

A Psalm for Uncertain Times

Psalm 46

Sunday, March 15, 2020

Introduction

We never know what tomorrow holds, but this week we have been reminded in new way of how uncertain life can be. The spread of the Coronavirus and the response to the spread has brought a situation that we did not expect, but thankfully we know that none of this is outside of the knowledge and plan of God.

Psalm 46 powerfully and effectively conveys this truth: No matter what happens, no matter what life brings, we are safe in the care of God. Even when the earth falls out from under our feet; even when chaos surrounds us; God is our refuge, our protector and our safe shelter.

The Structure of the Psalm - Psalm 46 is a Psalm of Confidence and consists of three refrains. Each refrain has three elements: A statement of confidence declaring God's protection and presence, (2) a description of God's care in the midst of trouble and (3) a call to stop and reflect, *Selah*.

The Presence and Protection of God in the Midst of Natural Disaster: He is Our Refuge from the Storm (46:1-3)

- **Statement of Confidence:** The first refrain leads with a statement of confidence that not only serves this section, but prefaces the entire Psalm.
 - **God's Protection:** The description of God as our refuge reminds us that God is our place of safety and protection. We must note that God is not simply 'a' refuge, He is 'our' refuge; God protects those who are His. In addition, while those seeking refuge may be weak, God is our strength (Psalm 61:2-4).
 - **God's Presence:** Not only is God an available refuge, He's an accessible refuge. He is always near, always present, and always able to be found. Trouble will come, but God is always present.
- **God's Care in the Storm:** In verses 2 and 3 the Psalmist provides a vivid picture of a world that is overcome by disaster. He describes the earth shaking and waters rising. The waters get so high that they cover the mountains and challenge their stability.
- **Application:** When we think about the earth we generally think of it as firm and unmovable (Psalm 104:5), but there are things in life that make the ground feel like it's falling out from underneath us. When the ground is shaking and the waters are rising our natural reaction is fear, but the Psalmist says he will not be afraid. He is confident that our God is higher than the waters and stronger than the mountains - He is our ever-present refuge.

The Presence and Protection of God in the Midst of National Instability: He will Overcome the Enemy (46:4-7)

- **God's Presence in and Protection of His City:** The setting of verses 4-7 is Jerusalem, the city of God. The Psalmist describes a city that is both in danger of attack but also filled with gladness. The city is calm in the face of danger because of God's presence (a river of gladness) and His promised protection. Though the enemies will come, God will fight on behalf of His people, and He can defeat them with a word (Psalm 2:1-6; 12).
- **Application:** No matter what's going on we can find gladness through God's presence and the assurance of His protection. The reality is that attacks will come, but God has the power to speak (utter His voice) and change everything. Even in the most chaotic times in our world, God is in control. His presence and power are our hope.
- **Statement of Confidence:** The refrain ends with a statement of confidence in the presence and protection of God. The Lord of Hosts (the powerful leader of armies of angels) is with us! The God of Jacob (a merciful and covenant faithful God) is our fortress (a heavily protected building that cannot be penetrated).

The Presence and Protection of God in the Midst of War and Chaos: He will Bring Peace (46:8-11)

- **God's Presence and Protection:** The final section describes how God will come and judge the wicked. But God doesn't come in judgment in order to bring more chaos; instead, His judgment is a means of establishing peace. He brings desolation (judgment) and then disarms the enemy (breaks and destroys the weapons of the enemy).
- **A Call to Respond:** This section is different than the others in that it contains two imperatives: In verse 8 we are called to 'come and see' the work of God, His judgment and His establishing of peace. In verse 10 we are called to 'be still' (stop, surrender, let go) and acknowledge God and His works.
- **Statement of Confidence:** Repeated from the second refrain.
- **Jesus - The One who comes as the Ultimate Judge and the Ultimate Peacemaker and the One who will be exalted over all** - While the Psalm is written before the coming of Christ, we know that much of God's work has been and will be accomplished through Jesus. Ultimately, God breaks the bow and shatters the spear of the enemy through the work of Jesus on the cross and Jesus is the One who has been highly exalted over every nation. While we still live in a fallen world, one day Jesus will come in judgment and bring peace. (1 Cor. 15:54-57; Phil. 2:9-10).

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