

1



2

The year was 1521, April 17, and Martin Luther, a man already condemned a heretic and excommunicated by the Holy Roman Catholic Church now appeared before the Emperor, princes, and representatives from the Church to give an account of his heresies, and if found guilty, would be executed. Johann Eck, the prosecutor, points to a pile writings that Luther had produced, most likely including his 95 theses (grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone). He asks Luther if he wrote all of them. Luther affirms this, and then Eck asks, "Do you fully and thoroughly recant ALL of it?" And Luther asks for some time to think about it, which is granted....

So, he enters his room that night, and so begins what he calls his "night of doubts." He knew that his life was on the line, and He wrestled with God that night and himself and wondered whether his positions were just his or were they clearly taught in Scripture? And so he opened up his Bible and read and prayed, and he was convinced his positions were clearly there in Scripture, and one of the passages he turned to as well that was to be a great encouragement to him was Psalm 46 (READ first few verses...)....



3

Luther returned the next morning, and again when asked to recant, this was his final response..."Unless I am convinced by proofs from the Scriptures or by plain and clear reasons and arguments, I can and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen!" And the Protestant Reformation was off and running...

Psalm 46 was one of Luther's favorite Psalms. It is said that later during dark and dangerous periods of the Reformation, that Luther would turn to his trusted friend, Philip Melancthon and exclaim, "Let's sing the 46th Psalm, and let the devil do his worst!" Psalm 46 was what inspired Luther's well-known hymn "A Mighty Fortress is our God," which we sung together earlier...

TR: For Luther, Psalm 46, God's Word, with the Holy Spirit as his guide, was a pathway to God as his fortress and strong refuge, in which he could then face the troubles that raged against him...

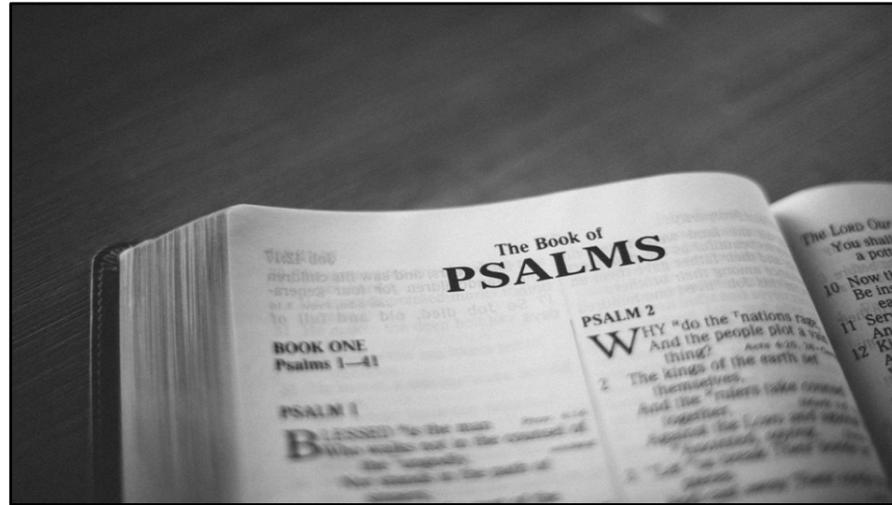


4

Today, there are some of you who are facing your own your own “Night of Doubts,” your own “trouble” as the Psalmist writes...

Whether it be Cancer or Criticism, or whether it be Chronic Sickness or depression or oppression, Relational Conflict in your Family/work/church or an Unknown Future, Life-Changing Accident or Overwhelming Responsibilities, Loss of loved one or just the scary feeling that you’re all alone... God’s Word is for you today.

And if you’re here today, maybe not in that place right now, just look to the people right next to you and around you...God’s Word is for you to take to them, and it also for you to hide in your heart for when that Night of Doubts comes in your life...because it will, one day...and you’ll need to know and remember the pathway of God’s Word to the fortress, who is our God...



5

If you haven't already, go ahead and Open your Bibles to Psalm 46...

Psalm 46:1-3

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*”

ESV

6

READ SLIDE...

I love how this Psalm starts with God and a confident declaration of who God is...a strong refuge...A very present help in trouble...before we get to talking about the trouble...we got to know who our God is...

