

Psalm 46

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[0:00] Let us pray. Father, thank you for the beauty of this day. Thank you for your love for us from eternity past. Thank you for filling us with your Holy Spirit and gathering us here to worship you this morning.

As we open your Holy Word, would you speak now by the conviction and comfort of your Holy Spirit, Lord. May you do a mighty work in our lives, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

You may be seated. If you would open up to Psalm 46, page 471. We're in a little five-week series in the book of Psalms. It's kind of like the prayer book of the Bible.

It was the prayer book of Jesus when he walked the earth. I like to think it's still his prayer book in heaven now. And it's the prayer book of all who follow Jesus.

And Psalm 46 in particular is designed to help the people of God cling to God through their troubles. Sometimes we go through things individually that are pretty tough, and we need the people of God to support us, to surround us, to walk with us.

[1:21] But we especially need to know that the Lord is our shepherd, and God's going to support us, and walk with us, and guide us. So that's why last week we were looking at Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. But there are also times when we go through things as a community.

We go through things as a church, or as a nation, or as a culture, and we can only go through them together. And we need to know that God is for us collectively. And that's what Psalm 46 is all about. It says, God, in verse 1, is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble. So Psalm 46 is designed to help the people of God cling to God through their troubles, and it does this in three ways.

So these are the three points. Number one, it reminds us of God's protection. Number two, it refreshes us with God's presence. And number three, it reassures us of God's power.

So let's begin with a reminder of God's protection. This is verses 1 to 3. They're all about knowing God is our refuge and our strength and our help when everything around us seems to be unraveling.

[2:28] So it's a very simple structure to these verses. Verse 1, God is dot, dot, dot. Verse 2, therefore we will not fear dot, dot, dot.

Even though things are looking pretty bad. It's a simple structure. God is our shelter and our strength and our protection. Therefore, we will not fear even though things are looking pretty bad.

That's it. And it's interesting because this reverses the normal sequence of our personal prayers, right? Normally, we start with our troubles and then we ask God for help. Trouble, trouble, trouble, Lord, please help.

I'm not the only one, right? And there's lots of psalms like that. Like next week, we're going to read a psalm like that. That's not a bad way to pray. But Psalm 46 moves in the opposite direction.

It starts with who God is and then says, let's let that guide how we face the troubles of our day. The troubles in our life. In other words, Psalm 46 trains our hearts to think of our troubles from the perspective of who God is.

[3:36] Rather than trying to think about who God is from the perspective of our troubles. And there's a big difference between those two. Now, this doesn't mean that the psalm belittles our troubles because it's really honest about there's some really big things happening in our lives and in the world around us.

If you look at verses 2 to 3, it gives this poetic picture of all creation descending into chaos. So verse 2, though the mountains be moved, it says, 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 rage and foam, and though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

In the ancient world, the sea was an image of chaos. It was unpredictable and it was untamable. And mountains were an image of stability and strength.

You cannot move the mountains. And so here we have the image of the mountains tumbling into the sea and trembling before the sea. In other words, it's saying everything that was once stable in life is now unstable.

Everything that was once dependable is now no longer dependable. And it feels like the world is in upheaval and it's being turned upside down. Have you ever felt that way?

[4:51] I mean, how many of you just reading the news headlines this week felt that way? Like everything is changing and there's nothing solid to hold on to anymore.

Or the image I thought of this week is like being, trying to swim in a turbulent ocean and the swells are so big that when you're at the bottom of the swell, you cannot see the horizon in front of you. See, here's the upshot of Psalm 46. It's saying that although all the cards can be completely stacked against us and although we might have every earthly reason to fear, genuinely fear, we will not fear.

To which I say, really, in what universe is that true for me? How and why is that possible?

And the simple answer is because of who God is. See, the reality is that nothing in our lives can keep us from fear. And nothing in the world can relieve us from our fears.

[5:50] God alone has to do that. So let's look at verse 1 for a second. Straight out of the gate, we're told that God is our refuge. This is imagery of finding a shelter in a storm or finding a shield in the midst of battle.

We're protected. We have a place of safety. And then it goes on and says, not only is God our refuge, but God is our strength. And I love this because it says, not only is God going to protect us, but God is going to internally strengthen us.

