

Psalm 46

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Whoa, nice and loud. It's great to see you in the new year. And one of the things that I asked on Facebook, I'm sure some of you are my Facebook friends.

I'm happy to add you if you're not. But one of the questions I asked on Friday is, what do people fear? And some people commented on my wall.

And I got a few responses. Basically, there are a few types of things that people fear. Some fears basically have no basis for these fears.

Some people fear that we might lose the ashes. It's not going to happen. And some people, but there are some more serious fears. The word fear can mean frightened. So some of the things that people fear are natural disasters like cyclones or something that's man-made or caused by people like terrorism and wars.

But fear can also mean worry and anxieties. And that type of fear is actually even worse for us because if you're frightened of something, if you have a spider, you just get shocked.

[1 : 14] But if there's an anxiety, it gnaws at you. This thing keeps you thinking at night. And there's even a new acronym that has come out.

F-O-M-O. I'm not sure how to pronounce it because I'm getting old now. Is it FOMO? I'm not sure. It is. Good. So what does that stand for? Fear of missing out.

That's right. This is something that people... If you don't know what that means, you can look it up on Wikipedia. I did as well. So it came up in 2004.

It originally meant that people, when they see what's happening on Facebook or other social media sites, they fear that they're missing out on something. But I think this is something that's true of all of us.

This is the society that we live in. In fact, this is the fear that consumes us. This is the fear that we have at the start of the creation. The serpent said, don't you want to taste this fruit of good and evil?

[2 : 19] Basically asking us, you might miss out on that. And this is true of all stages of life. In our youth, we might just think that we might...

If we don't do the things that our friends do, we are missing out. If you are single, you might see that you might miss out on a relationship. So you might date a non-Christian or drift into pornography. And if you are working, you might see that you don't get to tick off your bucket list. I want to go to these places. I want to travel. I want to have all these experiences.

I want to go to that restaurant. At work, we might plow in many countless hours because we fear that we don't get a promotion. When colleagues participate in office politics, we might fear that we don't get a promotion because we are not hanging in the right circles or saying different things to get ahead.

Once you are married, you might fear that your kids might miss out. Therefore, you try to give them the best start in life possible. Enroll them in different classes or just swimming classes or different types of tutoring.

[3 : 34] Or you might want them to hang around different friends or buy them the best things so that they do not miss out. And I've seen people that grow older. One of the things that people of my parents' generation, they keep saying to us is that, I want to do this for you and buy this for you because I don't want you to miss out.

They fear that we will miss out. If you think about it, all these fears are just different manifestations of selfish fears that drive us to hoard our money and our time to spend it on ourselves and our loved ones.

So you can see that today, the things that we fear might be very different from what is seen in Psalm 46. So the original title under the psalm, so when you read the psalm, there are little letters

just below Psalm 46.

Those titles tell us who is this psalm used for and what is the situation. Unfortunately, in this psalm, they don't tell us, the writer did not tell us when these events happened.

But we can read, if you read through the psalm, you will have noticed that it is about God rescuing them. And there are many instances in the Bible where Israel or Judah is surrounded by enemies.

[4 : 56] And one of the passages that fits in this sort of description and context is Psalm 2 Kings chapters 18 to 19.

So what I'm going to do today is do something a little bit different. I'm going to read this psalm alongside with 2 Kings 18 to 19. So that's like a little backstory and illustration to this psalm.

So we can actually feel what it means to be under siege and be attacked. So, the only things that, if you look at the psalm, like any good sermon, it's in three sections, so it makes it easy for me.

There are three sections in this psalm. Verses 1 to 3, God is present to calm his people. Second section is verses 4 to 7, God is present to comfort his city.

The third section is verses 8 to 11, God is present to control the nations. So, let's look at the first section, which is, God is present to calm his people.

[5 : 59] So, I want to set the scene for this psalm, so you can probably read through the psalm.

The psalm is crying to God as their strength and refuge. And one of the things, if you read 2 Kings chapters 18 to 19, you can see that that's a situation that God's people needed rescuing from.

