

A Fortress and Refuge

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thanks very much, Al. And I just want to add my welcome to you all as well. It's good to see a number of you. Josie and I have been away on camp this week, and we were about to disappear for another two weeks on holiday. But it's really good to just come back and check in and see our church family as well. And it's really good to meet new people as well who've come along today. So yeah, we're in Psalm 46. It'd be really, really good to just keep that open in front of you if you have it. And it's been my privilege to dig into this, the Psalm, and to see what God has to say to us from it. So you might have noticed there in the heading, we see that this is a song for God's people. So if you take a look at the heading, those were instructions that were left there by the writers of the Psalm to kind of instruct the people who were going to sing it or play it and how they should do that. And we see clearly there that this is a song. It's a song for God's people. And it was written by the sons of Korah to be added to the songbook for the people of Israel. So this run of Psalms that we're doing, many of them tell us that these were written by the sons of Korah. And Psalm 46, it's a song which wasn't only sung by

God's people back then, but it's also a song that God's people can sing today as well. God has left it for us, not just to read and to learn from, but we can also sing it as well. But as we look at the words of this Psalm, we quickly see that it is speaking about a world which is in complete chaos.

I don't know if you noticed that. If you look at the first few verses, the Psalmist is using apocalyptic language. The very earth is giving away, is giving way. The very mountains, solid and firm, are falling into the sea. The Psalmist is painting a picture of chaos. The sea is roaring and foaming and surging. Where can God's people find refuge in a world that's spinning out of control? But then the Psalmist points to another kind of disorder in the world. Just like the sea, the nations are roaring. Down in verse 6, they are in uproar against one another and they are in uproar against God. And this reminds us of Psalm 2, which forms part of the introduction to the book of Psalms.

In Psalm 2, the nations set themselves up against God and against his anointed King, Jesus. And here we see them again. They are in uproar against God in Psalm 46. So we see a picture of chaos. And the chaos described in this Psalm, we can see some of this in our world today.

[3 : 1 0] We can see it in our climate. Our world seems to be falling apart. The climate targets are constantly missed. The targets that we set in our countries, we miss them again and again.

We see so many species of animals and plants which are lost forever. We see the ice caps starting to melt. We see the seawaters rising around the world. We see devastating wildfires, hurricanes, and even this week we've seen devastating flooding in Texas. It is clear that something has gone very badly wrong in our world, in our climate. Our world is not at peace. And this is because the world that you and I are living in, it's a world that is sitting under judgment, the judgment of God because of sin in this world. And you can go all the way back to Genesis 3 and you can see how God spelled out how he was going to judge the earth because of sin.

But then we also see the chaos of Psalm 46 in the way that the nations around our world rage against one another. There is constant conflict around our world. And we've touched on that as well this morning in our prayers. We see war in Eastern Europe, not that far from us. We see it in the Middle East. And we see it in further flung places that we never hear about in our news.

There's conflict all around the world. And that shows us that there is something that has gone wrong among the nations of the earth as well. It's not just in our climate, but there is something gone wrong amongst the nations. And the nations are living in this world under God's judgment. And the nations will be judged for their sin and for setting themselves up against God and his anointed one. So this world that the psalmist paints, it's a world that is experiencing chaos. It is a world that is under God's judgment for sin. And whether we are directly or indirectly by the chaos in our world, whether it's right up in our faces or if it's further away, it can cause us to fear.

[5 : 33] We are left asking ourselves, where will God's people turn to when the earth gives way? When the earth below their feet seems to be wobbling? Where can God's people take refuge when the nations rage against them? When the people of this world rage against God's people? When they rage against our God? When they rage against his anointed King, Jesus? Who can God's people cling to as they live in this world, which is experiencing God's judgment? Well, I think the psalmist wants us to know this morning that there is order behind this disorder. This psalm reminds us that this is a world, yes, it's sitting under God's judgment, but the Almighty God stands above this chaotic and rebellious world and he commands it to be still and to know who the true King is in this world. So this is where we're going this morning. Three headings, Almighty God is among his people. God will still and be exalted among his enemies and God will dwell among his people. So we're going to start by seeing that God's people can take confidence because Almighty God is among his people and he is their refuge. So I mentioned before that this is a song and it's structured like a song. The Pew Bibles, they miss out the silah word, but if we see that the word silah is inserted at the end of verse 7 and it's, sorry, just before verse 7, actually I can't remember, I think it's inserted three times, do correct me, but this shows us that this is well structured this psalm. I don't know if you noticed that there's a repeated chorus. So verse 7 and verse 11 it's the exact same words again. So this repeated chorus and if there's two choruses then that means we have a verse 1, which is verses 1 to 6. That's our first stanza, our first verse of our song and then verses 8 to 10 is our second verse. So it's very well structured this psalm and what this shows us is that God has a really clear message for us through this song and we see right from the very start of this song this theme that we're going to see today that God is our refuge and he is our strength. The very first words of this song, he is our refuge and our strength and this is an idea which is repeated in the chorus in verse 7 and 11, the God of Jacob is our fortress. The God of Jacob is our fortress. The imagery is clear. God is a place of refuge for his people. God's people will be safe in God's, their fortress, peace when they choose to take shelter in him. Now we probably can't appreciate the physical safety we might feel in a refuge like the one described in this psalm because we are living in a country that is at peace at the moment but if we were living in the Middle East today or if we were living in the UK during World War II or World War I then we would understand what it would feel like to take refuge.

