

Psalm 46 "Making God Your Refuge" **

Main Idea: In Psalm 46, we learn the difference God makes in situations of trouble. The Psalm affirms that God is to be our refuge in three troubling times.

I. Affirmation: God is a refuge for *present troubles* (1-3).

A. Affirm what God is (1).

1. He is our refuge.
2. He is our strength.
3. He is our help in trouble.

B. Affirm the difference God makes (2-3).

1. Catastrophes do happen.
2. We need not fear.

II. Affirmation: God was a refuge for *past troubles* (4-7).

- A. He protected Jerusalem (4-5).
- B. He stopped the nations (6).

III. Affirmation: God will be a refuge for *future troubles* (8-11).

A. He wants us to ponder *His works* (8-9).

1. He brings desolations (8).
2. He causes wars to cease (9).

B. He wants us to ponder *Him* (10).

C. He wants us to ponder *His sufficiency* (7, 11).

1. He is with us.
2. He is our fortress.

Two Practical Suggestions:

1. Make it your number one aim in life to know God.
2. Make it your number two aim to live in light of what you know.

People are hungry for God. True, many do not realize it, but they are starving for God. A couple of decades of man-centered ministry in the American Church has produced a theologically-shallow brand of Christianity. What's been *in* has been preaching about felt-needs--family issues, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and the like. The result has been spiritual malnutrition. Our generation is *starving for God*.

Most do not realize this is the case because their hunger pains have been covered up by the cotton-candy of felt-need preaching. If I haven't eaten for a week, and you give me a bag of cotton-candy, and I eat it, what will happen to my appetite? I'll lose it. I won't be hungry for the meat and bread my body needs.

Miserable, dissatisfied people think they help with their home life, or help with their finances, or help on handling job-pressure, and indeed they may need help in these areas, but these are basically symptoms. What's their real need? They need God. They are starving for the One Who alone can satisfy.

The aim of this study in God's Word is to help us get to know God better. There is no more practical pursuit to which we can devote our energy than to seek to know Him better. And Psalm 46 can help us.

This morning we're going to look at a familiar psalm. I want to tell you up front that you may not hear anything *new* today. In fact, my goal isn't novelty. It is to reaffirm something you probably know—but it's also something you probably tend to ignore and need to be reminded of often.

It's this. We are desperate for God. I mean *desperate*. The fact is, as Jesus put it, without Him we can do

nothing. But here's a fundamental problem for us. We're prone to forget that truth. We're prone to forget Him.

Is God making a difference in your life? What do I mean by that question, you ask. In Psalm 46, we learn *the difference God makes in life, especially in situations of trouble*. God is not only for Sunday. He's a seven day a week God. But He doesn't exist for us—like a Genie in a bottle. We exist for Him, and He invites us, indeed commands us, to live in constant dependency upon Him. The Christian life isn't tacking God onto the corner of our lives. It's a life in which we *make Him our refuge*.

What does that mean, and how do we do it? Psalm 46 tells us. This psalm affirms that God is to be our refuge in three troubling times.

I. Affirmation: God is a refuge for *present troubles* (1-3).

Psalm 46 begins with this heading (1), "For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to alamo. A song." And then verse 1 declares, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble."

Allow me to make some general observations concerning Psalm 46. It's a "song." It uses plural, personal pronouns ("we," "us," "our"). Possibly this psalm was a song that God wanted the Jews to sing in their corporate temple worship. What stands out most is that it's about God. That should strike us, for in our day we seem to want to think and talk about man rather than God.

That's unfortunate for us, especially when you consider the message of Psalm 46 and discover the difference knowing God can make in our lives.

Psalm 46 is an amazing song. Martin Luther had great appreciation for it. Many of you have known its solace. It's a song about God, and His people, and trouble, and the difference He makes when His people face trouble! Where do you turn when you face trouble? The psalmist calls on us to make two affirmations.

A. Affirm what God is (1). He is the One Who gives Himself to us in three ways.

1. *He is our refuge*. Refuge is a term of defense. In the Hebrew it refers to a place of shelter from rain, storm, and danger. The unchanging God is the One in whom we find shelter. He's the place of relief for His people.

Several years ago Sherry and I lived near a small lake. The king of the hill on that lake was a large aggressive swan. Also calling the lake home were some ducks. We used to watch what would happen when the baby ducks were swimming in the water and got too close to the swan. That cantankerous creature would go into attack mode and go after the helpless ducklings. And the ducklings would scurry across the water as fast as they could to get to their mother, and then duck in behind her. She may have been only one third the size of the swan, but she would have given her life to protect her young. She was their *refuge*.

