From eternity, He is now, At this very moment, On this very evening, God is, Now, Is that for you and me, A comforting truth, Do you doubt, The existence,

The existence, Of God, Have you been plagued, With doubt, As to whether, There is a God, And long ago, I was having a conversation, With, An elder, Who shall remain anonymous, And I am not going to tell you, What even area he was from, And, He was telling me, How he was plagued, With this, Doubt, That there is, No God, And I was trying to help him, In his dilemma, Because, A thick blackness, And darkness, Had enveloped his mind, And his heart, As he reflected upon this, He wasn't finding, Any comfort, In the fact, That there was no God, But, He was being tempted, Down that road, That there is, No God, The psalmist, Doesn't have this dilemma,

He doesn't have, This dupeity, In his mind, He doesn't have, This doubt, God is, That ought, To be cause for praise, But yet, Unless, We appropriate, By faith, The God, Who is, We will not derive, Comfort, From his existence, The devils, Believe, In the existence, Of God, And they tremble, But they don't derive, Any comfort, From the fact, That he exists, We have to trust, In the self-existent, God, To enjoy, The comfort, That is to be derived, From the existence, Of this omnipotent, Power, And that brings me, To my second point, The description given, God is our refuge, And strength, A very present help, In trouble, I think I ought to say, That this description, Is not an exhaustive, Or comprehensive, Description of God,

I'm not sure, That any description, Of God, Could be said, To be exhaustive, And comprehensive, Because of the very, Nature of God, But this description, Is surely one, Of the most comforting, Descriptions of God, In troublous times, It is not speaking, Of God, In general, But in times, Of trouble, And the word here, That is translated, Trouble, Implies, Times of, Deep distress, And anguish, Times of, Severe, Affliction, In, Daniel chapter 12, At that time, Shall arise, My hill, The great prince, Who has charge, Of your people, And there will be, A time of trouble, A time of tribulation, Such as, Never has been, Since there was a nation, Till that time, That is the,

The essence of the word, That is translated here, As trouble, A time that causes, Exceeding deep distress, And anguish, Of soul, And so, The Bible assumes, That the believer will, Have days of trouble, Call upon me, Says the Lord, Through the psalmist, In the day, Of trouble, So there, Is the assumption, That you will, Have times of trouble, That you will not, Have a trouble, Free existence, As you pass, Through life, It will be a fallacy, An extreme fallacy, To be persuaded, That you wouldn't, Have trouble, As you go through life, You will have trouble, And the Bible, Assumes it, And it exhorts you, To call upon God, In the day of trouble, Because, He, Is your source of help, There is no one else, Who can really help you, In the day of trouble, Except the one, Who encourages you,

[20:35] To call upon him, In the day of trouble, Again, You find the psalmist, Say, In, In, In the day of trouble, I seek the Lord, When, When he calls to me, Says God, I will answer him, I will be with him, In trouble, That's the promise of God, And, You notice, In that context, In Psalm 91, When he calls to me, I will answer him, I will be with him, In trouble, Who is in trouble, The very one, Whom you might expect, Not to be in trouble, The one, Who dwells, In the shelter, Of the most high, Who abides, In the shadow, Of the almighty, And if you thought, That anyone, Might be excluded, From trouble, It's the one, Who dwells, Under the, In the, In the shadow, Of the most high, And who abides, In the shadow, Of the almighty, Even in such, August places, If I can put it like that, You are not, Exempt,

From trouble, Because the lot, Of the believer, In the world, Is to go through, Flood, And fire, And you remember, How, The believer, Pray, So Lord, Be our salvation, In the time, Of trouble, And you might be saying, No, But, But that just refers, To old testament, Times, Surely that's not true, Of new testament, Believers, Well, What do the apostles, Teach, Encouraging, Those of the new testament, To continue, In the faith, And say, Through, Many tribulations, We must enter, The kingdom of God, In other words, Tribulation, Tribulation, Is a feature, Of old testament, A new testament, Life, Of believers, Therefore, The apostle, Exalts, Believers, To be patient, In tribulation, So, What does this psalm, Teach us, When, Lest we be,

Overwhelmed, And discouraged, By such talk, Of trouble, Well, You notice, What it teaches, In this very first, In this very first verse, The God who is, Is, The refuge, What is, A refuge, Can we not say, That it is a place, Of quiet retreat, From every danger, A place, To be safe, A place, That emphasizes, The certainty, And comprehensive, Nature, Of the Lord's ability, To protect, His own, Unlike those, Who have taken refuge, In the lie of idolatry, And are swept away, By God's wrath, He is always a refuge, For those, Who, By act of will, And demonstration, Of personal faith, Make him, The refuge,

