

Psalm 46:1-11 | To the choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah. According to Alamoth. 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

Psalm 46 I 2024 Anno Domini

I don't know about you all but I'm looking forward to another election year. In 2016 I was young and didn't understand the dramatic emotional response to the election cycle in the church. In 2020 I was exhausted and basically ignored it. In 2024 I'm interested because I think I have a bit of a different understanding of what undergirds our election cycles. It's sort of like every four years we check in with who we think we are as a people and the election becomes a foil through which we work this out. I'm convinced that the United States is in a fundamental crisis of meaning and the only shared language we have to work this out at a corporate level is political. But we are not fundamentally in a political crisis. Although it will feel like it.

I think there are two pitfalls that Christians will fall into this next year. The first is to receive the political discourse that our culture gives us as the primary level of reality. If the issue, as our

culture understands it, is fundamentally political then the solutions must be fundamentally political. The Bible will then be framed as a primarily political document, and the advancement of the Kingdom of God will have its success gauged in primarily political terms. False dichotomies will be presented between those who are concerned with political realities (the real issue*) and those who are concerned with personal piety (an avoidant tendency*). Merely adopting the political discourse as the arena of discourse, loss, and victory, is to neglect the transcendent reality of the gospel. The arena of God's redemptive scheme is creation itself and politics is merely one aspect.

A second tendency among Christians is to white wash the present issues that our culture faces. To speak peace when there is no peace. I think this will be heard in people saying things like, "the world is not really different than it ever has been. There have always been particular sinful tendencies in culture, people have always idolized political power, the church has always been an underdog, and when you say "change the culture" I don't think that actually means anything." There is of course truth in this but there is a sense in which it is so true its almost equivalent to saying nothing. There is a subtle nihilism in it. Not the type of Nihilism that says there is no ultimate meaning in the world, but more of an imminent nihilism of a type that says there is no connection between our present realities and the ultimate meaning of God. This pitfall hears Jesus saying, 'his kingdom is not of this world' as him saying, 'his kingdom is not for this world.' This is to deny the present reality of the Gospel.

The fact is the redemptive story is larger than politics, although it includes politics, and the present issues faced by our culture and the church are the realist issues we could face, because they are the ones given to us by God to face. So as we look forward to what is sure to be another dynamic year I want to approach it with some questions given to us by John Steinbeck in his book *East of Eden*. Here is what he says. Long quote time.

"I don't know how it will be in the years to come. There are monstrous changes taking place in the world, forces shaping a future whose face we do not know. Some of these forces seem evil to us, perhaps not in themselves but because their tendency is to eliminate other things we hold good. It is true that two men can lift a bigger stone than one man. A group can build automobiles quicker and better than one man, and bread from a huge factory is cheaper and more uniform. When our food and clothing and housing all are born in the complication of mass production, mass method is bound to get into our thinking and to eliminate all other thinking. In our time mass or collective production has entered our economics, our politics, and even our religion, so that some nations have substituted the idea collective for the idea God. This in my time is the danger. There is great tension in the world, tension toward a breaking point, and men are unhappy and confused.

At such a time it seems natural and good to me to ask myself these questions. What do I believe in? What must I fight for? What must I fight against?

Only scripture provides the answers to these questions and let's us know where the fight is.

1. The True God

Psalm 46:1 | God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

This verse is enough for whatever you're going through. It must be so certainly settled in your heart that you are able to feel it like a ballast stone in your soul. Notice the verse is not God will provide our refuge and our strength. Surely God does this in all kinds of ways, as he provides financially, or relationally, or through the loving kindness of one another in the church. But it does not say that. It says that God himself *is* our refuge and strength. Refuge is something outside of you, like a warm home in a raging storm. A refuge gathers you in and protects you from external harms. Strength is not external, strength rises up from within, but God is our strength as well. He moves in our hearts so intimately that he himself is our strength.

Lastly the verse tells us that God is a very present help in trouble. Very present, I can hear Toby Zeigler, the speech writer in the show the West Wing note that you can't qualify present. Your either present or your not, what does it mean to be very present? It's difficult to translate but it could also be something like, strongly finds, or well proved. I must say I like very present. God is very here in our trouble and he himself is our refuge and strength. This is to be trusted and received by faith and it is a truth which will be well proved. If you have faith in this God it will manifest in fearlessness even at the giving way of all other seeming certainties.

