

Psalm 46 The Shaking

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to follow along, it would be great to turn back to page 3, to the words of Psalm 46. As you do that, I wanted to highlight this grey, chic title, Christianity Explored.

It's advertised as a group that you're not going to get preached at in. You're not going to be asked to pray, read, sing aloud. There are lots of things that's not. Let me tell you what it is.

It's for anyone who'd like to investigate further the Christian faith or claims of Christ. I understand they have supper together and watch a video together.

And there are seven weeks starting October 20th. And the reason I wanted to highlight it is, if you are interested in the Christian faith, or if you would like clarity, or if you feel that God is speaking to you and working in your life somehow, that is a great group to belong to.

Now, I apologise for calling this sermon the shaking. It sounds like one of those B-grade movies.

The reason I've done it is because of the key word in the psalm, which is going to become clear in just a moment.

[1 : 09] This is an ancient example of recycling. Luther wrote a hymn based on Psalm 46 in the 1520s.

And then Bach wrote a cantata. Actually, he wrote it a number of times in a number of different versions, until he felt he'd got it right and recycled Luther's recycling of the psalm.

And it's all based around this hymn, A Safe Stronghold Our God Is Still, defiant, wonderful, written by Luther, and also the psalmist, in a time of deep conflict and adversity.

And as we look at the psalm, we've got to keep in mind that the psalmist lays two things side by side. Not one or the other, but two things side by side. The first is the reality of violence, chaos, confusion, catastrophe, the instability, the shakiness of the world.

At the same time, the reality of God, the Lord of hosts, who offers himself as our refuge and strength, the one thing, completely and utterly unshakable, who rules over the world and brings, in the end, as we see, justice and peace to his creation.

[2 : 33] And here's the thing, we've got to keep both of those ideas in mind. So you see, that's the way the psalm starts. God is our refuge and strength, very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear, which means he is afraid.

Though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea. There's that word. Though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

It is a devastating and stunning and shattering picture of some devastation and some disaster of an unimaginable scale. And the key word is this word, shake.

And the psalmist takes the picture of the thing that we think is most secure and firm, the mountains. And he says, the mountains and the earth, they shake, they shatter and they fall apart.

And the waters roar in chaos and they foam. And the Bible says, and the psalmist says, this is the nature of the world itself. Everything in the world shakes, falls apart, runs down.

[3 : 42] Your wealth, your health, the people you love, life itself, it's all profoundly fragile. And part of the message is not to ground ourselves in things that are shakable because when they shake, we shake.

And all the work and all the devotion and all the energy in the world just cannot stop the world from shaking. I was assured last night by the person who's done physics in our house that this is the second law of thermodynamics at work.

And I asked him, what does that mean? And he said, everything runs down. Thank you very much.

And he said, I'll show you exhibit A and he took me up to his bedroom. It was a good exhibit.

When you take food out, it goes bad. As men grow past 40, they get lots of hair in their ears. I'm told that, no, I'm not going to say that one.

Even the mountains, which seem so solid, are literally falling apart. We have a large plum tree in our backyard that produces wonderful plums, thousands of plums.

[4 : 54] And because of the snow last year, ten thousands of plums, I'm exaggerating, thousands. And we went away for a week at the end of summer and we came back and all thousands of plums were lying on the ground.

So we scraped them up into four large buckets and they began to ferment. It was this wonderful kind of brewery thing and all the wasps gathered.

And now they're just a dry and lumpy crust at the bottom of these buckets because it doesn't take long for plums to devolve. And every civilization and every culture and every organization and institution and corporation shakes and falls apart.

And when we see it happening, we are looking at ourselves in a mirror because you and I shake and we will fall apart physically. It doesn't matter how good your diet or how many surgeries you have or your fitness regime, you and I are falling apart.

Families fall apart. One of us will die. The psalmist says there's one thing that's unshakable. It's God. But here's the wonderful thing.

[6 : 11] He says God is our refuge and strength. A very present help in trouble. God offers himself to us, his unshakability to us as a refuge.

He's the only one who doesn't devolve and he puts himself forward and he's not difficult to find. He's not hiding from us. That's why it's so utterly futile and foolish to try and ground ourselves on what is shakable.

To put all my hopes into something that's going to fall apart. To think that my real problem is that I don't have the right job or I don't have the right spouse or I don't have the right children. That if only I had more money, I would be unshakable.

If only that person loved me, I'd be unshakable. If only my health were better, I'd be unshakable.

