

A Mighty Fortress is Our God
A Sermon on Psalm 46

by
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Introduction

A. Introductory remarks on the psalm (title).

- a. Psalm 46 is classified as a song of Zion, which is a psalm that celebrates the city of Jerusalem as the city of God.
 - i. Jerusalem is given much attention in the Scriptures because God chose it to be of special significance.
 - ii. The significance of this is in the fact that God promised to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem and it would be His resting place forever.
- b. The superscription itself tells us this was a song written by a group known as the sons of Korah, and it was set to Alamoth.
 - i. The sons of Korah were a Levitical group who have eleven of the Psalms attributed to them. They are related to the Korah of the book of Numbers.
 - ii. The psalm is set to Alamoth, it is a term that literally means, “to the height of a young maiden,” so it was possibly sung by women.
 - iii. The psalm also bears clear structure, which lends to three natural divisions in vv. 1-3, 4-7, and 8-11.

B. The overall theme in this psalm is that God is a stability to His people in the midst of a broken and chaotic world.

- a. Vv. 1-3 speak of God as our refuge in natural disaster
- b. Vv. 4-7 speaks of God as our refuge in the midst of political and social disaster.

- c. Vv. 8-11 speak of God as our refuge in the midst of all disaster, but specifically in light of the fact that at the end of all days, God will make an end to all disaster.

I. God is our refuge in the midst of natural disaster (vv. 1-3).

A. God is a refuge and strength in times of trouble (v. 1).

- a. There are two words within the first half of v. 1 that richly describe God Himself.
 - i. The first is that God is our refuge.
 - 1. The term for refuge in the Hebrew simply describes the idea of shelter.
 - 2. In Him the child of God hides and finds protection from any of the troubles of life.
 - ii. The second is that God is our strength.
 - 1. The term here is focused upon the idea that God Himself is the source of strength.
 - 2. He is pleased to give strength to the weak, because His strength is made perfect in weakness.
 - iii. God is depicted as One who protects and fights for His people in the midst of all calamity.
 - 1. Here where we see the psalmist use the word trouble, it is not simply depicting small problems.
 - 2. It is actually describing incredible distress; it focuses upon the idea of an anguish of the soul.
- b. God then is called a very present help in this distress (v. 1).

- i. In essence, the psalm is saying here that God will do for His people what they cannot do for themselves.
 1. He is not merely One who helps, but as one commentator puts it, He is what help is all about (Allen P. Ross).
 2. The obvious statement to make then is that help is needed when troubles arise.
- ii. Yet the other reality we must bear in mind is that God is near to us in the midst of trouble.
 1. He is not simply this God who stands above creation, passively watching it play out before His eyes.
 2. Yet He is also not a God who stand idly by while His people suffer.

B. In light of this reality, we can be without fear (v. 2a).

- a. It is in light of the fact that God is near to His people as a strong refuge, that the Psalmist then applies this to natural disasters (vv. 2-3).
 - i. The description of the events that would unfold are terrifying.
 1. The mountains fall into the sea, the water churns, and the earth quakes.
 2. The overall picture is that everything that is seen as stable is thrown into utter chaos.
- b. Yet the people of God are reminded that even if their whole world comes crashing down, they need not fear because they can have confidence in the Lord.

- i. It is in spite of all of this that the people of God see that which is truly immovable, which is the God Himself.
- ii. They testify of the strength of the One who makes the tumbling mountains and the cavernous earthquakes seem pitiful—why? Because He is in complete control at all times.

II. God is our refuge in the midst of political disaster (vv. 4-7).

A. The “river” makes glad the “city of God” speaks as a rich metaphor, declaring God as the source of life and flourishing (vv. 4-6).

- a. When we get to v. 4 we find another great depiction of that character of God in the midst of political and social disaster.
 - i. The psalmist focuses here on a river whose streams make glad the city of God.
 - 1. The “city of God” refers to the people of God, but what of the river that makes them glad?
 - 2. It is hard not to think of other rich metaphors used in Scripture that depict God as the One who refreshes the weary soul, the source of human flourishing, and the source of all life itself.
 - ii. The reason for their delight in this well-spring of joy is found in the fact that the Most-High God dwells among them.
 - 1. God is described as the Most-High simply because He is the One above all creation.
 - 2. Yet just as He stands high above creation, He is near to His people.

