

Today we focus on the nearness of God. We could talk about fortresses. We could talk about fortresses that seem to keep you safe, but really do not. We could talk about stronger and better fortresses. We could talk about the kind of things from which we need protection, and the kind of safety to be found in other things compared to the kind of safety found in God alone. We could compare all fortresses to God, and say that God is the strongest fortress, and all of that is true. However, what we really need to get is the answer to this question: “Who will protect us from God?” It is great that we think about whether we will or will not have God as our protection. However, let’s come at this from the perspective of the Psalmist himself. God is either your Fortress, or God is your Foe.

The Sons of Korah, authors of this Psalm, were musicians in the temple of God. This is known as the starting point for Martin Luther’s battle-hymn, *Ein’ Feste Berg*. This Psalm proclaims the ascendancy of God in one sphere after another. God has power over nature (v.1-3), God has power over the attackers of His city (v.4-7), God has power over the whole warring world (v.8-11). The Psalm is robust, and defiant in tone. It seems it was composed at a time of crisis, which makes its faith even more impressive. The crisis is not identified. The Psalm ranges far beyond any local situation.

We worry for nothing. No matter what happens, we have help in Christ.

1. We take comfort in God. (v.1-6)

In verses 1-6, the context is taking comfort in God when things look bleak.

Man has had so much to deal with in his own life down through history, that mankind has had little thought of a world catastrophe. However, this ancient Psalm can face a world catastrophe unafraid. Its opening phrase means exactly what it says. Our security is in God. Not in God plus anything else.

Verse 1, “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*” The word “Refuge” puts our focus on the defensive and protective aspect of God’s saving work for us. God is the unchanging One, in whom we find safe shelter from all threats. Furthermore, God is our strength. We are weak, and God empowers us for any actions that we do. The fact that God is very present, means that God is very ready to be found for those who are searching for Him. It is kind of like the way that a parent plays hide and seek with a very young child who cries quickly. In that case, the parent hides in a way that he can be found easily. God can be found easily by us, for He is very obviously present.

The main noun is help. God is our help. Specifically, God is our help in trouble. This is an unmatched comfort to us, and certainly worthy of our reply of singing! A Psalm is for singing, so the song goes on to enumerate exactly the types of trouble in which we find ourselves, where God is our help.

V. 2-3 Since it is true that God is our help, “...*therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way....*” Since God is our help, we will not fear. What if there were an objection? Remember Job? He trusted, and it was pointed out that Job trusted. But then there was an objection – Job only trusts you because life is easy for him. What if you mess with Job’s life? Then will he trust you? Same dynamic here. The objection starts at the largest possible calamity that can be imagined by the author. Namely, “*the earth gives way...*” What does that mean? The author means that even if there were a great undoing of all of the created order itself, the Psalmist would witness it, and still would not fear. Even if the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, this Psalmist would remain calm in his heart. In other words, the Psalmist has considered the biggest of problems, and all smaller problems are also included in this hypothetical case, and the Psalmist has concluded that he cannot imagine any scenario in which he would not keep right on trusting in the Lord. The Psalmist is not being flippant. He spelled out the details quite thoroughly in verses 2-3. (v.2) “*though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea...*” (v.3), “*though [the sea’s] waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.*”

Suddenly in verse 4, the scene changes from focusing on hypothetical troubles, to focusing on the reason that we will not fear. The scene changes from focusing on our need for help, to focusing on the One who provides us that help. The scene changes from the chaos of the sea with waters roaring to the waters of a river whose streams in an orderly way feed the city. So, we read, “*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God...*” In contrast to the troubles: the earth giving way, the mountains trembling, and the sea waters churning, there is a serene calm and the unassailable gladness of the city of God. The waters are seen but now instead of being in an oceanic torrent, the waters have been tamed, so that the water is no longer destructive, but only constructive. The waters neatly flow in streams where they belong, and this flowing of the waters feeds into the city of God. The controlled waters are evidence of the dominance of the Most High, whose holiness takes up His habitation in His city, causing gladness to abound. If the author were writing a travel brochure, across the front he would write, “Welcome to the City of God!”

v.4, “the city of God” is one of the great themes of the Old Testament, and especially of the Psalms. Those who are familiar with the Old Testament, when we hear city of God, we think King David. God’s choice of David was striking, since David was not the first born son, but rather David was the eighth son. God

was a very present help in trouble for David, and beyond David, for Jesse's family, and for all of Israel. In the same way, God's choice of Jerusalem to be the city of God was also striking. The wonder of God's selection of this city keeps breaking through. It is only because it is now the place where God lives that it is strong. This is made clear in verse 5, "*God is in the midst of her.[the city of God's people!] She [the city of God's people] shall not be moved; God will help her[the city of God's people] when morning dawns.*") This is already sketching a picture that was later painted in beautifully with many colors in the New Testament – verse 5 sketched out a vision of Zion, the city of God, as a heavenly community of people rather than just a local place on earth. In Psalm 48:2, Zion is prophesied as the joy of all the earth.

