

Psalm 46

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[0 : 00] Psalm 46, the passage that we proclaimed together as a church family earlier this morning.! As we continue our second of four sermons in this series, every tear and trial, how Christians walk with Christ through suffering.

! Your whole world can change. And the time it takes to speak a single sentence. That's true for good news, right? Sentences like, will you marry me? Sentences like, you're hired, things like that. You change a lot of things. It's also true for bad news. With sentences like, your test results are in. And they're positive.

Or, we need you to come down to the police station. Sentences like, there's something wrong with the baby. Or, I'm not happy. I want a divorce.

I think we can each fill in some of the sentences that have changed our lives. Sentences like these are world-altering moments.

[1 : 23] And Psalm 46, the psalm that we have already read together as a church family, is about what the people of God do in that moment when the bottom falls out.

Right? Verse 2. 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.

That's language about the bottom falling out, right? The earth gives way. Everything is falling apart for the psalmist. And psalmist just means the person who wrote a psalm, right?

The mountains are thrown into the sea. His world is in an upheaval. In the ancient world, the sea was the great unknown.

It was unpredictable and a source of danger. And so when he speaks of a raging, foaming water, he's talking about his and our uncertainty.

[2 : 33] In the midst of that moment's chaos, which I think Sue just shared very clearly with us, our suffering brings to us great uncertainty.

These are the images of our world. Verses 2 and 3. As we know it, coming undone. And among our church family here today are people who know what it's like to have their world come undone, to have the ground you thought you could stand on come unmoored.

And our God does not dismiss that. He doesn't gloss over it. His word doesn't just give us, you know, sympathy sayings and quips for our real hardships.

The first thing he does is he acknowledges our real, earth-shaking troubles. The Lord doesn't sit in heaven, far off, unconcerned about our suffering.

Last week we saw his invitation to us to come to him and to honestly express our sorrows about our suffering and to pour out to him just what that pain is doing to us.

[3 : 57] And then he gave us somewhere to stand in the midst of the upheaval, reassured and resting on his past faithfulness. And this week, in Psalm 46, the Lord once again acknowledges the magnitude of life's troubles.

They can be so destabilizing. It's as if the very earth gives way around us. And where last week we looked at the past, today he directs us into the present moment.

Whereas verse 1 says, God is our refuge and our strength. A very present help in times of trouble. This psalm is for right now. The present moment of suffering. We aren't looking back. We aren't looking ahead to the future. It's not that God was our refuge or that we can look forward to him being our refuge sometime in the future.

We walk with God today in this moment of pain. In fact, if you look at this psalm, verses 1, verse 7, verse 11, the beginning, the middle, and the end of this psalm speak one message.

[5 : 21] The Lord is with us. He is present with his people. That's what this psalm is all about. So if your earth is giving way and you're in pain right now, this passage is for you right now.

And if the Lord has blessed you in this moment with peace, Psalm 46 is a preparation for you for the day you need it, for the day the bottom falls out. And for all of us, it's a reminder to walk with God each day.

God is present for these weighty things. Isn't he present in every other circumstance? And this is the single most, the single most important thing about your heart when it comes to your own suffering.

More than the sermon we preached last week and more than the following two. This is the one. In the moment of trouble, do you go to God for refuge?

In the moment of pain, do you run to him for comfort? Or do you run somewhere else? To distractions? To things that numb your pain?

[6 : 42] Anywhere else? The question really is, in your suffering, do you act like a Christian who runs to God?

Or an atheist who runs anywhere else? If you run to refuge, run to God for refuge and strength, you'll find a very present help.

Time of trouble. But if you don't, you're on your own. It's just you and your pain. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, will you help us glorify you by finding in you a refuge, a strong tower, and help in our time of need.

We pray that in the name of Jesus Christ, our King. Amen. One writer put it this way, the problem is not that we feel troubled by trouble and pained by pain.

[7 : 56] Something hurtful should hurt. The problem is that we push God away into irrelevance when we obsess over suffering.

We make God a vague afterthought, weightless and distant in comparison to the thing immediately pressing upon us. Is that true of your experience?

It's often true of mine. I let the thing that is hurting me fill my whole view and I push God to the back of my mind, not in the present moment.

And so our task today is to look at Psalm 46 and ask these questions. When the earth gives way, when tragedy and suffering and trouble make everything come unmoored, when disaster threatens us, how is God a refuge?