They were under siege. And I haven't been under siege, which is great. But I like watching movies with sieges in it, especially like the Lord of the Rings trilogy.

Those siege scenes are awesome. And siege scenes are always great because you know that there's a lot of pressure built up and there are always heroic armies marching out. And you know that the people under siege, they tend to escape, which is always a good ending, a happy ending. But in reality, sieges are actually very scary. Sieges are a horrible way to conquer a city for those that are under siege.

They might die of disease and starvation. And usually, it doesn't end well, unlike most movies. And the situation described in 2 Kings is especially terrifying.

[7 : 14] So let's do some math to help us understand why it is terrifying. We have to do, fast forward to 2 Kings chapter 19, verse 35.

We know that the Assyrian army had at least 185,000 people because that's how many got slaughtered at the end of the story.

And in the middle, when the king of Assyria taunted Hezekiah, he implied that Jerusalem didn't even have 2,000 men to be mounted warriors to meet this army.

So you can think of it as the math, 185,000 to 2,000. That's 92 to 1. These are not good odds. Humanly speaking, there's no way for them to survive.

Let's trace the story back to the beginning in 2 Kings. So if you have the Bible, turn to 2 Kings chapter 18. If not, you can just follow this story along with me. So in 2 Kings chapter 18, verse 13 onwards, we can see that the Assyrians is a very large and cruel army coming from the north.

[8 : 27] They've come, destroyed all the other nations, and they're now coming up to Judah. Hezekiah is the king of Judah and Jerusalem.

he is scared of the Assyrians, so he tried to appease this king by giving him a tribute. He basically tried to find all the gold and all the wealth that he can find, even by scraping off all the gold from the temple and giving it to the king of Assyria, Sennacherib, as a tribute.

He thought that that might appease the king, but instead of appeasing the king, the king of Assyria, Sennacherib, taunted Judah, taunted them for the fact that they tried to rely on Egypt and taunted them, taunted Judah's god.

We can see this taunt in 2 Kings chapter 18, verses 19 to 23. I'll read that now. On what do you rest this trust of yours? Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war?

In whom do you now trust that you have rebelled against me? Behold, you are trusting now in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will appease the hand of any man who leans on it.

[9 : 47] Such is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all who trust in him. But if you say to me, we have removed, we trust in the Lord our God, is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, you shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem.

Come now, make a wager with me, my master, the king of Assyria. I will give you 2,000 horses if you are able to, on your part, set riders on them.

So you can see in this taunt, he's saying that there's no way for Israel, for Jerusalem to survive. With this background, and we know the end of the story that God rescued Jerusalem, we can actually understand why the psalmist was so glad to sing that God is our refuge, our very present help in trouble in verse 1.

Judah needed a place to hide, and although they were tempted to buy off their enemies and rely on Egypt, at the end they realized that, Hezekiah realized that the only place to hide is God.

What's more, they needed to be delivered soon, because they were besieged. We will trace the story back a little bit later to see how close they were to destruction. That's why the psalmist prayed that it's a very present help in trouble.

[11:14] God helped them just at the right time when they needed help. You can actually, remembering the odds, the overwhelming odds that they have, 92 to 1 man, 185,000 army to 2,000, is a miraculous salvation.

That's why the psalmist kept singing in verses 2 and 3, that though we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved in the heart of the sea, though the waters roam and fall, raw and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

What is mentioned here are all the terrifying natural disasters, like earthquakes and the sea. And if you know the Bible in the Old Testament, the Jews are scared, absolutely terrified of the sea.

At the beginning of creation, darkness and the sea is a total chaos. So they are scared of the sea and they're scared of all these natural disasters.

So what is mentioned here is total chaos destruction. And the psalmist is saying that even in this environment, they are not going to fear.

[12:29] They will not be moved. So we can actually see how God has rescued them. We can actually move from the second section of verses four to seven.

We can summarize how God is present to comfort his city. So let's pick up the story of the siege of Israel in 2 Kings. So you've got an army approaching the city of Jerusalem.