Psalm says, But for me, What is, What was good for him? It was good, To be near God, I have made, The Lord God, My refuge, God is a place, To be saved, From every, Gathering star, He provides shelter, Notice by the way, This expression here, It is that, God himself, Is the refuge, It is not that, He provides, A refuge, That would be wonderful, It is not even, That he gives us refuge, But that he himself, Is the refuge, The one, In whom, Believers, Sheltering, We take refuge, In him, It is not merely, The provider, Of our shelter, He is our shelter, He is our refuge, And so, This speaks of the security, That we are, That we gain,

Because God, Is our defense, And the psalmist, Doesn't stop there, God is our refuge, He says, And he is our strength, And the Hebrew word, That is used here, Translated strength, Is a very flexible word, In the original language, And, It could be understood, As, Pointing to God, As the source, Of inner strength, And courage, You know how, The apostle Paul says, In writing to the Philippians, I can do all things, Through, Through him, Who strengthens me, But, Although it could be, Translated in that way, I would like to suggest, That it means more than that, That this means, That God, Is the one, Who is strong, When we are weak, Well, Why do I say that?

[25 : 35] Well, When you look at verses, Two and three, Perhaps you'll understand, If verses two and three, Are happening, It frankly doesn't matter, How strong you are, If the world, Is being moved, From out under your feet, Doesn't matter, How strong you are, You know, People who are in earthquakes, And who speak of experiencing, Earthquakes, While the earthquake lasts, They are incapable, Of doing anything, The world is moving, Under their feet, And there is a very real, Truth, In that, That happens, In other ways, It doesn't have to be, A physical earthquake, In the world, There can be, Earthquakes in your life, There can be, Earthquakes that, Confront you in life, Because of the, Particular providences, That you pass through, And it's as if, The world, Is moving from under your feet, And you feel helpless,

And paralyzed, And incapable of action, And you don't know, What to do, You see, It doesn't matter, How strong you are, When that takes place, You are helpless, You need someone, Infinitely stronger, To take care of you, If the world, Is being moved out, From under your feet, And that's the picture, I believe, That the psalmist, Setting before us here, In verses 2 and 3, And so, The psalmist is reminding us, That we have that, Someone stronger in God, He is our refuge, And our strength, He is strong for us, When we are weak, And unable to meet, The challenges, Of present circumstances, And is that not, The story of our life, Are we not always weak, Perhaps sometimes, We feel strong, Perhaps sometimes, We feel like impetuous Peter, When he declared, Whoever, Whoever denies you,

I will never deny you, Then we are confronted, With our own helplessness, And our own weakness, And reminded forcibly, Of how weak, We really are, And how we need to cling, To the one, Who is infinitely strong, And who is able to uphold, And to sustain, He is our safe retreat, He is the immortality, Of the rock, In whose cleft, We might shelter, Safe, Unsecure, Just like, The churches pictured, In the song of Solomon, As the dove, In the cleft of the rock, In a place, Of safety and security, Safe, From the storms, Safe, From the turbulence, Of the winds, That gather round, In the cleft, Of the rock, How do we know, That place for ourselves,

And he is thirdly, A very pleasant help, He is, Says the psalmist, Exceedingly near, In time of trouble, You know, Be near to us Lord, Is a prayer, That we often, Offered, It's a biblical prayer, You're not denying, That, That, That, That God, Is omnipresent, But you're acknowledging, The special truth, Of your need, For the nearness, Of God, In troubled times, And that's, Surely what has been, Spoken of, In the psalm here, You know, Sometimes young children, On dark nights, Sometimes, They feel afraid, And sometimes, You might feel a tug, At the clothes, And you'll find, A child there, Can I climb into bed, With you, I'll be able, To sleep better,

If I'm with you, In bed, And you know, That is, Something, Of what, Is, Is being stated here, Where, The people, Of God, The children, Of God, Seek, Special nearness, To the heavenly father, And to the elder brother, In times, Of trouble, You know, In Psalm 23, How, The psalmist speaks, How David speaks, In Psalm 23, Of, Of the Lord, Being his shepherd, And so on, And he speaks, Of how, The Lord supplies, His need, How he lies down, In green pastures, And how he's led, Beside still waters, And how he's restored, And he's, Speaking of God there, In the third person, He leads me, He leads me, He says, He makes me lie down, He leads me, He leads me, In paths,

[30 : 43] Of righteousness, But you notice, When he's walking, Through the valley, Of the shadow of death, And he says, I will fear no evil, For you, Are with me, There's a change, From the third person, To the second person, It's as if, The psalmist is saying there, That he senses, The exceeding, Nearness of God, To him, And especially, In the valley, Of the shadow of death, It's as if, God himself, Is standing, By his side, And the psalmist here, Is celebrating that truth, He is our very, Present help, In other words, He's not an indifferent, Bystander, He knows your pain, He knows your trials, He knows your difficulties, He knows the turmoil, In your soul, And he's not indifferent, To these trials, And these tribulations, He is one,