And you may be here this morning feeling that your life has been shaken and something has gone very wrong and you're not sure how to continue.

Something you feel is devastating. The psalm is saying the issue is not the thing that's shaking. It's not your circumstances because what God does is he shakes everything so as to show us what is unshakable.

[7 : 23] To show us the true nature of life and the world. And we keep trying to stop the world and stop our lives from shaking but it's not going to happen. So the two questions the psalm drives towards us are where do we find this unshakable God and how do we receive this unshakable God?

Where is verses 4 to 7? And we turn now from the roaring of the sea to the quiet river. There's a river, verse 4, whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation.

The city of God has no threatening, roaring sea. Instead there is a river. It is the river that God made in the Garden of Eden. It is the same river that comes in the last book of the Bible when God pictures the new heavens and the new earth.

It's the river of life flowing from God, filled with living water, unfailing supply of all our needs. And it's flowing now in our world and it doesn't look very impressive against the roaring chaos.

In fact it looks inadequate to deal with all the hatred and all the chaos that's tearing our world apart. But as it flows through our world it contains the truth of God and the love of God and that's why it has the power to make glad the city of God.

[8 : 44] Glad. This sense we feel a little bit I think in Bach's music. And the reason it can make us glad is in verse 4 is verse 5.

God is in the midst of her she shall not be shaken. That's the word. Same word. Where is God?

He's in the city of God and that's the symbol for the place and where is it?

Well it's not really a place it's the congregation of God's people. Everywhere where the church meets to delight in God to continue to try and found our lives on what is unshakable.

And God is in the midst of us and therefore we will not move. The mountains shake in verse 6 the kingdoms shake in verse 5 God does not shake.

And this word is a violent shaking until it shatters and falls apart. Kingdoms shake and fall. You know this.

[9 : 43] Mountains shake and fall. Marriage is shake and fall. Families shake and fall. But the place where God is will never fall because God is there. And so we have this wonderful line in line 7 the

Lord of hosts is with us the God of Jacob is our refuge.

The God of Jacob. Jacob. Nothing likeable about Jacob. He was not a nice person. A nasty piece of work which is why it's so hopeful for us.

God sets his love on Jacob and offers a refuge to people like him. Refuge. This is the new word here in verse 11. It's what is high. It's what cannot be scaled.

It's what cannot be shaken. That's where God is. Secondly then how do we get him? How do we find the unshakable God?

Now it's interesting in verses 8 and 9 the psalmist looks to the end of history. If you look at verse 9 he says he makes wars cease to the end of the earth, breaks the bow, shatters the spear, burns the chariot with fire.

[10:52] The fact that God is our refuge means we do not escape trouble. We don't escape history or avoid the shaking. It means that he's Lord of history and it's very important that while he will bring the outcome in the end of total peace and justice, the process there is one of judgment.

He makes wars to cease. It's not a gentle word, it's a forced disarmament. He breaks the bow, shatters the spear, burns the chariot. I had the great privilege of preaching this psalm in Albuquerque a couple of weeks after 9-11 and if you've never been to Albuquerque you may not know that every nuclear warhead and device that's produced in the United States is built and assembled in Albuquerque and we were in an adobe church.

It was a very unusual church. At the front it had a skull, a human skull. However, let's not get too distracted. It was interesting preaching with the skull there.

It didn't move. It was complicated. As we looked at these words and people were crowded in, people were standing and some people were sitting in windows along the side, many of whom make a living from the weapons industry.

The whole fragility and futility of weapons of mass destruction was so obvious to us that there's no single simple solution that we can manufacture to violence and war.

[12:32] that only God will bring peace. And that is why the key words and the only time God speaks in the psalm is verse 10 and here's what he says, Be still and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. People often misinterpret this to say, oh, it's a quiet moment of meditation.

Just chill out. It's very much the opposite. It's a command to history from the Lord of history. It's like a rebuke. It's a warning to surrender.

The reason it comes is because the world and everything in it shakes and falls apart because there's been a rupture in our relationship with God. It's we are the ones who are raging.

It's we are the ones who are shaking. And the world of decay is not the way God created it in the beginning but is the result of our ingratitude and our attitude to God. So how do we come to God?

[13:37] How do we find God, the unshakable God? God says, be still. And the word means drop it. It means be weak. This is what God commands.

He's saying stop pretending you're unshakable. Drop your pretense, defense. Acknowledge how weak you are. Be still, he says. That's not enough.