v.5, "*She shall not be moved.*" The same word is used repeatedly. "*moved*" The promise that the city of God shall not be moved, is a concept with intentional contrast to the mountains from verse 2, which were moved into the heart of the sea. So we have a split screen, and we are looking at two different images. On the one side, we are asked to imagine that if there were an earthquake so severe that every mountain on the face of the earth were shaken into bits and all the bits of rock rolled down into the ocean, even in that instance, the city of God would feel no tremors. "*God will help her when morning dawns*" is a pre-echo of the greatest deliverance of all, that was yet to come. This was not the first pre-echo. This prophesied moment was seen in pre-echoes throughout God's history with His people. Think of Exodus 14:27, where the waters of the Red Sea had been standing up like hallway walls for the people of God to pass through on dry land, but then when morning dawned the Sea was turned back to engulf the armies of Egypt. God helped His people when morning dawned. And after the enemies of God had put Jesus to death, when morning dawned, He rose from the dead, victorious over the grave, to become the permanent King of the City of God. There is one more morning dawn that is yet to come. At the great morning dawning, Christ our King Himself shall return, and gather His people to Himself in the heavenly Zion, the permanent city of God, which shall never be moved.

In v.6, the nations rage or were upset, the kingdoms totter or were shaken, and what happens next? God intervened. In the middle of the human raging and tottering and shaking, God's voice is heard. After all of the gathered human attempts to secure themselves, finally the silence from heaven is broken, and God "*utters His voice...*" What happens after God uttered His voice? The result was the melting of the earth. God's voice is also a theme in the Bible. You recall that it was God's voice that called into existence light itself. Following that, God's voice called into being the whole creation. As we are being taught here, God's voice is as decisive in dissolving the world at the end as it was in creating the world in the

beginning. How comforting this is to us in the middle of chaotic times in which we are living, that nothing is over, until we ask – what does God say about it?

When it seems like everything is going bad, we turn to God.

Now, what if God Himself is the One against you?

Then where do you turn?

TO GOD!

The more we realize that it is God bringing the storm, the more you need to pursue God.

What did Sennacherib think, when God was warring against him? He did not turn to God, but to a false god. (2 Kings 19:32-37)

What did Hezekiah think, when God was warring against him? (2 Kings 20:1-6)

What did Jonah think when He was on ship in the storm? (Jonah 1:1-17)

What did Jesus show us when He was on a ship in a storm? (Matthew 8:23-27)

What did Paul think when He was shipwrecked so many times in a storm? (Acts 27:13-44)

The Bible is filled with scenes that all ask us to consider for ourselves this one main question – where do you turn for help, when you are in trouble? We are encouraged to turn to the very present help. Our God is our refuge and our strength, which means that God takes the chaos of the storm waters, and God tames the waters into a well-organized stream to make us holy, and to make us God. God sent the storm for our sanctification, and so that we would praise Him in the storm. God will help us when morning dawns. We will not fear, though the earth gives way. God will speak to my problem, and that will be the solution. I will melt in praise. In the mean time, I will not be moved.

2. We praise God for what He has done to protect His people (v.7-9)

In v.7, we read, “*The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*” The word fortress here is a different Hebrew word than the Hebrew word used in verse 1, which was translated as refuge. This word fortress in verse 7 implies a building so tall, that no one can climb over it. The word communicates an inaccessible height. It is sometimes translated into English Bibles as “*our high stronghold.*” In those days, if the enemy could throw rocks over your city wall, or shoot arrows over your city wall, then you were not safe. This is God we are talking about, so don’t get stuck on the illustration of an ancient city wall. Now we live with airplanes, but the concept holds true in our imagination. Imagine a fence or a wall that cannot be vaulted, even by an airplane or a rocket or even by superman, (who was able to leap tall buildings in a single bound), for it is so high.

In v. 8, we have a vision of the future, as verse 8 reads, “*Come, behold the*

works of The LORD, how He has brought desolations on the earth.” The word for “behold,” in the invitation “*come, behold*” or “come and see” is a word for seeing as a prophet sees. That is, to have a spiritual understanding of future things that cannot be seen with the eyes, but rather can be seen with faith. What is to be understood? That one fine day, God will forcibly disarm the warring armies of the world.

In verse 9, we literally read that God “...*makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; He burns the chariots with fire.*” God brings to an end, all of the wars. The outcome is peace. The process that we need to go through in order to get to the place of world peace is God’s actions of judgment! God takes the actions of breaking the bow, shattering the spear, and burning the military vehicles known as chariots. This is not a process of gentle persuasion through extended peace talks. God will take action and simply make it happen. God’s judgment will come, and following that will be a thorough and lasting tranquility. (See also Isaiah 6:10-13, Isaiah 9:5 Daniel 12:1 2 Peter 3:12ff.)

