

March 20, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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BE STILL AND KNOW GOD
Psalm 46

Martin Luther wrote,
A mighty Fortress is our God,
A Bulwark never failing;
Our Helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Dr. Luther understood the attacks from the Accuser of the brethren as well as any servant of the Lord ever has. He often faced the verbal attacks of religious authorities. They threatened and harassed him. No doubt he faced the possibility of execution as others had before him.

But Luther understood two important truths. First, this world is under the influence of Satan who hates our God and Master. Second, in spite of all that Satan can do, God is our faithful fortress. In the serious game of spiritual tag, where to be tagged by sin and Satan is to be defeated, God is always home base where we will always be secure.

That is the message of this psalm. It is a wonderful message of hope and peace. The title of this song actually does not do much to reveal the theme of the song to us. Right off we understand that this is not a psalm of David. Rather it was the work of the sons of Korah. These were the descendants of the man who, along with Dathan and Abiram, rebelled against God's plan for leadership and administration. They seriously withstood God's man, Moses. We would conclude that they mistakenly yielded to Satan's temptation and paid the awful price of being killed by God's swift hand of judgment.

The good news revealing God's grace is that some of Korah's relatives survived God's judgment according to His sovereign design. Before his death David arranged for some of those men who were in the Levite family to be doorkeepers in the Lord's house while others would take care of the music ministry in the Lord's house. Therefore, it is not unusual to find a song written by someone in this group included in our collection of Psalms.

This song was to be sung according to *alamoth*. The Hebrew word *alamoth* refers to a damsel song or a song that would be pitched higher. Probably it meant that this song was written for tenors. But who was supposed to sing it is not nearly as helpful to us as what they were supposed to sing. Their song praises God for the security He offers His people in times of distress and chaos. Times somewhat like our own day.

No Fear (vv.1-3).

We should have no fear because God is our help (v.1). The writer reminded us that *God is our refuge and strength (v.1a)*. What did he mean that God is our refuge? That word described a rock or a shelter. A large overhanging rock was a good place to find refuge from the storm. Job used the word to say that people who were afflicted and persecuted would find protection from the rain in the shadow of the rock (Job 24:8).

There is a common relationship between trust and the refuge found in various psalms. It is like the child who runs to the parent in times of fear of trouble because he or she has learned to trust the parent. Too often people who profess faith in God act like He is the resort of last hope, instead of abiding in Him because He is our refuge from storm and trouble.

Furthermore, God is our strength. We acknowledge that God is inherently strong or mighty whether in or out of any kind of relationship to us. But to those who are in fellowship with God, our confidence is that we can call to Him and He will reveal Himself strong in our behalf. Specifically, God can show that strength in the physical realm. Such would be the case as we might call out to Him for protection in a literal storm. Or we plead with God when we have health trouble.

God is also our strength in social circumstances. This would have to do with fractured relationships or human enemies. David practiced such resorting to God in those times. But practically speaking, how do we flee to God who is our strength in the face of human conflict? We

read His Word for strengthening and we pray and He shows us His strength.

In light of the overall theme of this psalm, we can also conclude that God is our strength in the political arena. When the social and political environment is crumbling, God is still strong. Do we really act like God is our political strength?

God is a very present help in trouble (v.1b). This statement serves to remind us that there will be trouble. Afflictions, stresses, difficulties come in many different forms. The word for *trouble* literally speaks of a narrowing or a tight spot. We are in a tight spot when it appears there is no where to turn or go in order to escape the stress. People put us in those tight spots when they criticize us, gossip about us, seek to remove us from our job, or just want to hurt us. Circumstances put us in tight corners in areas from health issues to cultural meltdown. Christians living under Communism or Islamic rule know this trouble more intensely than the rest of us.

What can we do? Where to turn? Is life hopeless? There is hope because where there is trouble, God is our help. He is very present. There is no place in the universe or in eternity where God is not— except hell. Consider David’s conclusions in Psalm 34. *The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. (Psalm 34:15). When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all (Psalm 34:17-19).* This truth is especially true for believers who are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, in the face of chaos we will not fear (vv.2-3). *Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling (vv.2-3).* In this life, at any time, somewhere in this world, chaos is possible. Look at the pictures the psalmist gave to describe this chaos. He proposed that the earth might give way. The earth is a symbol of strength and security. We build huge buildings on the bedrock of earth. Imagine the combined weight of all the skyscrapers in New York City. What if the earth gives way as in an earthquake or a massive sink hole. A lot of buildings would disappear.

