

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 8.11.2024

PSALM 46 - GOD OUR FORTRESS

I. INTRODUCTION

Psalm 46

- 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*

- Psalm 46 is a hymn, attributed to the Sons of Korah.
- This is the first of what are known as the songs of Zion.
- This psalm was Martin Luther's favorite.
- His wonderful hymn, A Mighty Fortress is our God, is based on the truths of Psalm 46.
- In dark times and distressing situations, he famously told Philip Melancthon, his friend and co-laborer, "*Come, let us sing the forty-sixth psalm and let the devil do his worst!*"
- This psalm is about God's people confessing the language of faith and confidence in God who is our fortress, even under threats and difficulties, and against the hostility and hatred of the world and the devil.
- While this psalm describes a rescue of God's people that hearkens to the time of the final judgment, it depicts the repeated rescues of God's people throughout history.
- And while this psalm is about the corporate rescue of God's people, we can still apply its truths at an individual level.
- What is true for the Church of Jesus Christ as a whole is true for each individual believer within her.

II. THE CHURCH UNDER COSMIC THREAT

- The opening line of this psalm strikes the note of confident assurance.
- "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."
- The theme of God as a refuge, stronghold, fortress appears throughout many of the psalms.
- Ps 9:9 The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed.
- Ps 11:1 In the Lord I take refuge..."
- Ps 18:1-2 I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge.
- Ps 27:1b The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

- And not only is God a refuge for his people, not only is he their strength, he's also a very present help in trouble.
- God's people repeatedly found themselves in trouble.
- While we don't know of any specific trouble in view at the writing of this psalm, many scholars point to the events of 2 Kings 18-19, and the trouble Judah faced during Hezekiah's reign.

- He is our refuge, strength and help in ordinary times of tranquility and he will be our help in extraordinary times of trouble.
- The emphasis is not so much that God is continually rendering aid, the emphasis is on the exceedingly great measure of the aid he provides his people.
- Those who take refuge in the Lord and seek help from him will find it in magnificent measure.

- Because of the confession of assurance in the strength, stronghold and help that is God, his people can declare, "Therefore we will not fear..."
- God's people will not fear even when it feels like creation itself is coming apart and unraveling.
- The imagery in v2-3 is terrifying and depicts a cosmic disruption on an apocalyptic level.

- Like that described in Revelation at the end of history when God purges creation of all of its defilement and remakes the heavens and the earth.
- These are scenes describing God's terrifying final judgment.
- The landscape changes under the quaking of the earth.
- The waters of the sea roar and foam, a depiction of terrifying chaos of disorder that echoes back to the raging flood waters that cleansed the earth.
- "Even though the earth gives way..."
- The declaration God's people make that God is their refuge and strength, does not exempt them from trouble.
- While others would naturally be terrified and full of dread by the unmaking of the world, God's people stand unafraid as a consequence of God being their refuge.
- While the language reminds us of the end of human history, the imagery is also used in Scripture to describe God's judgment of the wicked nations and the destruction of God's enemies. (Isaiah 13)
- The psalm shows us that what is in view here is the utter destruction of the nations that are hostile to the people of God, who rage against the Lord and his Messiah. (Psalm 2:1-2)
- The world is at war with God and with God's people.
- It has been that way from the beginning and it will be that way until the final Day.
- "The nations rage..."
- Why? Because the Lord's promised Messiah, the Son of David, is a threat to all who reject God as Sovereign and repudiate his law and want to live as if they will never give account to the Creator.
- Cosmic conflict is what we have been thrust into from the moment we are born.
- The church of Jesus Christ has faced, is facing, and will face continuing threats from cosmic powers of this present darkness, from spiritual forces in the heavenly places, from rulers and authorities who hate God and hate his people (Ephesians 6:10-12).
- But God's people need not fear.
- God is refuge and strength and a very present help in troubled times.
- And we will not fear when God judges the world and all of creation is unmade, and the wicked nations are brought to nothing.
- "God is our fortress! Therefore we will not fear!"

III. THE CHURCH'S SAFETY IN CHRIST

- The Selah after v3 marks a natural break in the psalm.
- "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High."
- In the first part of this psalm, the waters roar and foam, they form the imagery of the destructive storms of judgment. But those chaotic waters are under God's sovereignty.
- But now, water takes the form of the life-giving waters of a river.
- This life giving river is said to flow through the "city of God." T
- This is the first occurrence in the psalms of the expression, "city of God."
- Psalm 48:1 identifies it with Mount Zion and as the city of the great King.
- Zion was where the Lord chose as the place of his presence; it is the earthly counterpart to the heavenly throne.