The psalmist says, "*God is our refuge*." That's not all.

2. *He is our strength*. The term refers to physical and material strength. Sometimes it's translated "might." God is dynamically involved in our lives. We serve a God Who empowers the weak for action. He is strength. He is *our strength*.

3. *He is our help in trouble*. My friend, when troubles come into our lives, it doesn't mean the plan of God has gone haywire. Please notice that the psalm assumes that we will have trouble. Our troubles are occasions to experience His help!

God is our *help*. The word refers to one who gives assistance and support.

Most of us don't understand this principle very well. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied." Paul knew the order--trouble now, glory later. But we turn it around. We want glory now, and trouble never. And if we face trouble, we think something's wrong.

In his book, *Desiring God*, John Piper asks, "How many times do we hear Christian testimonies to the effect that becoming a Christian has made life easier? I recently heard the quarterback of a professional football team say that after he prayed to receive Christ, he felt good about the game again and was proud of their 8 and 8 record because he was able to go out every Sunday and give it his best."

Most Christians in the prosperous West think of Christianity in terms of its benefits. Become a Christian and things will be better now. Your family life will improve. Your business life will improve. Your friendships will improve. You'll have the good life *now*.

What's wrong with Paul then? Why would he say that if there was no resurrection, we are of all men to be most pitied? "The answer seems to be," as Piper surmises, "that the Christian life for Paul was not the so-called good life of prosperity and ease. Instead it was a life of freely chosen suffering beyond anything we ordinarily experience."

Beloved, the Christian life is full of trouble. Why then would anyone want to be a Christian? Because along with the trouble comes the One who is an ever present help in trouble! "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all (Ps 34:19)."

What must we do when we face trouble? First, affirm what God is. He is our refuge and strength, the One Who delights to help us in our trouble. Furthermore, the psalmist calls us to make a second affirmation.

B. Affirm the difference God makes (2-3). We read in verses 2-3, "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. *Selah*."

Before us is a powerful word picture that illustrates two lessons.

1. *Catastrophes do happen*. The psalmist describes a turbulent cosmic turmoil, perhaps an earthquake, that threatened the city in which he lived. In powerful poetry, he depicts mountains tumbling into the sea causing tidal waves of the ocean to pelt the remaining mountains, making them tremble again.

Catastrophes like this do happen, don't they? Sometimes life gets pretty turbulent. Though the language here is poetic, it also represents a real phenomenon in Israel, where earthquakes were not unfamiliar to the lands surrounding the Rift Valley from the upper section of the Jordan to the Arabah in the south.

And do you know what happens when a natural disaster hits? The homes of God's people are not always exempt. God doesn't put a bubble over our lives. Catastrophes do happen, even to followers of Christ. But...

2. *We need not fear*. In fact, the psalmist begins verse 2 with this affirmation, "Therefore we *will* not fear though the earth give way ['be removed,' KJV]." How can we not fear when affliction rages all around? How can we face turmoil with confidence? We can because of one vital reason. God is our refuge and strength, a very [as the KJV renders the term] present help in trouble.

Have you ever heard anyone say, "The most treasured lessons I've learned in life came to me during times of ease and comfort."? I haven't. But I've heard plenty of saints share that it was during times of anguish and trouble that God taught them. Charles Spurgeon said that those who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls. Samuel Rutherford said that when he was cast into the cellars of affliction, he remembered that the great King always kept his wine there.

God is our refuge in present troubles. *God* is. That's true for every person who knows Him through a faith relationship with His Son Jesus Christ. The Maker of heaven and earth is our refuge.

You ask, "Will I always *feel* like He's my refuge?" No. But this psalm calls on us to affirm it whether we feel it or not—because it's true whether we feel it or not. God is our refuge.

But when the trouble hits, we may wonder and doubt. How can we be sure He will help us *this time*? We can be sure for several reasons, but here's the one the psalmist develops for us next. God has a track record.

II. Affirmation: God was a refuge for *past troubles* (4-7).

Listen to verses 4-6 where the psalmist rehearses what God meant to His chosen people in the past, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day [KJV, 'God shall help her, and that right early']. ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts."

What has God done in the past? The psalmist mentions two accomplishments...

A. He protected Jerusalem (4-5). Remember the description of the raging seas in verse 3? In verse 4 the water is a stream that makes people glad. What a difference! With God, the waters are no longer manacing seas but a life-giving river.

