

Running for the Storm Shelter

(Psalm 46)

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Introduction

I have always been fascinated by weather, especially tornadoes and hurricanes.

Given the opportunity, I would love to chase tornadoes or head to the beach if a minor hurricane was approaching.

When I was 9, a violent tornado struck Newberry.

One person was killed and several homes destroyed.

I was fascinated by the damage but it also created a lot of fear.

I even began looking at places to live when I grew up...

Places where tornadoes are the least likely to occur and also free from other severe weather.

I eventually grew out of this fear for the most part.

However, there are groups of people who live with **Lilapsophobia**, which is the fear of tornadoes and hurricanes.

And most who suffer from it, say that it stems from their lack of control in these situations.

You are essentially at the mercy of these storms.

And the anxiety that stems from the lack of control can be overwhelming.

One of the ways to deal with this fear is to build a storm shelter....

Which becomes a place of safety when a storm approaches.

When a storm warning is issued, people run to these bunkers and take cover while the storm passes.

Well, most of us don't suffer from this phobia.

However, I will say that if the Lord had lead me to the Midwest to pastor....

I would not have gone if the parsonage didn't have a storm cellar.

But many of us are tempted to be anxious and fearful but just keeping up with current events of the day.

Consider all the events just this summer...

The Ukraine/Russian conflict...

Hamas and Israel at war.

Babies dying in hot cars.

The ebola virus.

Christians being murdered in Iraq.

And that is just the past few weeks.

And all that can lead to the sin of anxiety and worry if we aren't careful....

Because the truth is that we live in an uncertain world in many respects.

And we can't just hide from all the elements in our own little storm shelter.

No, we are called to be in the world, just not of the world.

We are ambassadors for Christ at all times and in all places.

But how we do find comfort in the midst of chaos?

How do we react to the world falling apart around us?

Where do we run?

Well, this is the focus of the psalm that we will look at tonight.

Psalm 46 is often called the "Mighty Fortress" psalm.

It was the inspiration of the old hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," which was....

Written by Martin Luther in the 16th century.

Luther is known as the Father of the Reformation for having taken on the corrupt Catholic church in the 1500s.

His life was often threatened, and he was under constant persecution.

Psalm 46 was a source of comfort to his soul during these times...

And it was the inspiration for the hymn, which was sang at the national cathedral 3 days after the attacks of 9/11.

So, let's take a look at Psalm 46 tonight, which I divided into 3 sections...

The first 3 verses will show that....

We are Safe Because God is Stable

Verses 4-7 will show us that...

We are Safe Because God is by Our Side

And then in the final 4 verses, we will see that...

We are Safe Because God is Sovereign.

So, let's begin by seeing that...

I. We are Safe Because God is Stable

Verse 1 – 3..

For the choir director. A Psalm of the sons of Korah, ^[a]set to Alamoth. A Song.

46 *God is our refuge and strength,
^[b]A very present help in ^[c]trouble.
² Therefore we will not fear, though the
earth should change
And though the mountains slip into the heart
of the ^[d]sea;
³ Though its waters roar and foam,
Though the mountains quake at its swelling
pride. ^[e]Selah.*

Now, I have failed to mention something the last few weeks that is very important when studying the Psalms.

These little inscriptions before verse 1 are actually inspired parts of each psalm.

For instance, in Psalm 23....the inscription above verse 1 is simply...

“A Psalm of David.”

Well, that is part of the Psalm.

But the title that may appear in your Bibles is not inspired.

For instance, your Bible may have God is Our Refuge above psalm 46...

But that is not inspired.

It was supplied by the publisher of your Bible.

However, psalm 46 does have a rather long inscription.

That reads...

For the choir director. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah set to Alamoth. A Song.

And these would acknowledge who wrote it or give instructions about the psalm.

And Psalm 46 had both.

This psalm was to be given **to the choir director** or chief musician, who would in turn lead the people to sing this psalm.

It was written by the **Sons of Korah**, who were also responsible for writing this and other psalms.

And then it reads that it was to be **set to Alamoth**.

Which is an interesting note.

Alamoth is a Hebrew word that refers to young maidens or girls.

Some tend to think that this meant the song was to be performed with a high pitch...

Similar to the sound of a young voice.

Others feel that this means the song was to be sung by young girls....

Listen to what Andrew Bonar says,...

“A choir of young women would be selected to sing this psalm that speaks of fear and danger in order to show that even single young women (and even older widowed ladies) can sing without fear because God is always on their side.”

Though we cannot be certain, I tend to agree with him.

In a world filled with dangerous situations, the most vulnerable are single ladies....

Who are without the protection that a husband can provide.

And so, young ladies would sing in their high voices about the great protection that the Lord provides....

And here is what they would sing...

Verse 1...

**¹God is our refuge and strength,
[b]A very present help in [c]trouble.**

To make a fire, you need 3 elements,...

Heat, oxygen and fuel.

When those three come together, you get fire.

Well, verse 1 gives us the fearless triangle.

When you are gripped with fear or anxiety
or doubt....

You turn to God who is our refuge, strength
and help.

And you need each of these three to
overcome your fear.

