

Reformation Day: What is God Doing? (Psalm 46)

Introduction – On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the Wittenberg church door. More like our Friday email news; this was a way to make announcements to the church body. Yet this act is often considered the match that lit the reformation. Historically, the protestant church celebrates this day, not as a Halloween-substitute, but truly as Reformation Day. Messages on the Five Solas, the Five points of Calvinism, the priesthood of believers, and justification by faith abound. This morning, in light of some circumstances close to home, we will consider the psalm that inspired Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God." Psalm 46.

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. 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. 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 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.

Take a Look: What is God Doing? (vv8-11) – Whenever we read the newspaper 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.

Some Selahs on Psalm 46 – This psalm is messy and yet comforting. It leaves us with great tension and the hope of the gospel of our Lord Jesus at the same time. This is why it is so good to sing and meditate upon this and all of the psalms.

Our God In History – This is not given to us to meditate in the abstract. God is not coming to us in propositions. He comes to us in a hurricane, in an earthquake, in sickness, disease, and in the death of a loved one. He is not the God of a theology book, but the God of Jacob, a person in a particular place in time.

Stillness in His Sovereignty – We are told to be quiet in His sovereignty. This means so much more than simply trusting that "*all things work together for good*," although it certainly means that. For instance, in Romans 8, after that famous verse, we are reminded that "*if God is for us, who can be against us*," at which point Paul tells us that we are going to be led to slaughter. Pain and suffering and death are not able to "*separate us from the love of God*," but not because pain and suffering and death will not come. In fact they will. When the earth melts, it is because He uttered His voice. When the bottom falls out, it is because God has decreed it so. When Job's life falls apart, it is because God has brought this to pass. We must be still, not worrying about tomorrow, because there are enough worries for today – which means that there are worries for today.

But There Are Those Streams – In the midst of this story, the manifestation of Soli Deo Gloria, the exaltation of God among all the nations and all of the twists and turns God will take getting there, there is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God. In other words, there is grace for today. We can seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness *because* all these things will be added to us.

The Great Comedy – It doesn't matter how dark, how fallen, how difficult life has become. Psalm 46 teaches us that God is writing the Great Comedy. Jesus was crucified – and nothing more horrible could ever have happened upon this earth. But God was pleased to do so; for He was pleased to crush His Son that He might raise Him up again in victory over sin and death; over the devil himself. And in Christ, every mountain in your life that has been cast into the sea shall be raised up as well for God is in our midst and He will be glorified. "*The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our strength.*"