And we need that because we're weak, right? Like our spirits easily crumble in crisis. Is that you? Is that just me? Like, you know those moments when things are so intense, the pressure builds so much, and you feel like it's too much. Your body gets tense.

Your mind goes on high alert. Your heart is anxious. Your energy is sapped out of you. You grow tired and weary, and you lose, you run out of ideas and creativity. And you're weak, and you need strengthening.

[6:57] You don't just need protection. You need strengthening from the Lord. And the psalm starts off by saying, God is our refuge, and God is our strength. And then it goes on and says, he's also a very present help in times of trouble.

Very present means he's readily available. This is the readiness of God to help us. His attentiveness to us and his eagerness to be there for us.

I mean, there's enough in one verse to sustain your soul through life's fiercest drought or storm, right? Isn't it marvelous? It's just so good. I thought about preaching a whole sermon on this one verse and not going any further, but I won't do that to you.

But I just want to pause here for a moment because you see that little word, *selah*, that comes at the end of verse 3? And then it comes up two other places. A lot of scholars don't really know what that word is about, but the best guess is it probably means something like pause.

What you've just prayed and what you've just heard is so significant, you need time for it to go from your head to your heart. So stop for a moment and soak in it.

[8:03] So I want to ask you a few questions. What is the trouble that you see unsettling the world around you right now? What are those troubles that loom large in the world you inhabit?

And which of those troubles is unsettling you most? Like which of those things when you read in the news headline or you wake up in the morning or you go to bed at night is looming largest in your heart?

And if you don't know what that is, I just ask you, what are you afraid of right now? Like what are the fears that you would wake up in the morning on your heart and mind if that's the case for you?

Because that's probably an indication of what's settling for you.

And where are you turning for refuge and strength and help in the midst of that? Where are you turning? Because the Bible is very clear on this point.

Anything you turn to for ultimate refuge and protection other than God, it's called an idol. And it's only going to breed more fear and uncertainty in your life if you're committed to that idol.

[9:07] Because it can't deliver the refuge and security that your heart so deeply longs for. And so the question we have to ask ourselves is, how am I tempted to look elsewhere for protection other than God himself?

What are those things for me? You know, for some of us, it's the bank account or it's our securities or our investments or our pension or our property.

But the reality is, is that money can't protect us and we all know that. It can't shield us from heartache or failure or sin. And even, you know, the greatest economic, just a simple economic disaster could take it all out.

And markets could crash and pensions can run out and bank accounts can dwindle. Money cannot be our security. Houses can't be our protection. Other people think that they'll have protection or security because of their specialized training or their skills or their personal talents.

Like, we're smart and we're savvy and we know it. We can figure out how to get through this situation. But even the best educated and the most highly skilled people, they can suffer reversals of fortune, can't they?

[10:14] I mean, I've known plenty of CEOs in my life that have gotten fired. They didn't expect it. I've known plenty of PhDs that are experts in their field and can't find jobs.

They didn't expect it. Still others expect security from family and friends and business connections. These are all good gifts from God, but ultimately they are uncertain as well because family members, man, family members can die.

Friends are flaky. Business connections can erode. Psalm 46 says, in the midst of this world, you do not need to be afraid because you have a refuge.

You have a protector. You have a mighty fortress who is your God. So Psalm 46 begins by saying to us, remember that God is your protection.

Remember. Then it moves on in verses 4 to 7 to say, I want you also to be reassured that God is with you. God is present. Now, it's interesting in this section because the nature of the troubles is gaining a little bit more clarity in this section.

[11:31] It seems like there's a global crisis going on. So if you look at verse 7, it says, the nations rage and the kingdoms totter.

And in the beginning of this verse, the nations rage echoes the very beginning of Psalm 2. Psalm 1 and 2 are like the introduction to the whole book of Psalms and they set the theme. And at the beginning of Psalm 2, it asks the question, why do the nations rage?

Like why in the Middle East? Why do they rage? Why do the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth, says Psalm 2, set themselves together. The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed, the Lord Jesus Christ, saying, let us burst their pawns apart and cast away their cords from us.