...the word in Hebrew for “present” has literally a meaning of “to be Found,” So, not only is God a strong refuge, he is a very easy-to-find help in trouble...you don’t have to look hard, implying He’s right there...

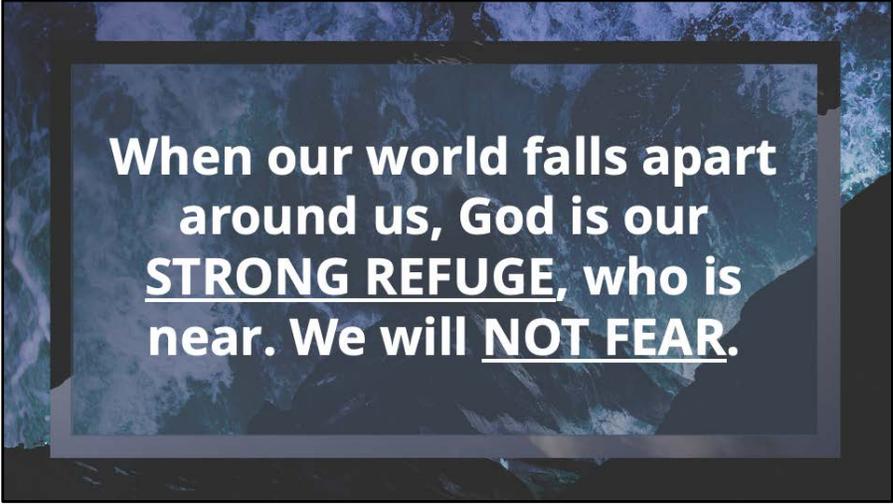
Kind of like when I’m playing hide and seek with my son, Emmet. He’s three, and he loves to play hide and seek, but more than anything he loves to be found... I count to 10, and as I take a few steps...he jumps out...HERE I AM!

Similarly, with God...you don’t have to go looking long or far... He is Strong, Near, and Easy-To-Find...Because of who He is, we will not fear any trouble...

Now the Trouble that is depicted here, is apocalyptic in nature and I don’t think could get any worse...could be metaphor representing the nations, which are mentioned later in the Psalm, or it could be description of some sort of end-of-the-world catastrophic earthquake...

Regardless, it seems obvious that the Psalmist is describing trouble that is the worst of the worst...and is essentially the UNDOING of the very fabric of creation...it is chaos coming against the created order, which God set in place...

TR: It may even seem like your life, but even when....



When our world falls apart
around us, God is our
STRONG REFUGE, who is
near. We will **NOT FEAR**.

7

READ SLIDE...

Maybe it's not actual mountains or raging seas for you today...but go ahead and put yourself and your troubles in the Psalm...perhaps it goes something like this...

God is MY refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble...Therefore, I will not fear....Though the diagnosis is Cancer and my body gives way, though my loved one is gone and I am swallowed up in sorrow, though the criticism and slander foam and rage against me and I tremble at their swelling, though every earthly and relational thing or person that I once knew as stable and secure in my life is now pulled out from under me....God is MY refuge and strength, a very present help in MY trouble. Therefore, I will not fear...no matter what.

TR: Let's keep reading, 2nd stanza...

Psalm 46:4-7

“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. **God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;** God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. **The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah**”

ESV

8

READ SLIDE

The Psalmist now describes a City, THE City of God, and a river that flows in the midst of her... Very quickly my mind goes to Jerusalem and where God's temple was and where His presence resided...but there is no river in Jerusalem, just a spring, called the Gihon, but that doesn't seem to match the description given here...so perhaps some poetic hyperbole of the Spring and of how the Psalmist sees Jerusalem,

or perhaps there is also a looking forward to what will be, a description of the New Jerusalem that we read about in Revelation 22...looking forward to THAT DAY when His kingdom is established once for all eternity...and the river of life flows through the middle of the city from the throne of God, and there is no darkness because God dwells right in the middle and from Him light pours out everywhere...