Be still and know that I am God. And we are so busy and we are running so fast that we so rarely take time to sit down and be weak in front of God and realize he is the one in whom my confidence should rest.

He is the one in whom I should trust. God is God alone. This is what he wants us to know. I am God. I will be exalted in the nations. And the psalm comes to the second time this words, the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.

And I just want to finish with this. When it says the Lord of hosts is with us, the words with us in the Hebrew are literally, Imanu.

[14:50] And when we open the New Testament, we read of a child that's born of the Holy Spirit, a virgin shall conceive a bearer's son and his name shall be called Immanuel, which means God is with us.

In the person of Jesus Christ, the God of Jacob, comes our refuge. And when you follow Jesus in the early stories of the gospel, what he does is he reverses the power of all those things that shake us.

He reverses sickness. He reverses chaos. He reverses the power of the wind and the wave to destroy. He reverses death. And when he dies, he is shaken and all the powers shake him and he's

shaken in our place.

He's shaken and shattered to pieces. And then three days later, as I said to the children, he rises again from the dead and again and again and again. The New Testament talks about that as God exalting him.

The same words used here in Psalm 46. God has exalted him above every power that shakes us, every rule, every dominion. And in his death, he takes all that can shake us.

[16:01] And through his death and resurrection, God offers to us what is most unshakable. And taking refuge in God is saying, Lord, I am still.

I recognize that you are God. Accept me for Christ's sake. Though the mountains shake and tremble, though the nations rage and ferment, God is our strength and refuge.

Our present help in trouble, present to us in the person of Jesus Christ, who is our high tower of strength, the one in whom we shall never be moved.

Amen. Let's kneel for prayer. There will be a short period of silence between the spoken prayers when you may add your own intercessions in the quietness of your own heart.

Lord, thank you, Father, that you are a great and mighty God with such a tender heart. As we call to you in the midst of our circumstances, whatever they might be, loss of a loved one, illness, unemployment, loneliness, whatever it is, you are present to us.

[17:21] Thank you, Father, for your words to us through the Bible. Your words of hope and life. Thank you, Father, for your unshakable nature.

Nothing surprises you or overwhelms you. You created us. You understand us so intimately. You desire to have a relationship with us.

Dear Father, help us to come to you, to trust you, and to receive from you your gifts of love and mercy this day. By your Holy Spirit, through the death and resurrection of your beloved Son, Jesus, we can know your forgiveness, your freedom, and your joy.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the beauty of the world around us, the blessings of the clear blue skies and brilliant sunshine we've enjoyed this past week, and for everything in creation that you have given us, including our family and friends.

Thank you, Father, for Bach's wonderful music and the witness to you that he so openly proclaimed. Father, we pray for our country of Canada and its elected public leaders, federally, provincially, municipally.

[18:59] We particularly pray for a spirit of cooperation amongst our elected federal representatives. at every level, cause our leaders to fulfill their office in a way that is honoring to you.

Dear Jesus, we remember children who have been orphaned in this city, this country, and the world, having lost their parents through some kind of violence. We pray for these dear ones, that they might come to know your love and healing in their lives.

Sustain those who care for them, and give them everything they need for the task. Thank you, Father, for our church family here at St. John's.

As we negotiate various changes, we ask for your grace. Keep us united, reminding us to look to you for guidance in all things.

We pray for our church families, and we pray for our church families, and we pray for our church families, and we pray for a particular measure of strength and wisdom for our clergy, our trustees, church committee, and all of our staff.

[20:24] And we pray for a covering of the Holy Spirit as we meet together to talk and pray this coming Thursday evening. Thank you, Jesus, for missionaries who are working in other countries, sharing their faith in you.

We remember Susan Norman working with InterVarsity in Charleston, South Carolina, Heather Bellamy with Samaritan's Purse in Afghanistan, and Joss Stringhold with Arab World Media in Cairo, Egypt.

Jesus, we ask that you would care for them and protect them and supply their every need. Father, we take a few moments to remember those in our church family who are in special need of our prayers this morning.

We lift up to you the Jacoby family as they minister to some of their neighbors. In addition, we pray for Harold, Dave, Dawn, Gordon, Lee, and Stephen.

Father, we thank you for your loving kindness to each one, and pray that they might know your great mercy and healing touch. Father, we thank you for your loving kindness to each one, and pray that they may be the same.

[22 : 01] And lastly, Jesus, we bring to you any special concern that might be on our hearts this day. All these prayers we offer in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.