Ponder those words: "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God." The city of God is Jerusalem, the chosen place of God's special dwelling in the Old Testament economy. Like all cities of notoriety, it faced the constant threat of attack. But Jerusalem stood firm. Why? Because, as verse 5 states, "God is within her."

I discovered something this week I'd never thought about before. The psalmist mentions a river in verse 4, a river that makes the city of God glad. But Jerusalem had no river. Other great cities—like Nineveh, Damascus, and Babylon—had rivers. But Jerusalem didn't. Or did she?

The psalmist said she did. "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells." Here "the river" seems to be a metaphor for the continual outpouring of the refreshing blessings of God. As the children's song puts it, "I've got peace like a river in my soul."

Yes, there is a river. It's source is God Himself. Speaking of Jerusalem the psalmist said, "God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day." God takes care of His own.

Don't misunderstand. God doesn't promise to keep us *from* trouble. He does guarentee to take us *through* trouble and preserve us *in* the trouble. He is the protector of His own.

Charles Spurgeon had this to say over a century ago, "There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that sovereignty overrules them, and that sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought to more earnestly contend to than the doctrine of their Master over all creation--the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands--the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that throne...for it is God upon the Throne whom we trust."

God has always helped His people in the past. What an encouragement this can be to us! When David's father-in-law tried to pin him to the wall with a javelin, God protected him. When power-hunger work associates instigated Daniel's night-stay in the lion's den, God protected him. When Haman sought to kill Mordecai and the Jews, God protected His own.

It's good for us to stop and remember, beloved. We need to remember what God did for His people in past troubles. In the past God protected Jerusalem. What else did He do?

B. He stopped the nations (6). "Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; He lifts His voice, the earth melts." There is no match for God. The Philistines were no match. The Ammonites were not. The Moabites were not, as the psalmist well knew. Time and time again in the past, God stopped the nations that threatened His chosen people.

Has God ever demonstrated His help to you in the past? Have you ever known Him to be your refuge? Think of those crisis times in your past for a moment. Did God let you down? Has He ever once failed His people? Oh, there were many times when they thought so--Joseph felt forgotten in prison, Job felt ignored as he sat in ashes, Jeremiah wept as he saw the destruction of God's land--but in the end, they all affirmed that God never left His throne.

In the face of present trouble, it encourages us to know God has a 100% track record! He Who was a faithful help yesterday will be the same today!

How do we make God our refuge? It involves affirming these truths. God *is* a refuge for present troubles. God *was* a refuge for past troubles. And thirdly...

III. Affirmation: God will be a refuge for *future troubles* (8-11).

Let's bypass verse 7 for a moment, since it's repeated in verse 11, and read verses 8-10, "Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. ⁹ He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields [KJV, 'the chariot'] 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.'"

In the third movement of the psalm, the writer invites us to ponder three facets of the God Who is our refuge, especially in light of future troubles.

A. He wants us to ponder ***His works*** (8-9). "Come and see the works of the Lord." What kind of works will God do, and indeed, has He already done? Here are two.

1. *He brings desolations* (8). This may unnerve us a little, but not like the alternative. Who is in control of desolations, and indeed, who brings them? You say, "Well, God is good so He couldn't. It's the devil that causes desolations." No doubt, the devil does have his hand in tragedy, but my friend, know this. There is not one thing that can happen on this planet that is outside of God's control and influence. Not one thing. If there were, God would no longer be God. Furthermore, He could not be our refuge.

The pink slip at work. Cancer. The sudden death of a spouse. The tornado that destroys our dreams. Are these tragedies cruel jokes of Satan that God finds Himself helpless to stop?

In his popular book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Kushner reminds us that insurance companies refer to earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, and various other natural disasters as "acts of God." Then he says, "I consider that a case of using God's name in vain. I don't believe that an earthquake that kills thousands of innocent victims without reason is an act of God. It is an act of nature. Nature is morally blind, without values. It churns along, following its own laws, not caring who or what gets in the way."

Luck, chance, fate. This is modern man's answer to the delicate question, "Why?" I agree with the conclusion of Jerry Bridges when he wrote in *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*, "If there is a single event in all of the universe that can occur outside of God's sovereign control then we cannot trust Him."

And then Bridges adds, "I will say this next statement as gently and compassionately as I know how. Our first

priority in times of adversity is to honor and glorify God by trusting Him. We tend to make our first priority the gaining of relief from our feelings of heartache or disappointment or frustration. This is a natural desire, and God has promised to give us grace sufficient for our trials...But...we honor God by choosing to trust Him when we don't understand what He is doing or why He has allowed some adverse circumstance to occur."

