

“Hope in God with Us as our Fortress”

Psalms 46

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To the choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah. According to Alamo. A Song.

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.*
- ² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah*
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.*
- ⁵ God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.*
- ⁶ The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.*
- ⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah*
- ⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.*
- ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.*
- ¹⁰ “Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”*
- ¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah*

What Gives Confident Hope?

I enjoy watching sports. What is it that gives some players confident hope, no matter what odds they're facing? And what is it that gives some players, and many of their fans, no real expectant hope of victory no matter what the circumstances seem to be?

Some players are just so poised under pressure, you know they're going to lead their teams to victory, no matter what the odds against them. For me, no one was better than this in Super Bowl situations than Joe Montana, and no one was better in the NBA Finals than

Michael Jordan. They both had a confidence that kept them calm and focused and allowed them to make some of the all-time great plays in the history of professional sports.

I do believe that sports can teach us much about life, but life is not a sport. Life is a gift, a blessing, and at times is full of trials and conflict. In this life, we who belong to God through faith in the Lord Jesus are both greatly blessed and greatly opposed, and so we experience joy and have so much to be thankful for, but we also face temptations and attacks that sometimes leave us feeling weak and overwhelmed.

Where can we find confident hope and real courage in the face of trials, temptations, and the attacks of our enemies? Where and how we find our hope and courage is as important as whether or not we have hope and courage in our Christian lives, for it is far too easy to be self-reliant and self-confident. And so we turn to the beautiful and powerful words of Psalm 46 for a different approach.

I. We Will Not Fear in Trouble, vv. 1-3

*¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.*

*² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,*

*³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah*

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Sometimes in a psalm, you have to wait until the end or near the end before you find the hope and the strength, the light and the courage. Here, we’re given this in the opening verse. God – the One who is mighty in strength and power beyond all others – is our refuge – our shelter, our hiding place – and our strength – our power, our ability – a very present help in trouble. To say that God is very present means that He is both always present and very closely present. He is never absent from us, and He is never far from us.

David celebrates the very present God with him in Psalm 139:1-12 –

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

*² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.*

*³ You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.*

*⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,

and lay your hand upon me.
⁶ *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;*
it is high; I cannot attain it.

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
⁸ *If I ascend to heaven, you are there!*
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
⁹ *If I take the wings of the morning*
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
¹⁰ *even there your hand shall lead me,*
and your right hand shall hold me.
¹¹ *If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,*
and the light about me be night,"
¹² *even the darkness is not dark to you;*
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

God is so closely present with us that He knows our inmost thoughts and every word before we speak it. He hems us in behind and before and lays His hand upon us, which means we cannot take a step without God's constant presence with us. And we can never either flee from God or hide from God. He is always and everywhere with us.

But Psalm 46 emphasizes not just that God is very closely and all times with us, but that He is our very present help. He is with us closely and always as our help – as our refuge and our strength.

God is the sole reason for confident hope in Psalm 46:

Therefore, we will not fear . . .

If you are convinced that God is with you as your ever present help, as your very close and never-leaving refuge and strength – well, then, logically, you never have any reason to fear, no matter what happens, even

though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
³ *though its waters roar and foam,*
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

The earth giving way and the mountains being moved into the heart of the sea speaks of seeing everything that seems so reliable and permanent collapse. Everything around us could collapse and give way, and still we would have no reason to fear. The roaring and foaming of the waters, swelling so high as to make the mountains tremble, speaks of strong and overwhelming danger and opposition. Opposition and doubt could rise to threaten us with seemingly overwhelming power and force, yet still we have no reason to fear.