So this is a picture from the London Underground in World War II and it's thought that 177,000 people who lived in London during the Blitz took refuge in the tunnels of the London Underground and there they would have felt safe from the carnage that was happening on the ground above. So that was the London Underground in World War II and this is a picture of Fort Knox in Kentucky and this place is so well known for its security that it's become a turn of phrase. For example, oh well it's not exactly Fort Knox is it? So we know that word, we know that place Fort Knox is a place of utter security.

It's a place that's impossible to enter or exit without the highest levels of clearance. So for the people of God, he is their London Underground where they feel completely safe when the bombs are dropping and he is their unshakable Fort Knox during times of trouble where no enemy may enter.

[10 : 25] But God isn't just a place of unshakable security. The psalmist wants to tell us that the Lord Almighty is with us.

And we see that in verse 7, the Lord Almighty is with us. And verse 1 again, he is an ever-present help in trouble. He's present. God is among his people.

God is in their midst. Now we see this idea often in the Old Testament. Whenever Almighty God was in the midst of his people, they were safe.

And we see that through the book of Exodus. God was in the midst of his people when they were in the wilderness. And he dwelled in the tabernacle, which was in the middle of the camp.

He was among his people. And then when God's people dwelled in the city of Jerusalem, God took up residence in the temple in the city. The temple was in the city of Jerusalem.

[11 : 27] And whenever Almighty God went into battle with the people of Israel, they were never defeated. So when God is among his people, he is like an MVP on a basketball team, a most valuable player.

Whenever Michael Jordan stepped onto the court with his Chicago Bulls teammates in the 90s, his team not only had an advantage because they had the best player with them, it also had the double benefit of inspiring confidence in his teammates, helping them to play at a higher level, but also

striking fear in their opponents because they knew how tough they were going to find it playing against a team with Michael Jordan in it.

So whenever Michael was playing, his team had a good chance of winning. When God is among his people, they will always prevail. They will never be defeated.

And when God is among his people, just like the Chicago Bulls, God's people are filled with confidence and their enemies are put to flight. So Almighty God is a refuge for the people of God. He is a fortress and he is a mighty helper among them, in the midst of them. But we must ask ourselves, what did this song mean for the nation of Israel who were given this song originally, who would have sung this song, whenever they gathered?

[13 : 08] Why was it important for the people of Israel to sing this particular song? Well, as the nation of Israel sang Psalm 46, they were reminding themselves to put their trust in God alone.

When their enemies were threatening them, when the nations around them were flexing their muscles and threatening to invade them, they were not to put their faith in the walls of Jerusalem. They were not to put their faith in alliances with other nations. And they were certainly not to put their faith in the gods of the surrounding nations, gods of wood and stone.

And believe me, you know it yourself, they tried all of these things. When God's people put their faith in other things, that's always when it went wrong for them.

And for us today, whether you are following Jesus or not this morning, I want to ask you, where do you run to in times of chaos? Where is your hope when calamity strikes, when the enemies are knocking at the door of the city, when the ground beneath us shakes?

[14 : 21] We know what this feels like, when the ground beneath us shakes. Not literally, but when calamity strikes in our life, when bad things are happening, when we are fearful, when we are scared.

Where is your hope? Where will you run to? Well, Psalm 46 reminds us that those who trust in the mighty fortress, in God and in his anointed King Jesus, they will always be secure.

So that is the security, the fortress, God among his people. But now, we're going to look at the second verse. We're going to look back at verses four and five in a minute.

But now let's look at the second verse of this song. So that's verses eight to 10. And let's see how God invites us to come and see what he has done. We say that in verse eight.