And Jerusalem, if you know the geography around it, God has actually given them little fortresses and little small cities, satellite cities around Jerusalem. And one of these cities is called Lipna.

And you can see that story in 2 Kings chapter 19. The Assyrian army moved closer to the city of Jerusalem and attacked Lipna.

And they did it throughout the day. And because it took a while, they needed to take a break in the afternoon. And the Assyrians sent another taunt to Hezekiah and Jerusalem.

[13:39] Now he's taunting God directly, taunting how has the Lord helped you? He's not going to rescue you. So in this situation, we can see that Hezekiah really needed to rely on God.

So we can actually see how he prayed in 2 Kings chapter 19 verses 15 to 19. I'll read from verse 15. Listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.

It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them.

For they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. Now, Lord, our God, deliver us from His hand, such as all the kingdoms of the earth.

May I know that you alone, Lord, is our God. Notice that in this prayer, Hezekiah isn't centred on the need for rescuing.

[15:02] If I was the king in this situation, I would have just prayed, God, please help us. There's a big army outside. Please destroy the Assyrians. But Hezekiah didn't pray that.

He appealed to who God is, the Lord. The Lord is the name Yahweh for God in the Old Testament. He appealed to God being the one that is different.

He is above all the other nations. Notice that he describes the Lord in verse 15 as enthroned between the cherubims. The cherubims are two little angels in the temple.

It's representing that God is in the temple in Jerusalem. It's describing how God is present above the Ark of the Covenant. Therefore, we can see that Hezekiah is appealing, for God to save Jerusalem, not because it needed rescuing, but because of His name and His place, Jerusalem, where He dwells in the temple.

This is why in verse 4 of Psalm 46, we can see that the psalmist is saying that there's a river that flows and that makes glad the city of God.

[16:14] This is where the Most High dwells. God dwells in Jerusalem in Jerusalem in the temple. And you can actually see the contrast between the total chaos outside being besieged and how

they felt inside because God is with them.

So we are reminded of earthquake and chaos and destruction outside, but the picture inside is that God is in the midst of her. She will not be moved.

And God will help her when the morning dawns. And these are amazing words, considering they were besieged overnight and they are awaiting their fate the next morning. And we can actually see what happened that night when Hezekiah prayed in 2 Kings chapter 19, verse 35.

That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning, they were all dead bodies.

So God's angel is God's means of destroying the Assyrian armies. This is why in verses 7 and 11, the psalmist can sing, The Lord of hosts is with us.

[17:29] The God of Jacob is our fortress. The phrase, the Lord of hosts, or the Lord Almighty, depending on which translation you use, is describing God as the warrior king over his angelic armies.

So let's step back. We use the siege as an illustration of Psalm 46. We think about what happens in this siege, and indeed some of the sieges in the rest of the Old Testament.

We can see that usually human means does not work. In this instance, nothing that Hezekiah did, whether it's paying a tribute to Assyria, forming an alliance with Egypt, that didn't work.

Hezekiah didn't even send an army out to meet the Assyrians. God's army destroyed the Assyrians before they did anything the next morning. This is why God alone is a strength and refuge.

The third section of the psalm is verses 8 to 11. We can see how here God is present to control the nations and what he asks of us in response.

[18:38] So if you think about an ancient battle, when a country wins, it doesn't affect just the relationship between these two countries.

When a victory is achieved, all the other nations around them are going to hear of it. So this is what happens in verses 8 to 11 of the psalm.

Notice that there's a difference between the tone between verses 1 to 7 and 8 to 11. So in verses 1 to 7, we can hear how the psalmist described how God saved his people.

But in verses 8 to 11, there are two instructions for the people of Jerusalem, or the readers of the psalm. In verse 8, the instruction is for them to come.

Come to see what the Lord has done. Come to see how the Lord has destroyed his enemies. It's important to see how God do things differently.

[19:43] Whereas Hezekiah is trying to use alliances to appease and to strategize, God alone is the king. He alone can crush everyone else.