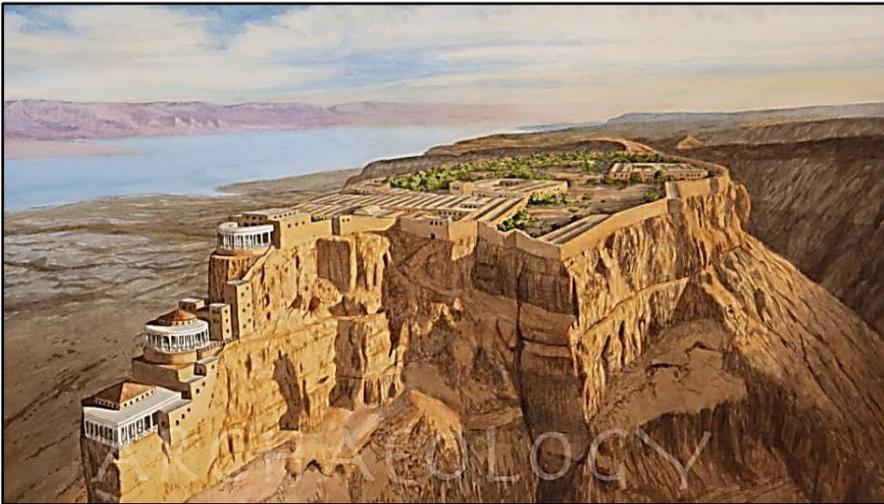
(I do believe the Psalmist is mostly referring to their Jerusalem), but the main focus for them and us today is that God is in the midst of her, therefore she shall not be moved...which is hugely significant, following the first stanza...the very earth gives way, and the mountains are moved, but not God, and not those for whom God is in their midst. The Kingdoms totter as well, and even the nations rage against the people of God, but that is still not cause for them to fear, because they know the Lord of Hosts is with them, the God of Angel Armies, is with them,

TR: the God of Jacob is their fortress...



To give you some visual perspective, There is a mountain fortress in the southern part of Israel, right next to the Dead Sea, built by Herod the Great long after Psalm 46 was written, but it is still a good example of an ancient Fortress...

It's called Masada, and you can see the ruins today in this picture...and even walk them yourself if you travel there...



Here is a picture of what it may have looked like back in the First Century...It was an extremely defensible fortress, just about 1,000 ft high, with sheer cliff drops all around and a wall up to the very edge...It was used as a fortress by a group of Zealots, years after Herod's death, to flee to, after the Romans sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple in 72 AD. They fled there with their families and lived there for about a year while the Romans laid siege and finally overtook them in 73 AD...

God is like that...a mountain fortress that cannot be moved, will not be moved, and those who flee to Him, they shall not be moved...though their world gives way around them, there is a still an anchor for their soul in God...

Some of you may be thinking, but what about all the bad things that continue to happen to me and all around me? Your world, if it hasn't already to some degree, will fall apart or is falling apart, but in the midst of that, your soul and spirit don't have to fall apart as well...Jesus himself said to His disciples, in this world you will have trouble, but take heart for I have overcome the world...

TR: You know, the beautiful thing is that this side of the cross and the coming of the Holy Spirit, God no longer takes up residence in a place built by human hands. He takes up residence in our very heart, God in Christ by the Holy Spirit, with us and in us and among us in our very midst...



When everything comes
against us, God is our
IMMOVABLE FORTRESS. We
will NOT BE MOVED.

11

READ SLIDE...

When we are In Him, we will not be moved...we cannot be shaken...we will not fear.

But some of you, like me at times still wonder...how about when I do fear, and I feel like I'm being moved...

I often go back to what that father said to Jesus in Mark 9, the father who had brought his boy to be healed, and Jesus says to that father, "All things are possible for him who believes," and immediately the father cries out, even with tears, "I BELIEVE, Help my unbelief!"

And when I face situations that overwhelm me, and I feel my world starting to fall apart around me, and I pray, God, I believe you are with me, help my unbelief...to see not just with my eyes but with eyes of faith...

TR: Let's look now at the 3rd stanza of the Psalm...

Psalm 46:8-9

**“Come, behold the works of the Lord,
how he has brought desolations on the
earth. He makes wars cease to the end
of the earth; he breaks the bow and
shatters the spear; he burns the
chariots with fire.**

ESV

12

READ SLIDE

TR: KEEP READING TO NEXT SLIDE...