God says, or sorry, the Psalmist says, come and see what the Lord has done. The desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth.

[15 : 29] He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the shields with fire. God wants us to see him in action as he unleashes his judgment on the rebellious nations, the enemies of the people of God.

And what does God do? We see in these verses, he causes wars to cease. He breaks the bow. He shatters the spear. He burns the shields or the chariots with fire.

God will defeat all the warring nations by destroying their weapons. How can you fight if your weapons have been destroyed?

The people of God are invited to come and see the desolations that God has brought upon their enemies. Perhaps there's one particular battle or event that the Psalmist has in mind when he writes this song.

But we've thought about Jericho already this morning. You know, that's a good example of God making an utter desolation of God's enemies.

[16 : 43] And he brings them down by his power alone. It was nothing that the Israelites did. They were just on a long walk, a long, noisy walk. The Psalmist says, Come and see, O people of God, what the covenant Lord has done for you.

He will raise your enemies to the ground and make them a desolation. Come and see what he has done. Now we've seen in verse 6 already that the nations are roaring and they're lifting up their voice against God and against his people.

But we see in verse 6 that when almighty God lifts up his voice, again that apocalyptic language, the earth melts.

When God lifts up his voice, mighty nations are brought to nothing. There is no doubt where true power lies in this Psalm.

Now I'm not sure when in Israel's history this Psalm was written. It could have been when Israel was still a kingdom or it could have been when they were in exile or under occupation.

[17 : 59] This could have been written to them when they were under Babylonian rule or under Persian rule or under Greek rule or even under Roman rule. No matter when in history the people of God sung this song, Psalm 46 should have reminded them where the true power lies.

These almighty kingdoms, where are they now? Where are the Greeks? Where are the Romans? Where are the Babylonians? God is the one who's able to utterly dismantle the nations and make them a desolation.

How foolish then it would have been for the people of God to trust in anyone or anything other than almighty God. God says to his people, come and see what I can do.

Come and see what I've done. But now let's move on to verse 10. And this is where God says to the nations and to all the earth, be still and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. So we've seen the invitation to come and see and now we see this command to be still.

[19 : 15] Now we quite often like to quote this verse. We like to take it as a sort of comforting verse. We like to meditate on it. But in the context of this psalm, in the context of Psalm 46, as we look at the language in the rest of the psalm, this is no peaceful meditation.

This is an awesome, authoritative command to the nations and to all the earth and to anybody who's looking on and listening to be still before him and to know for certain that he is God.

There is no other. This is no peaceful meditation. This is an authoritative command to still yourself before God. Now, this command from God, there are really obvious similarities.

I say really obvious. I just, at camp this week, we were looking at Mark chapter four. Sorry, the gospel of Mark. So my head's been in the gospel of Mark. My head's been in the Psalms full of prep for this.

And there seems to be some real similarities between this command of God and the story of Jesus in the boat on the Sea of Galilee in Mark chapter four.

[20 : 31] And I'm just going to put the words of the story up on the screen. You'll know this story really well. But I'm just going to read it. That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, that's Jesus, let us go over to the other side.

Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along just as he was in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped.

Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, teacher, don't you care if we drown?

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, quiet. Be still. Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? And they were terrified and they asked each other, who is this?

[21 : 42] Even the wind and the waves obey him. Jesus purposefully uses the words of Psalm 46 when he stands up and he speaks to the roaring, foaming, and surging sea and wind.

And he speaks these words in the presence of his disciples, be still and know that I am God. And we see in the story that they are left asking one another, who is this man?

They didn't know who he truly was yet, but by using this Psalm, Jesus is declaring, you lot know that I am God and that I will command the nations and all the earth to be still before me.

Jesus declares, look, this Psalm is about me. I am the fortress you must run to. I will be among you and be an ever-present help to you by my spirit.

I will fight for you and I will still the earth and the nations with just a word and I will be exalted. And where will Jesus be exalted?

[22 : 56] Well, we see in verse 10, Jesus will be exalted among the nations and in the earth. Jesus will be celebrated and glorified and worshipped in those two places of chaos that we looked at already.

In the earth, which is sitting under God's judgment. Jesus will still it. Jesus will be exalted in the midst of the nations who rebel against his rule as Jesus is exalted in the earth and among the nations, they will be humbled and they will be stilled and they will know without a doubt that he is God.

And God's people, those that have come into his kingdom that have chosen to set him up as their king, they will be looking on and they will be worshipping and glorifying him all the more when they

see him come down and humble all his enemies and be exalted.