Many Bible scholars believe Psalm 46 was written in the face of the threat facing Jerusalem by Sennacherib of Assyria in 701 BC. The Assyrians were the mightiest power in the world, the greatest empire the world had ever seen to that point in human history. They conquered Northern Israel and took them into captivity in 721 BC, twenty years earlier. Now, in 701 BC, they had destroyed all the fortified cities of Judah and were threatening to lay siege to Jerusalem. To say the Jewish people were outnumbered would be a massive understatement. In Isaiah 36:8-9, the Rabshakeh of the Assyrians, their official sent to pressure Jerusalem to surrender, mocked the people of God by saying, *“Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants?”*

From a human perspective, according to human reason, the Rabshakeh was not wrong to be so confident. But what he wasn't counting on was the ever-present help of God Almighty. In just one night, the angel of the LORD swept through the camp and the Assyrians with such utter devastation – 185,000 Assyrians were killed in a single night – that the Assyrians turned tail and crawled back home and never threatened Jerusalem again. Jerusalem would fall, by God's just judgment, over 100 years later, but it would not be the Assyrians who would conquer the city, as they had already faded from power by that time.

We do not need to be afraid of any enemy, for even our enemies are in the hands of God and are directed according to His pleasure to serve His purposes for His eternal glory and our true and eternal good.

II. We Will Be Refreshed and Will Not Be Moved, vv. 4-6

Far from being afraid, in the Lord, we can know that we will be refreshed in times of trouble and that we will not be moved. In fact, God Himself will be our powerful help at just the right time.

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

⁵ *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;*

*God will help her when morning dawns.
 6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
 he utters his voice, the earth melts*

The river of God in verse 4 is the ever-flowing stream of His gracious provision for His own. In John 7:37-38, Jesus said, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’*” And then the Apostle John explains what Jesus meant, in verse 39: “*Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*”

Each of us who believe in Jesus has the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts by faith, and the Holy Spirit refreshes us with the grace of God, strengthening us, renewing us, encouraging us, and correcting us, through the Word of God and prayer and the gathered worship of God’s people. We are refreshed by God in our midst, as He lives in each one of us personally and dwells especially in the gathered worship of His people, with power to comfort and encourage, to strengthen and transform us by His continual supply of grace for us in Christ.

Those of us who belong to Christ will not be moved from God’s will for us. We may be moved from we had planned or anticipated for our lives, but we will not be moved from God’s will, from His purposes.

Right after the promise that she shall not be moved come the further and sweeter promise, “*God will help her when morning dawns.*” In the immediate context of the Assyrian invasion of Judah, “when morning dawns” may have been a reference to the deliverance of God that became evident when morning dawned and the Assyrian army realized that they had lost 185,000 of their soldiers in the night. Throughout history, we can see many times when God came to the rescue of His people just in time, just at the right moment, when He decided to intervene and help them.

However, ultimately, Psalm 46:5 is pointing our confident hope toward the final and ultimate dawning of the morning. “When morning dawns” will be when Jesus comes again as the Light of the World, Delivered of His People, and Judge of the Nations. He will come and put a final end to all night and all oppression and opposition to God and His people. So, the promise “*God will help her when morning dawns*” should stir our hearts to put our hopes in the Second Coming of Jesus and the glorious end of this fallen age and the ushering in of the New Heavens and the New Earth where righteousness will reign supreme and we will live in eternal day.

Verse 6 makes it even more abundantly clear that this is the dawning day Psalm 46 has in mind. For while the nations rage against God and His people, the kingdoms of the earth will totter and fall, for when He utters His voice, the earth will melt.

When will this day come? No one knows but God alone. 2 Peter 3:10-13 says,

¹⁰ 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^[a] will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.^[b]

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

And Revelation 19:11-16:

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh, he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

For believers living in a fallen world and struggling hard against sin, temptation, opposition from the world, and the constant antagonism of the enemy of our souls, our hope and our confidence is made secure when we fix our hearts on the coming of the dawn, on the glorious Day of the Lord.

III. We Will Invite the Nations to Behold God & His Works, vv. 8-10

And while we confidently and expectantly wait for the coming day, we have a message to bring to the nations that rage against God:

*⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;*

*he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
 he burns the chariots with fire.
 10 "Be still, and know that I am God.
 I will be exalted among the nations,
 I will be exalted in the earth!"*

We are called to proclaim the character and power of God to the world and to call the nations of the world to honor Him as God. What exactly are we to proclaim?