- The prophets describe a river running through the New Jerusalem, in the new heavens and new earth. (Ezek 47; Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8-9; Rev 22:1-2)
 - This city is the “holy habitation of the Most High.”
 - This city is set apart from the sinful chaos of the surrounding world.
 - It is distinct, exempt from the cosmic upheaval of final judgment.
 - God’s habitation is there.
 - The Most High, is the highly exalted, sovereign and supreme God.
 - He is the one who has made this city his habitation.
 - Those who belong to this city are safe.
 - Why? Because God is in the midst of her.
 - The earth may give way and melt like wax, the mountains may topple, but the inhabitants of this city shall not be moved.
 - There is a contrast between the secure city and insecure cosmos.
 - The prophets, and in Revelation, describe the new creation as a cosmic temple (Revelation 21-22)
- And though this is a "not yet" reality, we can be assured that in the present, God’s presence stabilizes his people even when the ground beneath their feet gives way.
 - When things look their darkest, there is light, light is a symbol of hope.
 - Isaiah’s prophecy of Messiah (Isaiah 9)
 - Christ’s coming is described as “the sunrise” visiting from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death... (Luke 1:78-79)
- How does one make sure they are part of the city of God in order to be kept safe when the cosmos unravels?
 - One must be made a citizen of that city through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - By receiving Jesus Christ and believing upon him and what he has done to secure your place in the city of God.
 - By renouncing your allegiance to this world and worshipping the only Sovereign, who is worthy of all praise.
 - When we are saved, we are hid with Christ in God, there is no greater stability than that.
 - There is no greater place of security than being in Christ.
 - He becomes our refuge and fortress.
- Jesus said, *“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* (Matthew 16:18)
 - The church will always be in conflict with the world.
 - Hell itself is set against the people of God.
 - We are not exempt from trouble.
 - But God will always protect and preserve his Church.
 - God’s presence with his Church ensures her stability, security and timely help from the Lord.
- V6 The nations, which are the embodiment of the chaotic waters, threatening the church throughout history, rage. Again, this is the scene of Psalm 2.
 - Like the mountains, “The Kingdoms totter.” But God’s city will not totter.
 - “He utters his voice, the earth melts.”
 - When the Lord rises to judge the earth, the earth melts away.
 - All who resisted God, who rejected him and rejected his will, will melt before him.
 - God’s powerful voice formed and ordered the earth and that same voice will dissolve every element in creation.
 - The only safe place will be the one had by the people of God, in the city of God, with God dwelling in the midst of her.
 - God’s presence is the only safe place. God is their fortress.

- Whatever the trouble, God's presence in the midst of his people is the ground for tranquility that drives out fear. We are safe in Him!
- "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."
- Another powerful confession of God's people.
- Lord of Hosts is God of invincible armies..
- God is the Divine Warrior. He commands all of the powers of heaven and earth.
- And the one who commands invincible armies is "with us."
- This echoes Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy. (Isaiah 7:14).
- This is Jesus, who is Immanuel, God with us (Matt 1:23).
- He is the God of Jacob. The same God that providentially cared for Jacob in his troubles and distress is the same God who now watches over his people.

IV. FINAL PEACE

- Vv8-9 is an invitation to all who can hear, to envision the time described in the psalm.
- This is a time in the future, but the psalm speaks directly to its original audience and to us.
- By faith in Christ, who is our fortress, we believe that God will destroy all his enemies and purify creation on that Day.
- The wicked will perish and the righteous will be vindicated.
- V8 "Come, behold the works of the Lord..."
- This is the first of two exhortations in this psalm.
- This is one of the ways all are to respond to what has been so triumphantly declared.
- It is a word to the enemy nations, that rage against the Lord and his anointed, who oppress the people of God.
- It is a word to those whose faith may be wavering in the face of trouble.
- "Come, Behold..." is an imperative. It means to "Have a really good look." It implies that you have taken the time to discern and understand what you see.
- The imperative is to inspect the way that God will destroy the works of evildoers and the wicked nations, bringing desolations to the earth.
- There will come a day when all those who refuse to turn from evil will no longer be permitted to do so.
- All of the wicked will be punished.
- True and lasting peace will be the inevitable outcome of this process of comprehensive judgment.
- The world will be devastated and forcibly disarmed.
- "He makes wars to cease..."
- True and lasting peace will not come by human innovation or design.
- But, by command of the Lord's voice, all the chaos of this world, every war will cease.
- The word "cease," comes from the word from which we get Sabbath.
- On that Day, the Lord's powerful voice, will inaugurate perpetual and permanent Sabbath rest for which all of creation groans and longs for.
- Every rival kingdom will be thrown down and brought to nothing.
- All of the instruments of war will be rendered inoperative.
- Never again will God's people be persecuted or oppressed.
- Never again will they have to fear for their safety.
- Never again will they have to live through times where evil and violence increases and the wicked flourish.

- V10 is the second of the exhortations given.
 - This one comes as the prophetic voice of God.
 - “Be still, and know that I am God.”
 - But the command, Be still! is not just for Christians.
 - Be Still! Is a stern word to all rebels, to cease and desist from opposing God and His Messiah, from oppressing Christ’s people.
 - Recall how Jesus commanded the winds and raging waves, “Peace, be still!”
 - There he displayed his sovereignty over the natural forces of the created order.
 - With this command, the Sovereign Lord issues a call for all those at war with him to cease their efforts and acknowledge him as the only Sovereign.
-
- When the Lord unmakes the world, when the righteous inhabitants of the city of God are protected, when the Lord’s voice ends war and every rival kingdom is toppled and razed to the ground, God’s people will be still and know him.
 - On that Day, he will be exalted among the nations and in all the earth. (Is. 2:17)
- Be Still! And now that he is God.
 - The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress!

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?