Psalm 46:2-3 | 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

In this implication to the above premise we see the absoluteness of God compared to all other things. Imagine all that is necessary for stability and hope being lost, and in this case God is not lost therefore we will not fear. The absoluteness and the presence of God mean we are fearless. What does it mean for the earth to give way? Or the mountains fall into the heart of the sea? It is dramatic but common biblical imagery that conjure the chaos of the flood. It is as if the structures of creation themselves are unwinding. But you must understand that we experience this flood drama at all sorts of levels. When the land of Bethlehem stopped producing food and Naomi and her husband were forced into exile in Moab, that is the earth giving way. When your job can't pay the bills, the earth gives way. When the supportive relationship becomes indiscernible the earth gives way. The earth giving way is to lose the support we need to be able to function as persons and as a people.

The mountains being moved into the heart of the sea is like those highest fixed points that we could aim at suddenly vanishing into chaos and meaninglessness. This is happening at a cultural level as we have fewer and fewer shared values and shared goods between us. Those heights we would aim at, the points where the land meets the heavens disappear

into chaos. We do not fear, because God is very present. He is our refuge and strength. God is the upholder of our lives and the great aim of our lives. This cannot be taken or removed, therefore we do not fear.

2. The True City

Psalm 46:4-5 | 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.

The psalmist gives us a counter image of water to stand against the raging seas. The boundarilessness of the oceans chaos is set against the bounded river. Water which brings life to where we are rather than washes away the land. This is the river that goes to the city of God, making glad the people of God. This city of God is absolutely fixed, and most high. Like sure ground which supports us and the most high, higher than any mountain. She shall not be moved. God helping her when the morning dawns is a reference to the Exodus which took place in the morning. God is Lord of the waters, God of the chaos. And make no mistake this city is the people of God, his church. The New Jerusalem dressed like a bride. It will not be moved.

Psalm 46:6-7 | 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

There are other kingdoms and nations of the earth, those not founded on God. They rage and totter. In that order. It makes sense that it would be in that order because to rage is to be in tumult, like a tossing sea in a tempest, this is a loss of internal integrity and in that loss the nations totter. This happens internally and externally. Fighting without and fears within. The Lord's voice brings the final blow. He merely utters and the earth melts. Just as Rahab told the Israelite spies that the hearts of the people of Canaan melted when they heard of the Exodus. The truth of God makes plain the falseness of the gods we've been pursuing. But there is a difference in the true kingdom. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob, that is the faithful covenant keeping God is our fortress.

3. The True Victory

Psalm 46:8-9 | 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.

Now the Psalmist calls us to see the true victory. The word behold here is something like perceive. As in look at this with your minds eye, imagine this truth which will certainly

come. The Lord has brought desolations on the earth. All the kingdom's not founded in him will perish. It is a coming of absolute peace. Wars will cease to the end of the earth. Happy X-mas War is Over. But like the exodus it is a peace through judgement. The wars will cease by God's victory bows broken, spears shattered, chariots burned.

Psalm 46:10 | "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

The, "be still" when read on a coffee cup sounds like a zen mantra, but its different than that. It is more like what Jesus commands the raging waters in the storm on the boat. When he commands the waters to be still and they listen to him. God will be exalted among the nations. He will be exalted in the earth. This is either a terrible announcement or good news. God's exaltation is certain. Believe in it, fight for it in your heart and in the world, fight against anything that denigrates the exaltation of God.

In the book *Where the Wild Things Are*, Max sails to and "they roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws, until max said, "*be still!*" And tamed them with the magic trick of staring into their yellow eyes without blinking once. And they were frightened and called him the most wild thing of all and made him king of all wild things."

Heed the command and share in it. The command from your true king. You'll need to hear it said to your own heart as you join in the chaos, "Be still." You'll need to say it to one another as you see each other drawn into the chaos, "Be still." We'll need to say it to a tumultuous world. "Be still." Christ will be exalted. The king has come, he will come again.