He can use his own means to do everything. But the thing is, his destruction is fair. Some people might ask whether it's cruel for God to be the Lord of everyone, and to shatter the spears, and to destroy other enemies.

In this instance, we can see that the Assyrian king taunted the Lord and his people. But in fact, if you look at the context of the psalm, in Psalm 2, that is true for all peoples and all kings.

Because all nations have conspired to go against the Lord. And it's fair for God to judge everyone and anyone that taunts and defies God.

And it's actually important for the people of Judah to recognize that God is fair in judgment. And the psalmists tell them, come and look at the work of the Lord. The Lord is able to destroy his enemies.

[20:55] You need to see the work of the Lord to see how powerful he is. The second instruction given to the reader is to cease striving.

This is found in verse 10. They need to stop using their own means to plot and strategize, but instead come to know that they need to know God.

So I've quickly looked through what the psalm means. Let's look through what it means for us. So one of the ways to work out what it means for us is to work out what it doesn't mean.

So I want to quickly step through what it doesn't mean for us before we work out what it does mean for us. Firstly, right now, no nation on earth can claim that they are God's nation and can claim that God is fighting on behalf of them.

We can't transfer what is said to Israel or Judah or the people of God in the Old Testament to us right now because no nation on earth are God's chosen nation, no earthly nation.

[22:04] And that's important because we don't want to use the Bible to unjustly justify religious wars. Secondly, God's holy city promise right now is not the earthly Jerusalem.

If you look at on Google Maps on Jerusalem, if you look at the city and look at the rivers, there's actually no river flowing through Jerusalem right now.

In the middle section of the psalm, even in Hezekiah's time, there's a river flowing through Jerusalem, but it's something that Hezekiah dug underneath to supply the city with water.

So that's probably not the promised city that we are looking forward to. We are looking forward to a heavenly Jerusalem. Jerusalem. Certainly, this psalm is not saying that God is like a magic genie in a lamp.

If we need help, just pray and rub the lamp. He is our present help in trouble. We will solve any trouble that we have. So we have to work out what this means for us right now.

[23 : 12] The instructions given to the people of God in the Old Testament is also true for us. We are to also see, come to see the work of the Lord.

The natural question for us is, we are not Jews. How can we come to see the work of the Lord and be happy about that? We need to understand now, it's not the Jews that are the people of God.

It's those that trust in Jesus. And on the flip side, it's those that defy Jesus that face a similar judgment to the Assyrians.

We can see that in the New Testament in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 6 to 8, God considers it just to repay affliction those who afflict you and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us.

And the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of Lord Jesus.

[24 : 28] We don't often celebrate the fact or actively tell people to look at God's judgment. But in some situations this is exactly what is needed to comfort those people.

You don't have to cast your mind far back in the news to see how that is going to be of comfort to some people. Just a couple of weeks ago you would have probably heard in the news that a few Christians in Tyrol was killed during the Christmas period inside the church.

Under that sort of religious persecution Christians will be comforted by the fact that God is going to repay those that will afflict them. The second instruction is in Psalm 46 verse 10.

the psalmist is telling God's people to seize and know the creator. The word to seize driving doesn't mean to stop trying, drop everything and just let God do everything.

The instruction to seize driving is to seize driving and to know God our creator. and I want you to cast our mind back to the examples I've given about fears in particular some of our worries and anxieties in our life.

[25 : 56] A lot of our striving is not about God and we actually need to know in here the important thing is not for God come to God to solve our problems.

The instruction is to seize driving and know our creator. We need to know God not for the relief that he gives but for the God that he is. Remember the illustration I gave at the start FOMO FOMO if we try to obtain everything in our life so we don't miss out on anything in our life that is one form of striving we are strategizing to provide for ourselves and not trust in our God.

It's a lifestyle that denies that Jesus is Lord and the most important thing in our life and it doesn't take into the fact that our city is the city of Jerusalem in heaven.