- b. The Psalmist reiterates that God is in the midst of His people during this time of social and political upheaval (v. 5).
 - i. Notice how he moves yet again to declare the complete stability of God's people in the midst of impending disaster strictly because God is with them.
 - 1. The city of God will remain immovable, though her enemies surround with threats of destruction and warfare.
 - 2. God will help her when the morning dawns.
 - ii. We see then how God will cause them to be unmoved and delivered (v. 6).
 - 1. There is stark contrast presented between these kingdoms that oppose God's people and the people He has made His own possession.
 - 2. The psalmist expresses this in saying that the Lord raises His voice and the earth melts.

B. From this point the psalmist writes, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold" (v. 7).

- a. The first phrase, "The Lord of hosts is with us" speaks of God's military might before the nations.
 - i. God is not only our shelter against the forces of nature, but also, He is our shelter against the forces of mankind.
 - ii. Yet the phrase here specifically invokes the personal name of God, Yahweh—but notice, it is, "Yahweh of hosts."

1. I think of 2 Kings 6, where we see the prophet Elisha praying the Lord would open the eyes of his petrified servant to see the vast armies of God.
 2. This God, who has all of the heavenly hosts at His disposal, is with us.
- b. The second phrase in v. 7, “The God of Jacob is our stronghold” speaks of God’s covenant faithfulness to His people.
- i. When I say, “Covenant faithfulness,” what I am referring to here is the love that God set upon the Israelites because of the covenant He swore with Abraham.
 1. It is God’s utter faithfulness to make good on His promises and not break them.
 2. Yet just as God’s covenant promises cannot be undone because of Israel’s faithlessness, it could not be threatened by the Israelites enemies.
 - ii. The psalmist is reminding the people of the hope they have in the God of the covenant, who swore to bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel.
 1. This would also remind them of all His faithful deeds in providing for them since the time of Abraham.
 2. In many ways, this is the same for us, as we recognize God’s providence in hindsight.

III. The people of God can confidently rest in His protection in the midst of all chaos (vv. 8-11).

A. We now come to the final section of the psalm where the psalmist summarizes everything that has been said thus far.

- a. What stands out in this section though is that he now appeals to hope in light of that final day when God returns and makes an end to distress once and for all.
 - i. It is still set under the backdrop of suffering, whether through natural disaster or political disaster.
 - ii. This is not simply for the believer, at this point, but for the unbeliever as well.
- b. There are two, double commands given in vv. 8 and 10:
 - i. The first set of double commands given in v. 8 is that they would “come” and “behold” the works of the Yahweh.
 1. The “works” that Yahweh are shown in the remainder of v. 8 and v. 9.
 2. The intent of the double-command to come and behold these mighty works of God then is for the whole of the earth to consider their ways before Him.
 - ii. The final double-command is given in v. 10, “Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”
 1. The first of the two commands in v. 10 is that they are to cease striving.

2. Then we find the second command in v. 10 is that they know, but specifically, they know Yahweh is God.
3. The underlying reason for this is shown in the rest of v. 10: He will be exalted among the nations; He will be exalted in the earth.

B. The refrain is given once again, “the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold” (v. 7, 11).

- a. The refrain reminds them of the power, protection, and faithfulness of God.
- b. He is their stability, shelter, and warrior-king in the midst of all types of calamity.
 - i. Just as He made His covenant with the great Patriarchs, He has upheld that covenant with His people.
 - ii. In spite of all their surroundings; in spite of seeing everything fall apart around them, He is their God, and they are His people.

Conclusion

Community Group Questions:

- 1.) How do you understand God’s transcendence (that He reigns supremely above all things) and His immanence (that He is near to His people) as they relate to trials and sufferings?
- 2.) When you consider the commands given in the passage (“come/see” of v. 8 and “cease/know” of v. 10) how do you apply them personally?
- 3.) How does this psalm prepare you to share the hope of the gospel with people in your life currently?