So what's the image that we have here? The nations are raging. It's an image of all the leaders of the world gathering together and gathering all their top leaders together, like in the oval offices and parliament buildings and all these sorts of things.

[12:36] And they're trying to figure out how are we going to organize our nations? How are we going to lead our nations? And they're trying to do it in such a way that forgets God. So God's word and God's ways are seen as shackles of slavery that must be broken and must be cast off in order for the nation to truly be free in all that the nation was meant to be.

It's the illusion that we can have security and life and greatness as a nation apart from God. And as you can imagine, if a nation is organizing itself this way, it's not going to be a very stable nation.

If we lose our spiritual anchor, then morally, politically and economically, we're going to be an unstable place. And it's into this experience, this image of the nations raging and tottering and being unstable, that Psalm 46 gives us the image of a river.

God's presence with his people is like a steady flowing stream from a river. There's something so lovely about this image.

I love it. I have fond memories as a child of playing in little streams and trying to build dams and stop the water. I never did. Never did, which is a good thing for this image.

[13:57] God's river cannot be hindered. But note the juxtaposition here. The nations are raging. Power, might, anger, war, control. And yet God comes to his people like a stream from a river, steady and gentle and faithful.

Isn't that lovely? Here, it's not God is a raging river who's going to overpower his people with more power than the nations have, although he could do that. It's more like God's going to nourish his people with a refreshing stream that's going to bring them to light in the midst of the difficulties that they're facing.

Psalm 4 and 5, look at it with me. It says, There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God. Probably a reference to Jerusalem in the Old Testament, but a reference to the church and the people of God today.

The holy habitation of the Most High. That's the place where God dwells. Verse 5, God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved.

Note that little word, moved, because this whole section hinges on a word play. Hard to see it in English, but it's there in Hebrew. And it begins in Psalm, in verse 2.

[15 : 08] The psalm uses the same word to describe the mountains being moved into the sea. In other words, mountains are crumbling. And then later on, in verse 7, the psalm uses the same word to describe kingdoms tottering.

Literally, kingdoms moving. Kingdoms crumbling. And then right in the middle, in verse 5, the psalm uses the word, God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved.

So here's the point. Mountains crumble. Kingdoms crumble. But the people of God will not crumble. Why? Because God is with us.

And his presence with us brings a sturdiness and a steadiness to our lives that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. God's presence is the only source of true stability in an unstable world. Friends, isn't that good news? Isn't that good news? I mean, when I look at the news headlines, I try to keep track of what's going on in the Middle East. Let alone China.

[16 : 15] Let alone south of the border, my beloved people. Who are so troubled right now. It's hard to keep track of it all. Let alone trying to keep track of the complexity of the global economy.

You pull on this string and this shows up. And you pull on this string and this shows up. Or the changes in tariffs and taxes. Or the wars and rumors of wars in places you've never heard of. Add to that the massive technological revolution that we're living through.

Sparked by AI. And we haven't even begun to wrap our minds around what that means. And there's whole economies and groups of jobs that people are wondering, is this going to exist in three years from now?

There's massive instability everywhere. What Bob Dylan said, right? Times are changing. Well, they are. Now more than ever. Or as much as ever. And Psalm 46 is asking us, where are you going to find your source of stability in the midst of it all?

Not just where are you going to find your protection and trouble, but where are you going to find your source of stability and security in the midst of instability? There's one person who said, finding ultimate refuge and stability in God means you become so immersed in his presence, so convinced of his goodness, so devoted to his lordship, that you find even in the darkness of the world, it's a perfectly safe place to be because God is there with you.

[17 : 47] You see, brothers and sisters, this isn't just some abstract notion. This is a deeply relational thing. To know this security and stability, you have to know God. Because you're not going to know the outcome of your life.

You can't even predict what tomorrow is going to bring. But you can know God, who is the same yesterday and today and forever. And so are you turning to him as your source of security?

Are you running to him when you feel unstable? Are you looking to him as the one who will bring you refuge and protection and a very present help in times of trouble?

I love the fact that the image of God's presence here isn't just an idea in the Bible. It's a living person. So you know the very first pages of the New Testament when the angel announces to Mary, Jesus is going to be born.