Who has your best interests, In view, This is what he is, At all times, And he will fulfill, His promise, For all the promises, Of God, Find their yes, Where, In Christ, Says the apostle, You see, The psalmist is aware, Of the special nearness, Of God, In troubled times, So he rehearses, As it were, These truths, About God, To encourage his faith, So that he trusts, In the living God, In the midst, Of the traumatic, Circumstances, And now he draws, For us, This catastrophic picture, And just, Briefly, The deduction, He formed, Therefore, He says, We will not fear, And this seems to me, To be the logic, Of faith, When you look at, Verses two and three, It's a picture, As it were, Of the world, Falling apart, Remember in Genesis one,

In the creation narrative, God divides the land, From the sea, And here we see, The land, Being as it were, Convulsed, And been thrown, Into the midst, Of the ocean, Thrown back, Into the sea, And the psalmist, Has said, We will not fear, Though the earth, Should change, Though the mountains, Slip into the heart, Of the sea, Though its waters, Roar and foam, Though the mountains, Quake at its swelling, It's almost, An apocalyptic, Description of the whole, Natural order, Been turned upside down, The disruption, Of the earth, The relocation, Of mountains, The disturbance, Of the seas, And think of what, He is saying here now, Because, What are the, The most, Permanent symbols, In our physical world, Not the earth, In which countless, Myriads of people, Have lived, And walked, And have cultivated, And they have passed,

Out of life, Yet the earth, Remains, The earth, Remains, Oh how often, Perhaps even at a very, Local level, Crofts and boundaries, Have been the cause of, Ill feeling, Between neighbours, And the neighbours are gone, And the earth remains, And the boundaries are there, And the people are no longer, There, Who disputed, The ground, That was there, The earth remains, And so it will remain, Until the final day, That God has appointed, And what is more durable, And lasting, Than the majestic, Mountain ranges, As you look at them, And you remember how, How the Lord, Uses this, As an illustration, Of his own, Covenant, Love,

And kindness, And he speaks, Through the prophet Isaiah, The mountains may depart, The hills be removed, But my steadfast love, Shall not depart from you, That's the promise of God, These things may take place, That seem, Almost incapable of happening, But my covenant love, Will never part from you, That is the promise, Of a covenant, Keeping God, The earth remains, These mountains, The ebb and flow of the sea, Again a symbol of permanence, And so the psalmist depicts, For us sheer, And utter cares, Where all that appears, Stable and unchanging, Has gone into free form, Perhaps some of you, Maybe all of you, Have heard the name, Elizabeth Elliot, She lost her first husband, Jim Elliot, In Ecuador,

[35 : 49] He was killed, By the native Indians there, When he was trying, To reach them, With the gospel, And she remarried, And her second husband, Addison Leach, Was, Died of, Of cancer, And in relating, These experiences, She referred to this psalm, Saying that in the first shock of death, Everything, She said in my world, That seemed most dependable, Has given way, Mountains are falling, Earth is reeling, The seas are falling, In an irregular way, Oh, In such a time, A profound comfort, To know, That when your world, Is crumbling, And falling apart, There is one, Who is not, And that is the God, Who is, And the psalmist, Is resting, In this God, He is running to God, And it's in time,

Of trouble, That we run, To God, The righteous, Run unto the Lord, It's in troublous times, That they run, To the Lord, They acknowledge, His control, Over all circumstances, And all of these troubles, Are small, In comparison, To the hugeness, Of the living God, And His power, To address our troubles, And to remedy our troubles, And provide care for us, In the midst of all, Our difficulties, Remember what the author, In the right letter to the Hebrews, Says in chapter 12, At that time, His voice shook the earth, But now he has promised, Yet once more I will shake, Not only the earth, But also the heavens, This phrase, Yet once more, Indicates the removal, Of things that are shaken,

That is things that have been made, In order that the things, That cannot be shaken, May remain, Therefore he says, Let us be grateful, For receiving a kingdom, That cannot be shaken, Let us offer to God, And we offer to God, Let us offer to God, Acceptable worship, With reverence and all, For our God, Is a consuming fire, And it seems to me, That the psalmist, Knows this, And he knows, That no matter, How bad things look, His God is greater, And his God, Has purposed, To shake the things, Which can be shaken, In order to make firm, The things, Which will last forever, And by his mercy, He has chosen, Sinners like you and me, So that you too, Will not be shaken, There is a declaration made, God is, Reaffirming the existence of God, There is a description given, Of God being a refuge, And a stronghold, A present help in trouble,

A deduction is formed, Therefore, We will not fear, Not because, He is foolish, Or limited in his vision, But because his vision, Is the vision of faith, And he is resting, In the power, Of an omnipotent, Under gracious, Under merciful God, Is not you and me tonight, Let us pray, Amen, Amen,