In what way is he present? The answer comes in verses four through six and it is unexpected.

[9 : 07] 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.

How can that possibly answer the questions that we just asked? That verses one through three invite us to ask?

How is that the answer? How does this help us figure out how God is a refuge? How does it show us the way he's present with his people in the midst of their turmoil?

Because it sure doesn't sound like it at first. First, let's figure out what this city is. What city are we talking about?

[10 : 10] Often, in the Bible, the city of God has something to do with Jerusalem. But that's probably not the city we're talking about here. Why not?

I like how one pastor kind of put it to his congregation. He said, Pop quiz. Name the river. Verse four. That flows through Jerusalem.

Trick question. There isn't one. Jerusalem sits on top of a hill so there is no river running through it. This isn't Jerusalem.

But scripture is full of a city. City of God with a river running through it. and he shows it to us every once in a while.

We'll see it in Ezekiel chapter 47. We see it in Zechariah chapter 14. We see it in Joel chapter 3. We see it finally in Revelation chapter 22.

[11 : 19] Revelation chapter 22 verses 1 through 5 say, Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the city through the street of the city also on either side of the river of life the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit yielding its fruit each month.

The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him they will see his

face and his name will be on their foreheads and night will be no more they will need no light of lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever.

I hope you can see the connections between Psalm 46 and Revelation 22 the city of God a river running through that city God dwells there the city is blessed because of his presence nothing can disturb that city because God protects it.

These are pictures of the same city. Pop quiz not a trick question where in the Bible is Revelation 22?

it's very end. It is the final chapter. After God has defeated all his enemies after he has brought his people into his city wiped every tear from their eye and celebrated his wedding feast with his bride the church this is the city.

[13:04] What does that mean? It means that if they're a picture of the same place that Psalm 46 verses 4 and following is a picture of heaven.

Now if you're following along that might not make a whole lot of sense because again we started asking questions like how is God a refuge while the earth gives way?

How is God present in that moment? How does God help us while the sea rages around us? And then he points us to heaven. How does a picture of heaven answer any of those questions?

When the mountains fall we need a refuge today not in heaven on the last day. When the storms rage we need help today not after the storm has drowned us and sent us to heaven.

Right? To answer that question we see that verses 4 through 6 don't stand by themselves.

[14:13] They're kind of your Bible probably has them grouped together in verse 7. This is the chief glory of Psalm 46.

If you see this you will have the greatest comfort the world can know. Psalm raises the question in verses 1 through 3 how is God present in our troubles?

And then it shows us a picture of heaven in verses 4 through 6 and then it tells us in verse 7 that God is with us. The chief glory of this Psalm friends is heaven is not a far off hope.

the part that counts God with us is already a reality for the people of God. Heaven has come near.

We might not yet reside within that city's gates but the king who built its walls and gives it life left the city and came for us and dwells with us and he brings his comfort with him.

[15:34] And so we can say verse 7 the Lord of hosts is with us. Present tense. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Present tense. Heaven has drawn near. our father in heaven did not say I'll send my son to bleed and to die and to rescue sinners back to me and I'll promise to spend eternity with them and then finish that with you know I'll see you when you get here.

when I put an engagement ring on Aaron's finger I didn't say alright I'll see you in a year at the altar. Anyone let her out of my sight right? The whole time and incidentally Friday was our 10th anniversary and that's what verses 4-7 show us.

To answer our question how is God a present refuge it's answered in two parts. One heaven is our great refuge and two heaven has come near. Our great hope and our great comfort is this the God who by his presence makes heaven heaven is with his people today even when the earth gives way around us.

[17:16] That is the great glory of this psalm. Only one question remains how do Christians respond to that? How do we receive those comforts?

Because until we connect to that it just remains an interesting idea doesn't it? We find the answer in verses 8-11. This brings us our first instruction if you're paying attention.

Until now Psalm 46 has exclusively been a reminder to us. God is with us. The earth gives way God is with us.

There is a perfect place in a heavenly city and he is with us. It's only now after we've heard that message again and again that we're given anything to do.

