

Psalm 46

Introduction – We pray and long for reformation in our churches and over our nation. When the great reformation of the 16th Century came, we must remember, reformers found themselves wanted criminals and things were often pretty bleak. Psalm 46 was a favorite of Martin Luther's and was the inspiration for his hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God." During perilous times, Luther is known for saying to his coworker, Phillip Melancthon, "*Come Phillip, let's sing the forty-sixty psalm.*" He commented on it thus, "*We sing this psalm to the praise of God, because God is with us and powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends his church and his word against all fanatical spirits, against the gates of hell, against the implacable hatred of the devil, and against all the assaults of the world, the flesh and sin.*"

An Outline of Psalm 46 – The psalm is called "a song," and this is the word used by Paul in Eph 5:19 where, filled with the Spirit, we find ourselves singing "*psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.*" This is a song of the Spirit. Easily broken into three sections, marked by "Selah," the psalm begins and ends with the metaphor of God being our strong and mighty fortress of protection. Verses 1-3 state that even when the entire world is collapsing, God is our refuge and strength. Verses 4-7 contrast the raging of the heathen nations with the peaceful protection within the walls of God's gathered people. Verses 8-11 declares that God will establish peace on earth and will bring it with superior firepower. The psalmist commands us to know this in the midst of the greatest tempests life can bring – or is it that God can bring?

A Bulwark Never Failing (vv1-3) – Name your trouble. God is near. Therefore (v2) nothing should cause us to fear. The picture of the unshakeable, unmovable mountain being taken up and cast in the sea is to show that this truth rightly embraced covers the hardest providences, the least expected hardships. When the earth is removed, that is, when the very foundations of your world have crumbled around you, this is the time to know the God you worship. But notice, knowing God does not promise believers that their earth will not be removed, or that their mountain will not be cast into the sea. God's mighty fortress does not keep us in a sterile environment free from harm's way. Remember, Jesus spoke of the judgment of Jerusalem under the figure of a mountain being cast into the sea (an unthinkable event in the mind of a Jew), and remember that the choir singing this were the sons of Korah – whose famous ancestor had perished when "the earth moved" (Num 16). And so we Selah.

Streams of the River (vv 4-7) – In contrast to the turbulent and threatening sea, he now presents a peaceful and abundant river. Like the world inside and outside Noah's ark, the people of God experience a complete difference even in the midst of tumult. Oceans are roaring and we find ourselves drinking with gladness from the peaceful streams of the River of Life (Psalm 36:8-9). This occurs because we are the tabernacles, the dwelling places of God. We are the city of God, the place of His designing, building, electing, purchasing and indwelling; the place dedicated to His praise and glorified by His presence (Spurgeon).

This city cannot be moved. It is the unshakeable thing, we are promised (Heb 12:28). If this city is besieged, then God Himself is besieged and will break forth in help. He often comes, but not until the darkest hour of the night, just at the break of day. Just at the last minute. This is God's way. Verse 5 is a short narrative of just this pattern, as is Mark 4:35-41.

He is Jehovah of armies (Lord Sabaoth His name) and He is with us. And He is not a nameless God. He is a particular God who is working in history; in fact He is writing the history. He is the God of Jacob. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Triune God of Scripture. And so we Selah.

An Attitude of Triumph (vv8-11) - Whenever we read the news or our history books, it should be with these verses in our minds. God has done all these things. He has caused the desolations, and He has brought them to an end (Amos 3:6). In all the world events and in all the personal situations, we are told that God is the One who, according to the counsel of His will, is working all of these things. It is His good pleasure to do so.

Only the man of faith can now believe and obey verse 10. And here is the purpose of all of the tumult, all of the external, internal, spiritual and literal earthquakes: Soli Deo Gloria. It's all about Him, not us. He is God and we are not. But what will the nations do? Where is He taking this story? It doesn't ruin a good story, in some ways, even when you know the ending. Even more so, it doesn't ruin the tension in which we live while we live through the story knowing the ending. God's kingdom will spread and He will be exalted among the nations. This battle is not won through carnal weapons, but through spiritual weapons – and our God is the God of armies

As one historian once observed, the God of the Bible is no buttercup. In this passage, He makes wars to cease on the earth by force. We know from the rest of the Bible that this is not the entire story—He is the suffering servant as well. He conquered sin and death by means of the humiliation of the cross, certainly. He rose again from the dead three days later, establishing our justification. He also—

forty years after His death, burial, and resurrection—destroyed Jerusalem with a rod of iron. It is a grave mistake to relegate desolations to the Old Testament (Wilson).

Be Still and Know – Above all tumults running through the world and through your life, the Psalmist hears and repeats the words of His God – “Be still and know that I am God.” This can be misunderstood as a summons to quiet meditation. But the Hebrew word means “desist,” commanding the forces opposing God’s sovereignty to surrender. This is to be commanded to the world and to your own soul when you wrestle to be at peace in the midst of the tumult. “Cease, desist, forsake, relax.” God calls you to this grace (Phil 4:6-7). This grace is grounded in thanksgiving which is the triumph of faith in the midst of tumult. The peace of God protects your hearts and minds (and note that it is not that your hearts and minds are to protect the peace of God). The peace of God is between you and the destructions all around. In that Refuge, you may smile at all your foes.

The River of God – But beside the refuge of protection, this refuge is a city of conquering triumph. The city of God, which is the Church, has a river flowing right through her center. God the Father is our river (Jer 2:13). God the Son is our river (Zech 13:1). God the Holy Spirit is our river (John 7:38). The temple at the center of the City of God is the source of this river (Ezek 47:1-12), and as this river flows through the New Jerusalem, which is the Church, we see that trees grow on both sides of the river, and the leaves of those trees are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2).

“Come Phillip, let’s sing the forty-sixty psalm.”

Dave Hatcher – August 16, 2020