Psalm 46:8 says, "Come, behold the works of the LORD." The works of God in creation and in redemption establish who God is and the trustworthiness of His word, giving us a firm basis to proclaim what He is going to do in the future. The fact that He created everything out of nothing by the word of His power, and the fact that Jesus died on the cross to redeem us and rose again from the dead in glorious power, seen by hundreds of eye-witnesses, then returned to heaven, promising to come again – these facts of the works of the LORD establish the truth and reliability of His coming work.

And so, we must proclaim the Gospel to the nations, and the heart of the Gospel is who God is and what He has done. We must tell how Jesus is unique in who He is as the God-man and what He has done in rising again from the dead. Even as we proclaim the truth of the Gospel to the nations, we are strengthened in our confident hope and expectation, as we are reminded of what God has done and what He has promised to do.

In the imagery of Psalm 46, the streams of living water that refresh the City of God flow best when they flow from God into the city of God and then from the city of God out to the nations. In Israel, it's easy to see the difference between the Sea of Galilee in the North and the Dead Sea in the South. The Sea of Galilee is a living and active vital fishery, and it has been for thousands of years. But the Dead Sea is exactly that – completely dead. Nothing can live in the Dead Sea because it is so incredibly salty. What's the difference? Both seas are fed to the Jordan River, the river from the same source. However, the water of the Jordan River flows into the Sea and Galilee and back out again, keeping the sea fresh and full of life. The Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea and stops, not flowing out again, but just evaporating from the Dead Sea, concentrating the salt levels more and more until it is too toxic for life.

Which sea will you be? Verse 10 is the summary of the message we are to proclaim from God to the nations:

*“Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”*

“Be still” here means “cease striving” or let your activity go. The world is frantically busy in its striving activity, always trying to achieve, to create, often in direct defiance of God, often trying to create substitute gods. Only one thing is really needed. In His prayer to His Father in John 17, Jesus said, “*This is eternal life, to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.*” This is what we need to tell the world, what God wants to tell the world through us. We were all created by God to enjoy knowing God as our eternal life. In the end, God will be exalted among the nations and in all the earth, so the best thing to do is to come to Him today and trust Him before He comes in judgment.

IV. God with Us as Our Fortress, vv. 7 & 11

That’s the message for the nations: Come and see. Be still and know.

For those of us who already know the Lord, who have been made His own dearly loved children by grace through faith, the refrain of verses 7 & 11 is the message of Psalm 46 for us:

*7 The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah*

The LORD of Hosts – YaHWeH Sabaoth

The LORD – YaHWeH – the unchanging, eternal, self-sufficient Great I AM

- “of hosts” – of the armies of heaven
- “is with us” – He is on our side because He has made us part of His family and has put us on His side
- “the God of Jacob” – Jacob the deceiver who was blessed by God despite his sin and who wrestled with God
- “is our fortress” – our strong tower, our refuge, our defense.

This is the strongest Gospel hope. The Gospel-promise name of Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, and the whole story of the Gospel unfolded through all of Scripture is about how God is meaning our broken relationship with Him through the person and work of Jesus, so that He will be with us and we will be with Him forever.

In this world, we live in hostile territory, surrounded by enemies. God is with us as our fortress, where we can hide and be protected, refreshed, and equipped for the battle. We

need to see that we are in a battle and surrounded by enemies, that the LORD is with us as the LORD of hosts and our fortress, and we need to turn to Him, run to Him, and hide in Him. We cannot fight and win the battle on our own, and we don't need to.

Joyful Confidence in Trouble

Where do you stand with the LORD this morning? Do you know Him and do you have eternal life in knowing Him? If not, come to Him through faith in Jesus Christ, who dies to take away the sins of His people and rose again to give us eternal life and who is coming again to judge the living and the dead. Trust in Jesus and come to know God through Him.

Or perhaps you do know God, but you've been out in the world fighting your battles and feeling overwhelmed by doubt or fear or anxiety or whatever because you've been living and fighting in your own strength and not seeking the refuge and strength, the ever-present help in trouble that the LORD alone gives. How can you seek the LORD? On your knees in prayer and through the word and in worship with His people – truly seeking Him – not just seeking stuff from Him. For He is the reward and the salvation and the eternal life and refuge our souls need.