The only two commands in the psalm come to us in verses 8 and 10. Let's start in verse 8. Come behold the works of the Lord how he has brought desolation 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 suffering has a way of filling our whole view we can't tear our eyes away from it when you get the cancer diagnosis it's all you can think about it distracts us it grabs hold of all of our attention we become students of our own suffering and grief and what does beholding our trouble do for us do to us well not only does focusing on it give us no comfort it also magnifies the injury in our own eyes

when we point our eyes solely at the parts of the earth that are giving way we don't even see the parts that still stand fast but

[19 : 48] God has something else for us to do the psalmist invites us commands us to look at God specifically to look at God in his power and his justice and his majesty and for his end goal peace why when the earth is giving way all around you you need to know you need to be certain that the God who is with you is powerful he can break the bow of suffering when your suffering comes in the form of evil right cancer is a natural sort of evil but there are other kinds of suffering that come from human sin and in that moment you need to know that he cares about justice he shatters the spear the weapons of war and when your suffering brings you low because it does you need to know that the one who stands by your side is high and exalted this is a testament to his majesty and when your troubles be they grief or evil or loss or anxiety or pain or conflict when they war against your soul you need to know that his aim is peace he makes wars cease!

to the end of the earth and right on the heels of that first command comes verse 10 how near is the Lord how near is he he is so near that he interrupts the song look at verse 10 who is now speaking in verse 10 be still and know that I am God I will be exalted among the nations I will be exalted in the earth the Lord of hosts is so near at hand so present to his people he taps the psalmist on the shoulder and says let me speak directly to my people in their moment when the earth is giving way when the bottom falls out

I'll take it from here and he directs us he addresses us directly now and what does he say he takes verse eight behold God and his works and he says here I am we not hearing it from a third party have you heard the Lord he's near he shows himself to be a very present help and speaks directly to us and what does he say he's emphasizing what the psalmist has already said in verse eight first he says be still it's as if he's saying will you quiet your mind and tear your gaze away from the turbulence of your troubles and set your eyes on the solid rock you'll find stillness amid the chaos I do not change you'll find glory in the face of ruin my majesty does not end and the rest of this interruption this interjection that he puts to us has to do with his majesty he says I will be exalted it says two things I think first it's a comfort that even through this moment that is filled with falling mountains our God will be victorious the world will one day see his glory so we need not fear the war is lost if our present battle isn't going well we will be victorious because he will be exalted and second more importantly I think it prompts us to praise and he says I will be exalted among the nations I will be exalted in the earth I think that's pretty clear indication that it's where we're to go as well it prompts us to praise but praise why praise in the midst of our suffering maybe no more than ever when it is most difficult to praise him that's exactly what we need suffering brings you low praise brings us to the very courts of heaven take your heart to the highest height rejoice!

in God suffering means the earth gives way so suffering tears away as it were this world's mask that mask that says that everything here is solid and worth fighting for and what we should ultimately value praise instead sets our eyes on the king who is secure who will be exalted in all the earth why praise well suffering narrows our gaze to the point of the pain right it narrows our gaze it's the only thing we can look at and that becomes our whole world but proclaiming his worth that's worship expands our view again and reminds us of the joy and the glory that our trouble has pushed out of sight why praise suffering isolates us but beholding our

[26 : 31] God reminds us that we are not alone he came for us in the past he promises to be with us in the future and in this present moment he promises he interjects first time that he is with us the great question is how do we do it right this sounds good this sounds uplifting too but but any any any any any I think it just means stop what we're doing, which is probably cementing our eyes on our own suffering and beholding the works of the Lord and turning our hearts to praise.

I think that comes to us in three ways, three ways to actually get our eyes off of our own troubles and into the praise, which glorifies God and restores our soul.

It starts actually with what we spoke about last week. Last week, he invited us to pour our hearts out to him.

This week's the reason that we can. He's near and he's attentive. That actually makes last week's sermon, I hope, make more sense. We won't go to God and cast our cares on him if we don't know that he's a present help, that he's willing to hear.

And both of those truths are front and center here in Psalm 46. And this is a help for us. Pouring our sorrows out to God is a help to us when we can't get our eyes off of our sorrow.

[28 : 53] If we can't take our eyes off the suffering, go to God with that suffering. That's the way we enter into his presence and begin to shift our weight and move from eyes solely on the suffering to moving our eyes to the God who is present and near.

Make the burden, the trial, the pain, the stress, the things that press on us, make that the content of our prayers.

Suddenly, we're not alone with them. Suddenly, we're with the God who is near. He is a present refuge today because we can go to him with our burdens, hearing our cries.