Sometimes, you just need the shelter, or
refuge that the Lord provides.

Sometimes, we just run to Him when the
storms hit.

Then we get strength from him to endure the
storms.

And then he is our help to get past the storm.

So many times we see this in how Christians
respond to the sudden death of someone
close.

They first turn to the Lord as refuge from
their sadness.

Then they rely upon the Lord's strength to help them endure the next few days.

And finally, the Lord helps them to move on from the tragedy in time.

And the psalmist says that God is "a very present" help.

The idea is that God is easily found in times of trouble.

Sometimes, I will say "I lost my keys." And they will be found after I look through all the cushions of our couch...

In my car...

And then I will find them in a drawer of my dresser.

They were truly lost.

And then sometimes I will say, "I lost my keys" and my wife will walk into the kitchen...

And say, "they are right here on the counter."

They weren't really lost because they are easily found.

Well, the author of this psalm is saying..

God is our refuge, strength and help who is easily found.

You don't have to search high and low for God.

He is very near and present to help you in times of trouble.

He's not hiding during those difficult times; he is easily found.

And when he is found, He removes our fears...

Look at verses 2 and 3...

*² Therefore we will not fear, though the
earth should change
And though the mountains slip into the heart
of the ^[d]sea;
³ Though its waters roar and foam,
Though the mountains quake at its swelling
pride. ^[e]Selah.*

Here, the psalmist talks about the surest of foundations.

Though our world is fallen, the mountains and the sea are usually the surest foundations of the earth.

That's why people build structures on the ground.

They trust the earth to remain stable.

The tallest building in the world, the burj tower in Dubai is 2722 feet in the air...

Over a half mile in the air...

And it is based on the premise that the earth won't move.

But we do know that the earth moves.

We lived in California. We know it moves.

But even here this past year, yall found out it moves too.

And that is an unsettling feeling to say the least...

It is really a helpless feeling to sense the ground moving.

Yet the psalmist says that he remains fearless because God is his refuge strength and help.

He will even remain fearless when the waters roar and foam in verse 3.

And though we may think the sea to be less sure than the mountains...

The oceans are normally fairly stable as well.

Good are shipped across them every day.

People even build houses near the beach without much fear of them being destroyed.

Yet hurricanes and tidal waves do occur.

And they are powerful forces that also fill people with fear...

Yet the psalmist assures us that natural disasters are not a source of fear in his life.

Since the Lord is his refuge.

And the new see the word "Selah."

Which just means that this would be a time to pause in the song.

A time to think about what was being sung.

And let it sink deep into your soul.

The truth of these first few verses is that we can live without the fear of impending natural disasters.

Do earthquakes and floods and hurricanes kill Christians?

Sure, but we don't leave in fear of them.

The Lord is our refuge and strength.

Nature is unstable and can't be fully trusted.

God is stable and completely trustworthy.

And because of that, we feel safe.

But also....#2....

II. We are Safe Because God is By Our Side

Verse 4...

*⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad
the city of God,
The holy dwelling places of the Most High.*

In contrast to the waters that cause people to fear in verse 3...

The psalmist talks about waters that bring joy in verse 4...

Take your Bible and turn to Genesis 2:10...

God is providing a description of Eden that has yet to be stained by sin...

And notice what is in the land...

*¹⁰ Now a river ^[g]flowed out of Eden to water
the garden; and from there it divided and
became four ^[h]rivers. ¹¹ The name of the first
is Pishon; it ^[i]flows around the whole land
of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² The gold
of that land is good; the bdellium and the
onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the*

second river is Gihon; it ^[i]flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is ^[k]Tigris; it ^[l]flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the ^[m]Euphrates.

In the garden, there were streams and rivers...

Now, turn all the way to the back of your Bibles to Rev. 22:1...

***22** Then he showed me a river of the water of life, ^[a]clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of ^[b]the Lamb, ² in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life,*

Now, we are looking at the new heavens and earth and what do we see?

A river.

A river before sin, and a river after sin has been abolished.

And these bodies of water will be a source of joy and not fear...

Waters in a fallen world are a source of dread...

Waters in a sinless world are a source of delight.

In this case, the psalmist is probably referring to the waters that flowed through Jerusalem.

And provided drinking waters within the walls of the city.

And that would be a source of happiness for the citizens of the city.

And then verse 5...

⁵ God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved;

God will help her ^[1]when morning dawns.

Jerusalem was also a safe place because God protected her.

Most commentators on Psalm 46 believe that it was written after the events in 2 Kings 18-19...

Let's flip there for just a minute...

Most of you know this passage, but I think you will see something interesting here...

In 2 Kings 18, Hezekiah becomes king of Judah...

He was a good king, but right away, the Assyrians surround Jerusalem...

And threaten to destroy it...

So Hezekiah turns to the Lord for protection in 2 Kings 19:19....

And the Lord answers in a mighty way.

Look with me at 2 Kings 19:35...

³⁵ Then it happened that night that the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when ^[L]men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were ^[S]dead. ³⁶ So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home, and lived at Nineveh. ³⁷ It came about as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that ^[L]Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him

with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place.

Notice, when did the situation improve from the perspective of the people?