Psalm 46 invites us to ponder the works of God, the first of which is that He brings desolations. "Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations *he has brought* on the earth." Secondly...

2. *He causes wars to cease* (9). "He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire."

War is terrible. But our God breaks the bow and shatters the spear. As we consider future troubles, know this. One day, the God of refuge will cause war to cease forever.

When? Read the book of Revelation. There's coming a day when the Son of God will return in His splendor, conquer and judge this wicked world, and establish His kingdom. Then there will be peace. Then there will be no more war. Until then, God wants us to ponder His works. Secondly...

B. He wants us to ponder **Him** (10). Notice the shift in verse 10. Until this point, the psalmist has spoken, but now God speaks. "Be still and know that I am God." God invites us to ponder *Him*. Actually, the injunction "Be still" is not so much a word of comfort as a word of rebuke to a restless and turbulent world-- "Quiet!" The command resembles the order that Jesus sounded to another raging sea, "Peace! Be still!"

Why must we be still before God? Because He alone *is* God! As God, He alone can say (as verse 10 records), "I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." That is a statement of what He deserves, and also of what He will one day accomplish. The day is coming when every knee will bow (Phil 2:9-10).

May I ask you a personal question? How long has it been since you were *still*? For many of us, our feet hit the floor running in the morning and they don't stop until we crash at night. Our schedules are jam packed with tons of activities. I'm not talking about bad things, either. We have lots of important things to do.

But none is as important as this *non-activity*. "Be still," God says, "and know that I am God." Do you make it a daily priority to be still in the presence of God? If we want Him to be our refuge, we must.

I urge you to carve out daily time to be still before God. He who gave His Son for us so that we might know Him wants us to *know Him*.

C. He wants us to ponder **His sufficiency** (7, 11). The climax of the psalm is a verse the psalmist repeats, so great is its importance. Verse 7, "The LORD Almighty [KJV, 'LORD of hosts'] is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress [KJV, 'refuge']. Selah." Again in verse 11, "The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah."

God is sufficient for us. He is all we need. We can be sure of this for two reasons.

1. *He is with us*. The Hebrew, *Yahveh Sabbaot imanu*--"The LORD Almighty is with us." We cannot escape His presence. No situation is beyond His care. His presence makes all the difference in the world.

A man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing--we're behind."

"Boy," said the spectator, "I'll bet you're discouraged."

"Why should I be discouraged?" replied the little boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!"

My friend, we know something that gives us ample reason to have hope no matter how dismal circumstances may appear. *He is with us.*

2. *He is our fortress.* "The God of Jacob is our "fortress," the psalmist says. Proverbs 18:10 tells us, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."

"But why would God want to defend me?" you ask. "I've not been very dependable to Him. Maybe He's thrown in the towel on me."

In case you're feeling that way, I want you to take a close look at something. The God of *Jacob* is our fortress. Who was Jacob? He was the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. He was also a man with a pretty rocky life. He had a ton of domestic problems, ranging from a brother who literally hated him at one point (due to his own deception), to marrying two sisters, to having kids that lied to him, and a whole lot more baggage. His was far from a problem free life.

But Jacob had this going for Him. He experienced the grace and mercy of God. God protected him, time and time again. Not because he deserved it, but because God is merciful. And the psalmist says, "The God of Jacob is *our* fortress." Yes, ours too, if we'll trust Him.

God is our refuge. He is a refuge for present troubles, just as He has been for past troubles, and will be for all future troubles. Now, let's allow that truth to hit close to home.

In his classic book *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer makes this staggering observation, "...For millions of Christians...God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle."

Is Tozer right? I think he is. I wonder if he is describing you and me.

Many of us know about God, and indeed, in salvific terms, we know God, but we do not *know* God in personal experience. Oh, we know He exists, and we believe we will stand before Him one day, but right now, in the present, He seems distant to us.

Let's be honest with ourselves. What difference is God making in your life? Can you honestly say He is? Do you see His hand at work as you move through the day?

Psalm 46 is true. God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. But to experience His help, He must be *our* refuge and strength.

Two Practical Suggestions:

1. *Make it your number one aim in life to know God.* Not just to know *about* Him, but to know *Him*. The key to knowing Him is to know His self-revelation, His Word. And the key to knowing His Word is to know the *Living Word*, Jesus Christ.

2. *Make it your number two aim to live in light of what you know.* When you learn truth about God, build your life upon it. Build your life upon Him.