So, we praise God for what He has done to protect His people, what He is doing now to protect His people, and what He will do in the future to protect His people. That brings us to our last point, from verses 10-11.

3. We rejoice that God will always get the glory He deserves. (v.10-11)

In verse 10 contains the famous phrase, “Be still and know that I am God...” which is found on many plaques for Christians. I wonder whether the phrase is understood in its context of Psalm 46? Let me read verse 10, and you listen for how the phrase is couched, “*Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!*” God is not speaking to the harassed, providing instant comfort through a phrase fit for a plaque. Instead, God is speaking to the rebellious nations. God is presenting a rebuke to the restless and turbulent world. God’s message is “Be Quiet” or “Stand down” or “Pipe down” or “Leave it alone!” It resembles Jesus’ command, when in Mark 4:39, Jesus spoke to the waters of the restless sea, and said, “Peace! Be still!” “Let it drop” = to sink, relax, let drop, abandon, refrain, forsake. To let go. To let alone. To be quiet. The goal is stated not in the context of man’s hopes, but rather in the context of an expression of God’s glory. God says, “I will be exalted.” God says, “I win.” The proud resent the fact that God wins. The humble long for God to go ahead and enact that victory.

For those of us who love this God, having the context of verse 10 renews our confidence to worship God, because He is truly worthy, and to work for God’s kingdom, because it is a good investment of all of our energies, time and talents.

Who is with us? Verse 11 Nothing less than such a God as this, is with us. Verse 11 is a glorious end to the Psalm, but I want you to notice that it is an exact

repeat of verse 7. That is not surprising, since this is a song that we are studying. Often songs have verses and then a repeated refrain. So, if you allow me to say it this way, Psalm 46 has two verses, and we sing the refrain after each verse. Here is verse 11, coming to remind us who is our very present help. Here is verse 11, to comfort us because of who is with us. Here are the words of verse 11, "*The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*"

None less than this very same God is our high stronghold. He is our mighty fortress.

CONCLUSION: We will not fear, though the earth give way...

There is only one thing left to fear. God Himself!

In the prophecy of the book of Joel, the God who attacks, also rides at the head of His attacking army, and leads them into battle. The scary part is God is attacking us in judgment for our sins. By attacking us, and the having Joel prophesy about God attacking us, God exposes the unacceptability of our sins and demands that we repent! While our first reaction to the attacking God is to turn away and run away from God, we are commanded to have the opposite response. We are commanded to turn TOWARD God and run TOWARD God! Joel 2:11-13, "*The Lord utters his voice before His army, for His camp is exceedingly great; He who executes His word is powerful. For the day of the Lord is great and very awesome; who can endure it? "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and He relents over disaster.*" Joel 2:11-13

Return to the LORD internally, not just externally. On Thanksgiving, give thanks to the LORD in your Heart, not just in your external observance of Thanksgiving Day.

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending disaster. Do you know what God will send upon us instead of disaster? His Spirit!! Joel 2:28, "*And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit ...*"

What does this have to do with Psalm 46, and Thanksgiving, and your life?

Ephesians 1:14, "*[the Holy Spirit] ...is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of His glory.*" That means God will not destroy us, because God is with us INSIDE of us! What? Yes, Christ lives inside us by His Spirit, so how could He destroy us? God the Father already destroyed His Son once for all at the cross, so that we can live forever. God will not destroy His own Spirit.

That is God's guarantee to us. That is the safety. That is the protection. That is the refuge and strength. That is the mighty fortress. What will protect us

from God? Having God inside of us. Does that remind you of anything? How about Psalm 46, verse 5, “*God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns...*” And how about verse 7, which is repeated in verse 11 of this Psalm. “*The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*”

God silences everyone who attacks us, for He is God, and He dwells in us. He will be exalted. We are safe.

No matter what comes, you are in Christ, and Christ is in you, and you are safe.

Do not fear, just believe and rejoice!

We are the city of God, the church of Christ Jesus! There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. Since God dwells in you, be glad. Be very glad. Whatever you do, do not give in to worry. Whatever comes, be sure not to fear. God is the worst thing to fear, and He already lives inside of you. You could not be more safe. Just wait. You’ll see. In the mean time, take refuge in Him and be glad. Be peaceful. Be tranquil. God is a very present help in trouble. Give thanks to Him.

Into what tower do you run?

1. Proverbs 18:10-11. In what ways are you hoping for money to solve your problem, instead of God? Compare to Matthew 11:28-30
2. Isaiah 28:16. What does it mean that the stone God set is a tested one? (Think of the cross.) How often will you be let down?
3. Psalm 93:4. How mighty is God compared to hurricanes? What will happen to you at the end of time? See Luke 21:25-27, and verse 34.