What's the name that's given to Jesus? It's Emmanuel. God with us. That's what, first thing that the angel wants us to know about this child.

[18 : 54] And then when Jesus calls his disciples to follow him, what does he want them to know? He says, Look, where two or three of you are gathered together in my name, I'm going to be there in your midst. I want you to know that I'm going to be with you when you gather.

And then on the other side of the cross in the resurrection, when he's about to go to heaven and be at the right hand of the Father, he's sending his disciples out into the world to live their ordinary lives

in mission for him.

And he says, Behold, I will be with you always to the end of the age. It's a reminder of his presence. So the beginning of the gospel, the middle of the gospel, the end of the gospel, Jesus, the presence of God with us.

And so if you want to know true security in your life, if you want to know the stability of knowing God amidst the changes and chances of this world, you have to put your faith in Jesus. You got to bank everything on him.

You have to cling to him with all your might or all your weakness and trust that he's going to hold you. He's going to save you.

[19 : 56] He's going to satisfy you. He's going to be enough for you. He's the presence of God.

And so this psalm first tries to say to us, you know, I want to remind you of God's protection in your life.

I want to reassure you of God's presence in your life. And then the psalm ends by saying, and I want you to know about God's power as well.

It's interesting in verses 8 to 11, there's a little bit of a shift in focus. In the first seven verses of the psalm, it's all about God's activity towards us who are facing troubles. And then in the last four verses of the psalm, it shifts, and it's all about God's activity towards those who are causing troubles.

These verses, in other words, give a vision, a final and ultimate vision of God's final victory over all the chaotic forces of evil in the world. Especially those that threaten the church of Jesus Christ. And it's something that we haven't yet fully experienced, obviously, but it will happen when Jesus comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead. And you see there's this image that God will judge the earth and he will disarm, you see it I think in verse 9, he will disarm the armies of the world.

[21 : 17] And then in verse 10, he will tell the nations, shut up and bow down. That's my translation. It's not formally based on the Hebrew.

But literally, verse 10, be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. Often throughout the history of the church, people have received us as a, the people of God have received us as a word of reassurance.

Like God is in some sense saying to us, don't fret about everything that's happening in the world. You should pray about it.

You should work for peace, but don't fret when it looks like your enemies are having success in all the power. Because in the end, I'm going to disarm them and I will be exalted.

It's guaranteed. So be still. In the midst of all of it, you can be still and you can be assured and you can know that I have the whole situation in my hands.

[22 : 19] I am God. You are not. I am God. The nations are not. It's a word of reassurance. But there's also other people that have read here, and I think appropriately so, not just a word of reassurance to the people of God, but a word of rebuke to the nations that rage against God and his people.

In other words, it's saying to the nations, stop what you're doing. Be still and bend the knee and worship me. And it's a fitting conclusion to this vision of judgment that God calls the nations to exalt him.

And he disarms the nations and he reminds us that he is God in our midst. So let me just wrap things up here in about a minute.

We okay? You guys with me? Okay. Throughout the years, Psalm 46 has provided God's people with a spirit of sturdy confidence in God when they really lacked it.

Martin Luther, as Susan said, he wrote a song based on this psalm in a season of deep discouragement and depression. He called it a mighty fortress is our God.

[23 : 39] And John Wesley took these words, the words of the psalm, upon his lips as comfort on his deathbed. And what the psalm meant to these dear brothers in Christ and other sisters in Christ throughout the ages is that they can trust God in the deepest of troubles.

He is their protection, he is present with them, and he has power over everything that's happening in the universe. And they took it as a word not only when the world is at war and the church is under fire, but as a word to them personally when their own lives seem to be collapsing around them.

they could look to God and they could find in him a source of strength in times of trouble. So as we end, I just want to ask you what troubles your heart today?

What weighs heavy on you? What is it that's happening in the world that really, really concerns you? And would you go to Jesus with that?

He will be your refuge. And he, because he died on the cross and took away our sins and defeated all the powers of evil and because he sits at the right hand of God and he will come again to judge, we can be assured that nothing in all creation will separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

[25:00] So brothers and sisters, this is our God, a mighty fortress, worthy of our praise and all our trust. Amen. Amen.