Psalm 46:10-11

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

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah”

ESV

13

READ SLIDE...

TR: For many of you, I imagine there were 8 words in that stanza that really popped out at you, and not just because I highlighted them, but because you see them in a lot cards, and Christian stores, and Social Media memes that people post...



BE STILL, and know that I am God...

And I think we often say and think of them as being directed primarily at us...to slow down, relax, stop all the busy work and focus on God...

But As I've sat with this Psalm, the whole of it, and looked at it more in its context...

TR: I think these words more closely follow along with similar words spoken by Jesus in Mark chapter 4...when Jesus was asleep in a boat with his disciples during a storm...

Mark 4:39

And he (Jesus) awoke and **rebuked** the wind and said to the sea, "**Peace! Be still!**" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm...

ESV

15

READ SLIDE

TR: KEEP READING TO NEXT SLIDE...



“BE STILL!” Is a firm rebuke against the raging chaos of the sea and storm...

And I believe it’s the same for Psalm 46, that God is primarily addressing the nations and the kingdoms that rage, and the seas that swell and foam...

Verse 6, “He utters His voice, and the earth melts.”

and so here in verse 10 is God’s voice directly heard for the first time in this Psalm....Be Still! I will be exalted in all this earth and among the nations... as he causes the wars to cease, breaking the bow and shattering the spear, and burning the chariots with fire...

TR: He, our Sovereign God, who with just His voice brought everything into existence, and with just His voice causes everything chaotic to fall into order...



The God of Angel Armies is WITH US. He rebukes our CHAOS and establishes His PEACE.

17

READ SLIDE...

Yes, we need to be still... from all our busy striving and working and running around and fighting against the things rage against us in our lives, but first and foremost, it is God who commands our chaos to BE STILL...we are powerless to do so in our own strength...it is God who fights on our behalf...not even fights...he simply utters His voice, Be Still, and it is...and He establishes His Peace...

Now again, some of you might be thinking, then why has He Not stilled my chaos, and it rages on around me...I believe that we have to trust God and His timing when it comes to Him stilling the chaos in our world as a whole and in each of our own personal lives, and knowing/believing it all will be stilled and made right on THAT DAY, if not sooner in some way in OUR DAY...

But there is something about Him stilling the chaos that battles and rages in our hearts and minds and soul...that, I believe He does today and establishes deep within us a Peace that surpasses all understanding of the Chaos around us, and that will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus...even as a fortress.

TR: Praise God, for who He is, but I want to quickly take us back to Masada and reflect on the obvious for a moment...



...present day, looking up at the ruins...strong, defensible, easy-to-find fortress, and this is certainly obvious...but it did no one any good to remain outside the fortress, when all the trouble came, and not know the pathway in...I don't know if you can see, but there is a pathway to Masada...they call it the snake path, because of how it winds its way up the mountain...And it was the ONLY way to get in to the fortress safely...Nowadays, they have a Tram that will quickly take you to the top if you want...but back then, there was one WAY...

Immediately, John 14 (v.6) comes to mind when Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." First and foremost, the way to the Father, who is our fortress, is through Jesus Christ, trusting Him as your Lord and Savior, and following Him all the days of your life...¹ John 5 (v.12) "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

If any of you are hearing this message today and do not have the Son, then God cannot be a fortress for you, and your chaos rages on, and there can be no lasting peace around you nor in you.

It is only by acknowledging before God that you are a sinner, deserving of death, and then believing Jesus died for it all on the cross, paying your price, and that he rose again offering you life in Him, crediting all His righteousness to your account, if you would only receive it by faith and trust Him with all your heart and confess Him as Lord of your life...Oh, would you do that today, and receive the life and peace and relationship with Him that God offers to you in His Son?

NOW, For all of us who by Faith do have the Son, we all are still like wayward sheep who are prone to wander away from the Father and from the Fortress and get off the path...

TR: and sometimes it's difficult to find our way back...