The next morning.

Now, let's look at one more...

Exodus 14:26...

Again this is a very familiar story to most of yall...

Israel is fleeing from the Egyptians through the Red Sea that God parted from them...

²⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen." ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing ^[s] right into it; then the Lord ^[t] overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

There is something to be said about the help that comes from the Lord in the morning.

And maybe you are missing out on that if you aren't up early and spending time with Him in the Scriptures and in prayer.

What did Jeremiah write in Lamentations 3:22?

²² The Lord's lovingkindnesses ^[1] indeed never cease,

For His compassions never fail.

*²³ They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.*

That is the basis for my favorite hymn...

Great is thy Faithfulness...

Where the chorus is...

Great is thy Faithful, Great is Thy Faithfulness,

Morning by Morning new mercies I see...

And there is a sense where God's help often comes in the morning.

Are you there?

Sometimes help comes in the early hours.

May we all be faithful to be there when God sends help.

Now you can flip back to Psalm 46....

And we will finish this up...

Verses 6 and 7....

*⁶ The ^[g] nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered;
He ^[h] raised His voice, the earth melted.
⁷ The Lord of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah.*

The world situation can look grave.

In fact, verse 6 is the theme of history.

Nations cause trouble, and kingdoms rise and fall.

We see this even today.

And it can be a source of anxiety and worry just like the earthquakes and waters of the first 3 verses.

For some, nature makes them fearful.

For others, nations make them fearful.

And sometimes, that worry makes us lose sight of this very important truth...

Everything is in the Lord's hands....

Politics is the practice of men trying to get a grip on a world that is falling out of control...

And they never can quite close their hand.

But the truth is that the world is always in God's grip.

Look at the second half of verse 6...

He raises his voice and the earth melts.

Such is the power of God.

Then the psalmist says in verse 7 that the Lord of hosts is with us...

And the Lord of hosts refers to the creatures that constantly surround the Lord and do his work.....

Remember when Elisha prayed that a man's eyes be opened so he could see all the help that was around Elisha.

And his eyes were open and he could see the mountains covered with chariots and horses.

That is a picture of the Lord of hosts, who serve to protect God's people.

And that's the picture that is being painted here.

It is a picture of God's protection of an earthly city...

But it is also a picture of the same protection of those who are in Christ.

We need not fear the trouble that surrounds us in the world...

Whether it is natural or national disaster...

We are safe because is beside us and around us.

And then last...

III. We are Safe Because God is Sovereign

Verses 8 & 9....

⁸ *Come, behold the works of the Lord,
[i] Who has wrought desolations in the earth.
⁹ He makes wars to cease to the end of the
earth;
He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in
two;
He burns the chariots with fire.*

For the original readers, this was a call to remember all that the Lord had accomplished for Israel.

Enemies had fallen left and right to little old Israel.

And the psalmist provides a gentle reminder that Israel's victories are not because she was superior...

But rather, God was the reason they were successful.

He makes cities desolate...

He ends wars...

He breaks bows and he burns chariots...

David understood that as a young boy taking on Goliath...

Listen to 1 Samuel 17:44-47....

⁴⁴ The Philistine also said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field." ⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. ⁴⁶ This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands."

God works through men to accomplish his purposes, but may we never forget it is God's strength and not our own.

God gives and takes away.

He raises up and destroys.

He is sovereign over all things.

Nothing is beyond his control.

Then verses 10 & 11....

*¹⁰ “[i] Cease striving and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the [k] nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”*

*¹¹ The Lord of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah.*

And the psalm ends two commands...

The first is to cease striving...

Which is often translated, “Be still.”

What physically happens to those who are fearful and anxious?

They tremble. They shake.

And this is a command to stop worrying.

Anxiety comes when we know things are beyond our control.

Peace and stillness and comfort come when we know the One who is in control.

Let me say that again...

Anxiety, worry and fear come from not having control...

Peace, comfort and rest come from being in a right relationship with the One who has total control of all things...

And the second command is to recognize God's sovereignty.

If you struggle with anxiety, you need to recognize that God is sovereign.

If you struggle with fear, you need to remind yourself that the Lord is in control.

And then the Psalm ends with an assurance from the Lord that He will be exalted...

Eventually, everyone will be overcome by His sovereign rule.

And that is another source of great comfort for us.

There is no danger of God losing.

We serve the King who will outlast all other kings.

We love a Lord who will rule all other lords.

You are on the winning team if you are saved.

There is great comfort in knowing that.

Conclusion

We are safe because God is stable. The seas may roar around us and the mountains may fall, but Christ is our rock.

We are safe because God is by our side.

WE may not live within the city walls of Jerusalem, but God goes before us and walks behind us.

We are safe because God is sovereign.

Nothing happens beyond the Lord's control.

We should find total safety in that truth.

Martin Luther was right....

God is indeed a mighty fortress for us.

I want to close with verse 3 of this great hymn...

And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed
his truth to triumph through us.

The Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

And that is true, Satan will fall with just one
word from the Lord.

And I pray that the words of the Lord have
also comforted your hearts tonight.

God is our refuge and strength.

May we remind ourselves daily of this
important truth.