Maybe you were somewhat distressed a couple of years ago when a sinkhole developed under the Corvette Museum in Bowling Green, KY. Who would have imagined it? Of all places, why did the earth give

way under one-of-a-kind Corvettes? Surely we would not have been as distressed if such a thing happened at a Barbie Doll Museum.

Mountains are even more secure than the earth. To the ancients, nothing represented security better than the massive, rocky mountains that could not be moved. We move small chunks of mountains at great cost with modern machinery. What consternation will result if the “big one” really does hit the San Andreas Fault? What if a large chunk of California just slid off into the Pacific Ocean? How would people respond? How would you and I respond? More realistically, how do people respond when massive tsunamis wipe out whole sections of a coastline?

It is good for us to remember reality. Most of us never face troubles that extreme. But our personal testing might seem like an earthquake or tsunami. How should we respond?

We will not fear. The psalmist encouraged us by saying that even in the face of awful trouble we will not be terrorized. The English word *fear* is the Hebrew word used to describe the emotional reaction of the Israelites at Mt. Sinai when God came down to them in fire, smoke, lightening, and blasting trumpet. *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off (Exodus 20:18).*

The same Hebrew word can also describe being awestruck. We are not going to respond like that in the face of trouble and disaster. How can we not be fearful in the face of natural disaster? How can we not be terrified when the Social Police haul us off to concentration camps to be re-indoctrinated so that we will stop resisting political correctness? How did Daniel and his friends respond in the face of political and social upheaval? They were not terrified but simply trusted in the LORD who promised to be their stronghold also.

Let the Nations Rage, God Is with us (vv.4-7).

The great promise is that God is in our midst (vv.4-5). The place of God’s habitation is glad. *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High (v.4).* A stream that supplied abundant water was essential to the well being of ancient Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the city where God was pleased to make His presence known. This is a great picture of God’s provision for His

people. It was captured very well by John's vision of the eternal city. He wrote, *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1-2).*

That river in eternity is God's supply. It is the same kind of supply God promises everyone who has the indwelling Holy Spirit who is like an everlasting spring. That is what Jesus promised the Samaritan woman at the well. *Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14).* Of course that spring of living water is the expected norm when God Himself has taken up residence within us.

Is it good, is it important that God has taken up residence within us? Most certainly in light of the fact that the place of God's habitation is secure. *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns (v.5).* God within us is not a bothersome thing. We should never be agitated that God being in us might somehow take the joy out of life. God in us gives us confidence that even the worst of trials cannot shake our faith in Him.

Because God is in us, let the nations rage (vv.6-7). There is no argument that earthly kingdoms tend to be a bit volatile. Our text says that *the nations rage, the kingdoms totter (v.6a).* There have been very few times in the recorded history of humanity when there has not been war, tottering, and rage. Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history. For 3,132 years of recorded history one people group has killed at least 1,000 (the number that qualifies for war) members of another people group. We have not known serious conflict on our soil for over 150 years. None of us have ever experienced war within our land . . . yet. But all of us have a certain uneasiness with the state of affairs in our nation.

A good number of the people in this body of believers were alive when the German people reacted in anger to their loss in WWI, the pathetic national economy, and the sense of loss of nationalism. Along came a guy who promised to make Germany great again. The majority of the people believed it and elected a charismatic man named Adolf Hitler. The rest is history as they say. Millions of God's chosen people

suffered severe persecution even the ultimate loss, loss of life. Thousands of Christians were also dislocated from their homes and families by the Nazis. The same kind of thing could happen here. How will we respond to rage and tottering?

We will be confident that the LORD of hosts is with us. He is almighty. *He utters his voice, the earth melts (v.6b).* God is so much more powerful than any king, or general or president who causes national disruption. God who brought all things into existence by a mere word, can speak and melt the entire earth. Indeed one day He will do just that. *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed (2 Peter 3:10).*

That incredibly, majestic and powerful God is with us. *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress (v.7).* The General who is over all the angels in heaven is on our side. That should give us incredible confidence. Over the years, light has been made of the "Evangelicals" who claimed that God was on their side in the social battles. I am not about to try to draw the lines marking whose side God is on. But, if we are God's people, He is dwelling in us in the person of the Holy Spirit, and that clearly means the LORD of hosts is with US.