Heaven is what we need not the earthly things that we have right now. If we know that heaven is our home we don't have to fear that we will miss out on anything on earth.

So at the which area are we striving to be secure in ourselves secure in our earthly competencies and pleasures rather than to live for God.

[27 : 19] So we're going to explore that a little more next week. We need to work out how to strive for God and the sermon next week might touch on that a little bit more. But just as we have at the start of the year we need to take stock to come to know God and come for us to strive to save ourselves.

I want you to join in the work of telling others how they can come to know God and see striving. I want to actually tell you a story of someone that I met last year.

Her name is Rose. And she is a lady although she doesn't know God yet, she is trying to work out how to know God and see striving for herself. I will tell you a little bit of the story.

Rose is a typical lady that goes to ESL right now. They are quite a group of people right now that go to ESL. They accompany their children. So their children studies in Australia and because the parents are scared they want to be with the children.

They want to look after the children. And Rose is one such lady. So she wants to look after her child here. And at the same time she is separated from her husband because not legally separated but just because she has to be here to look after her child.

[28 : 43] And she worries about a lot of things back in China. She has ageing and sick relatives that she needs to take care of. And she is trying to strive to plan life both in Australia and in China to work out how to make the best of everything.

So we rose along with a few other people from ESL. We did a Bible study on Friday night because Friday night is a great time for Bible study for these people. Their children go to youth group and they go and do Bible study.

So we went through the gospel and read through Acts 17. When we presented the picture that God is different from any of the gods that the Greeks knew, that God is in control of all the nations and God is in control even where people live and how everyone moves, she is confident.

She wants to know that God. She wants to cease thriving and know a creator that is in control of all the nations and everything that we do. But from an atheistic background, she finds it very hard to accept that there is actually a God like that.

She is still wrestling with the truth of the gospel. You can see that there are many non-Christians like Rose exploring the gospel and trying to work out what it means for them.

[30 : 08] So we desperately need people in ESL to teach and we need people if you can't teach English or do other things. We need people just to talk with these people on a Tuesday and Friday morning.

We have a play group called Jelly Beans on Tuesday and ESL on Friday. It would be great if we just make friends with them, talk to them, so that they can come to hear, come to see God, come to see His work and come to know the Creator.

So I suggest another opportunity for us to help the community around us to know the gospel.

And this is actually by joining me in going on a global mission. I'm planning to lead a team to go to China at the end of the year.

So this is a great time for us to learn how to be in a different culture. And try to cross cultural bridges. And this is the things that we need exactly to reach the community around us.

[31 : 15] We're desperate for people to know Jesus and encounter Jesus. So we need to equip ourselves to do that properly. So if you're interested either in the local work or the global work please come to me write it on the card and tell me.

I'd love to know. I want to end the sermon though on a word that we haven't looked at. It's in verses 3, 7, and 11.

It's called Selah. So in the Amplified Bible it translates as to pause and think on that. So the psalm usually is written in the Bible so we have a paragraph we need to pause and think on what that means for us.

And incidentally there's also a name of Takeshi and Katie's daughter. You can ask them why they chose that name at the end of the service. If you don't get to speak with them today you can ask them throughout the year.

There are many opportunities to do that. Actually I haven't really asked you properly. I have asked you but I will join the queue at the end of the service. But for us right now we need to actually pause and think what the psalmist is trying to tell us to do.

[32 : 31] I want us to pause and think on two questions based on the two instructions that he's given us. When Jesus comes to destroy his enemies are you confident to stand before him?

Are you confident by the fact that he's going to destroy his enemies? If you are not please come and know Jesus so that you will be glad of his coming judgment.

The second question I want to ask you is are you taking steps to stop some of the things that you are doing so that you will know God that is going to be exalted amongst the nations?

Are there things we need to actively stop doing? Are there things that we need to stop pursuing in our lives? So that we can have the energy to strive to know God and strive to do things for him not for ourselves not for our security but so that he is exalted amongst the nations.

I'm going to hand the time back to Nick and help us to pause to think on that.