In the prayer is the first way he's a refuge to us, his children. His listening ear is a refuge in that moment. And since we're weak and can't tear our eyes off our pain, it is a kindness from our Heavenly Father because taking the things that we can't get our minds off of to him are that entry point into beholding him.

This is that first step into stilling our hearts and knowing that he is God. And we actually begin to turn our minds and our hearts towards obedience to that command.

[30 : 21] Be still. Know that I am God. Beholding his glory instead of our pain, which is, in fact, the second thing to do. Behold God and his works.

That's what verse 8, that's what verse 10 are all about, the two commands in this passage. Now, there is no way to behold his works and know him as God, as he commands here, apart from the word he has given us to do that very thing, to reveal himself to us.

It shows us his work in its histories. It shows us his good heart in his law. It shows us his love for us everywhere, but especially in the Gospels, where he walked among us.

So, friends, if you are not much in the word, you are not going to be able to behold him, to know that he is God, to be comforted by who he is in the midst of your storm.

There's nothing I can do beyond point you to his word and say, will you see him here?

[31 : 49] This is the God who is near to us, revealing himself to us. If you need a comfort in time of suffering, if you need a refuge, there is only one, and his name is the Lord, and he has chosen to reveal himself to his people in his word.

So, first, cast your cares on Christ. Let him be a present refuge. Let that be the entrance point on taking our eyes from the thing we can't tear them away from into his presence.

Pour them at his feet, as we said last week. And while we're there, by going to his presence, we can take the thing that we can't get our eyes off of into his throne room, and then we're standing in his throne room.

And then we behold his glory. We do that chiefly by reading the word that he has inspired to reveal himself to us. And the third thing is we pay very careful attention to this particular passage in his word.

We see one last thing that helps us to divert our gaze. From pain to glory. And live in the fullness of the comfort that he offers.

[33 : 21] Consider the form of Psalm 46. What do I mean by that? Psalm 46 is not a letter written to me privately.

Privately. By myself. Right? Look at verses 1 and 2. This is a reading for the whole gathered people of God.

God is whose refuge and strength. God is our refuge and strength. a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way. This Psalm does not happen without the people of God gathered together to worship the king.

God expects us What does that tell us? God expects us to receive this message of his nearness and his refuge as a church family all together pointed at him.

[34 : 36] So the last help for tearing my eyes away from my own suffering and beholding God and taking refuge in him through praise the last help in that journey is that others minister God's word to me when I can't take it in myself.

Those three things result in praise. Entering his presence with my true lament and when I've taken my lament into his throne room I'm standing in his throne room so I can behold his glory especially as he has revealed himself in his word.

And then by giving myself to the ministry of the church others can minister scripture to me when I am weak. But I must be involved and invested in the life of the church.

I must be part of the community or that facet of his help to us is lost to me. If you want to see this in action check out Psalm 63.

We won't be preaching it in this series but basically David follows this same pattern. In a time that he calls a dry and weary land he does two things. He beholds God's power and glory in the sanctuary that is he goes to church.

[36 : 15] He's with the gathered people of God and then he meditates on God privately and that results in his life in a heart of praise towards God which that heart of praise is a comfort to him in that dry and weary land.

So God has said all these things to us he has in verse 10 been so near that he interrupts the psalmist what does the psalmist say in response verse 11 the only thing he can say the Lord of hosts is with us the God of Jacob is our fortress God has not abandoned me in my troubles he has chosen to walk with me through them that's why Psalm 23 says even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me friends I hope this has stirred your heart to love this Lord who is so near that he interrupts to speak into our lives but I can't offer you this refuge this peace this hope and this help unless you've already been reconciled to Christ if you have not repented and believed and trusted in Jesus his work bearing your sin on the cross and rising to new life paving a way for you to go to heaven to be with him forever this is not true of you yet we saw the heavenly city in verses 4 and 5 the city and the river of life that verse 4 talks about is unveiled again for us in Revelation the first time it comes to us is in actually

Revelation 21 verses 5 and 6 and this is if you've not received Christ if this present help can't be yours yet this is his offer he who was seated on the throne that is Jesus said behold I am making all things new also he said write this down for these words are trustworthy and true and he said to me it is done I am the alpha and the omega the beginning and the end to the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment he offers all this refuge to us without payment it is not something we can buy anyway even if we tried but he offers it to us without payment why because he paid for it we can access it without payment of our own because Jesus made the payment it was his blood spilled for us at the cross friends let's pray

Lord we thank you