Because He is with us, He is our fortress. In the wild, wild west forts were very important. Often the settlers would build their farms in somewhat close proximity of the forts so that if there was an uprising of Native Americans, who were being pushed off their lands, they could find safety in the forts.

Observe the Many Reasons to Rest in God (vv.8-11).

See how the LORD controls nations (vv.8-9). He brings desolations on the earth. *Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth (v.8).* Pay attention to what God has done. It is quite human-like to become so focused on life that we do not see the work of God. We are like a teenager playing a video game. The house could be on fire and he is unaware of his plight because he is about to achieve a level he has never achieved before.

Probably that is a fair description of most Americans who are totally distracted with the passing stuff they call life. Sadly, too many people who profess to be God's people hardly ever stop to consider His

work. God's work is best observed by learning about God in His Word and then paying attention to what He is doing in nations, individuals, and sometimes even in nature.

Sometimes God has a way of arresting the attention of all the distracted people. The next statement in this psalm reminds us that God has brought desolations on the earth. Sometimes those desolations are natural disasters. Sometimes those desolations are wars. Are we saying that God is some kind of mean ogre who causes natural disasters and causes people to go to war? No. God is perfectly just and holy. Often God shows kindness, grace, and mercy beyond comprehension.

However, God set His laws of righteousness in place at creation. Therefore, all people and nations reap what they sow. When nations sow seeds of sin and injustice, at some point they are going to reap a harvest. Israel sowed seeds of unrighteousness for a long time. God kept warning them they were going to have to pay the piper. Finally, after over 200 years of warning God allowed Assyria to overthrow Israel. But because Assyria was arrogant, God allowed Babylon to overthrow them. And because Judah refused to repent and acted like Israel, about 100 years later God allowed Babylon to destroy Judah. But because Babylon was proud and arrogant about their power, God allowed them to be overthrown by Persia. And on it goes.

James spelled out the principle God uses. *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask (James 4:1-2).* Sometimes God does arrange the forces of nature as a channel for His judgment against the sins of people groups. But it doesn't have to be that way!

While it is true that God brings desolation on the earth, it is also true that He makes peace on the earth. *He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire (v.9).* God's desire is peace. He proves this by granting peace to everyone who trusts in Him. *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you (Isaiah 26:3).* We do not need to have tumult in our souls. We do not have to be at war with others.

God's works that lead to peace will be obvious as He brings all things in human history to culmination according to His plan. *He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples;*

and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (Isaiah 2:4).

Therefore, we can rest in the LORD's control (vv.10-11). Be still and know God. The psalmist put it like this: *"Be still, and know that I am God" (v.10a).* The order of this statement is critical. First, we must be still. That requires us to stop fretting. We must stop trying to control everything in your life or even things in other people's lives. Stop worrying about what you cannot fix. Stop trying to make God happy according to your own idea of righteousness. Stop trying to please everyone else. Okay, now maybe we are still.

Now we are ready to know that God is God. We learn this through His Word. Some Christians stay so distracted that they cannot get their minds focused on what they are trying to read in the Bible. Open your Bible, ask God to quiet your soul, and ask Him to make Himself obvious in His Word. Cut out all the distractions of life for a few minutes and meditate on what you read. What did that part of the Bible say about God, about you? Pray. Talk to God.

Be still and watch God be exalted. God promised, *"I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (v.10b).* God will be exalted. It really doesn't matter what the nations do or attempt to do. It really doesn't matter if all the nations deny God even exists. God is being exalted in all the earth right now. Don't miss it. If you are caught up in the bustling, jostling crowd of "what's happening now," you are missing what God is doing. Stop, turn off the TV, shut off the computer, get out your Bible and see what God said about how He is being exalted.

God's exaltation is everywhere in creation. God's exaltation is especially obvious right now in what some people consider to be the chaos of the nations. God is busy. Enjoy it! *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress (v.11).*