Thus says the Lord:

**“Stand by the roads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way is; and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls.”**

ESV

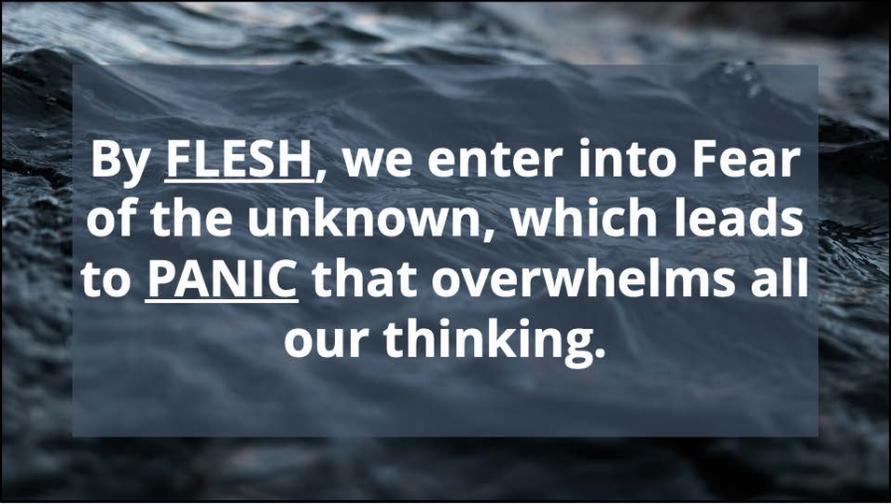
19

READ SLIDE...The Ancient Paths in this verse refer to Ancient Words, God’s Word, specifically the Mosaic Law, and those who followed and obeyed would find rest for their souls...

I see a couple significant pathways we can walk in life, even after starting out on the Main WAY that is IN CHRIST, there is one of the FLESH and one of FAITH...

And when I say Flesh here, I mean our old self, our sinful nature, which in Christ we have been set free from the power of, but it’s still present in our lives and wars against our new nature in Christ, and so we must seek to die to it and live to Christ (Galatians 2:20)...

TR: Whenever we wander and choose to go off the pathway...

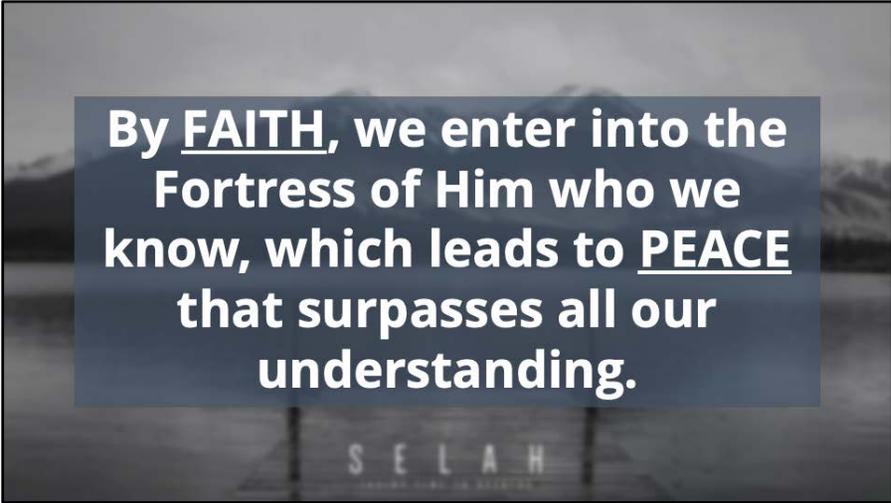
A dark, textured background, possibly representing water or a rough surface, with a semi-transparent text box overlaid in the center. The text is white and reads: "By FLESH, we enter into Fear of the unknown, which leads to PANIC that overwhelms all our thinking."

By FLESH, we enter into Fear of the unknown, which leads to PANIC that overwhelms all our thinking.

20

READ SLIDE...

TR: But when we walk the pathway...



By FAITH, we enter into the
Fortress of Him who we
know, which leads to PEACE
that surpasses all our
understanding.

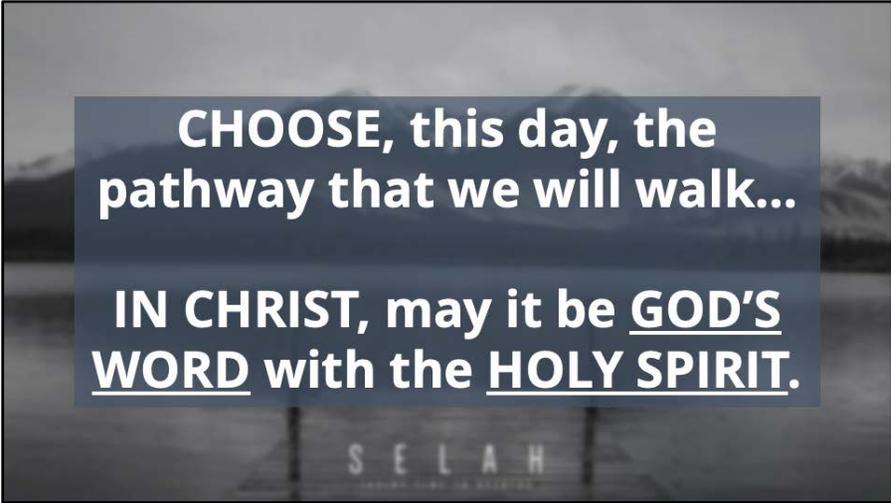
21

READ SLIDE...

If we don't train ourselves and encourage one another to know and walk together the pathway of faith, to know what to pray, to know His Word well...

THEN when trouble arises (whatever the trouble might be) the fear will creep up quickly, and panic can set in fast and overrun all your thinking...

TR: We all need to...



CHOOSE, this day, the pathway that we will walk...

IN CHRIST, may it be GOD'S WORD with the HOLY SPIRIT.

22

READ SLIDE...

All of Psalm 46 is a Pathway for us to the Fortress, who is our God...

And with the Holy Spirit our Guide, He illuminates the path for us...

Really, All of God's Word is that pathway, and with the Holy Spirit, it's the way we know God, enter into relationship with Him, abide in Christ, and take refuge in the fortress...

The Psalms are just really great Go-to pathways for me when it comes to facing troubles...

TR: And so I put together on the inside of the worship flyer a few of them for you...



Some, I memorized portions of, and others I'm just really familiar with...

They are for me, when I face trouble...but they are also for my brothers and sisters in Christ who are facing trouble...

that when I visit or email them, I share God's Word, which gives way more comfort and encouragement than any of my own words ever could...

I remember doing a hospital call a few years ago, when a family that I nor the church knew at all, but they simply wanted a pastor to visit, since the chaplain was off duty, and so I went, I prayed, and I entered the room....and this older man had just passed away, wife was right there holding his hand still, kids and grandkids gathered around, and what the Lord brought to mind...was Psalm 23, and I simply prayed that Psalm for them, word-for-word...and it you could almost tangibly see their spirits be lifted up as I shared that pathway Psalm to the Fortress, or in this case to God, the Shepherd...

What's your pathway Psalm or passage of Scripture...one you know well and is well travelled and is your go-to in times of trouble? Do you have one?

This summer, I challenge you to commit afresh to soaking in God's Word into your life, establishing a few, if not several Go-To pathways of Scripture, through daily readings, memorization, meditation, Bible Study, Prayer, in community with others...while not giving up reading through the whole of Scripture...really focusing on a few for yourself and for others...

TR: Martin Luther said it this way...



“First, when I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my Book of Psalms, hurry to my room, or, if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled and , as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the 10 commandments, the Creed...or some Psalms, just as a child might do.

It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, “Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.” Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day...”

It sounds like life in 1521 is not much different than life in 2019...



FAITH - WORD - PRAYER
A REFUSAL TO PANIC

Every new year brings us 365 Days of possible troubles. Every new day brings us 24 hours of uncertainty. But every second of every hour of every day, God's presence and power in our lives is available to us in Christ by His Spirit and in His Word.

“Therefore (in the words of John Piper) — do not lose heart, but take these truths, all the ones you’ve heard in every message from Scripture, and day by day, focus on them. Preach them to yourself every morning. Get alone with God and preach his word into your mind until your heart sings with confidence that you are new and cared for.”