But of course, Jesus was already glorified in the earth and among the nations when he was nailed to the cross to bear the wrath of God for the sins of mankind.

Jesus was glorified on that cross as the saviour of the world died and suffered for the ones that he loved.

[24 : 21] yet he was raised again to life defeating not just earthly nations but defeating the spiritual enemies of God once and for all.

So the God of Psalm 46 has already dealt the defeating blow to all his enemies on earth and in the spiritual realm. But we are living in a time after the cross and before Jesus returns in power, we are in this in-between time and so we haven't seen all the powers of the nations brought under his rule just yet.

So how can we as God's people sing Psalm 46 today? Well, I think it is by looking at where we are going, where we are going, where our destination is.

And this is the moment that we skip back to verses 4 and 5. And in verses 4 and 5 we see there that Jesus has, sorry, we know already from our Bible that Jesus has promised to deliver all who trust in him into his everlasting kingdom.

And we see this in view here, the city of God where God himself will dwell among us. This is the great promise that heaven will come down to earth and God will dwell among his people.

[25 : 42] We will live with him. And in verses 4 and 5 you can take a look at them again in Psalm 46. Here we see the river of life flowing in the city of God and we see that it makes the people glad.

This is a picture of tranquility and it is in contrast with the verses that come before the chaotic waters of the world under judgment. Here we see the river of life flowing peacefully in the city of God and it makes the people of God glad.

And this is the city where God dwells. We see that in this verse as well. God dwells here with his people. God is within this city.

He will be among his people there in the city of God. She will not fall. God will help her at the beginning of every day. It is clear that this place this place this city of God where we will dwell is a place of tranquility.

It's a place of rock steady safety. It is a holy place. And how will God's people have total confidence when they live in that place?

[27 : 00] How will God's people have confidence when they are with him in, I just gave it away, when they're with him in the new creation? It's because God himself will dwell there with them and in the midst of his people.

So in these in-between days after the cross and before Jesus' return, we are waiting for this day when we will live in total peace with God in his holy kingdom.

And as we wait, we need to consider these two things. So two things for us to think about just as we start to bring this all to a close.

We need to consider God's invitation that we've seen already. God's invitation to come and see and secondly, his command to be still.

Come and see what the Lord has done and secondly, be still and know that I am God. So today, in this in-between day, God is saying to us today, come and see what I've done.

[28 : 06] Maybe you say, maybe you're saying, I just can't see God working in the situation that I'm in right now. I'm in this situation. I have this circumstance in my life and I just can't see him at work.

Why should I trust him anyway? What is he actually doing? Well, I think God is inviting us to come and take a look in our Bibles, come and see what he's done in the history of his people, of Israel, how he displayed his mighty power again and again and again over his enemies.

But not just that, God is inviting us to come and see what he has done through his son, Jesus, bringing salvation and eternal refuge to all who choose to put their trust in him.

Come and see what I've done through my people, Israel, but come and see what I ultimately have done through my son, Jesus. Come and see. Now, at the start, we were thinking a little bit about bomb shelters, a place of refuge for people living in danger.

we thought about the London Underground. But the whole point of a bomb shelter is that you actually have to leave the unsafe place where you are, so maybe that's your house.

[29 : 23] You need to get up, you need to come out of that place and you need to enter into the shelter and only then will you be safe. In the same way, we must all leave the place of

self-dependence which offers us no true safety.

We need to stop depending on ourselves for safety. We need to come out of that place and enter into the refuge that God offers us and that is his son, Jesus.

Jesus is the only place where we can find true safety in this world which is rocking and shaking and at war with itself this world which will come to an end.

Jesus is the only place where we can find true safety in this world. So come and see what I've done through my son Jesus and secondly, God invites us to be still.

I think this is actually an invitation for us now. God invites us to come and be still before he commands the whole earth and the world to be still. God invites each one of us this morning.

[30 : 36] Be still. Will you humble yourself before him and know that he is the one true God? He will be exalted in our midst on that final day of judgment.

Jesus, whether we choose to trust in him or not or whether we will choose to keep roaring at him, setting ourselves up against him.

He will be exalted in our midst, whether we like it or not. God invites us here in Psalm 46 to be still and worship Jesus, who will bring all his enemies under his rule.

Let me pray. our God and Father, we thank you so much for giving us your word.

Thank you for giving us Psalm 46, this psalm that we may know or we've maybe never seen before.

And we thank you that this is a psalm that we can think about, we can read, we can even sing.

[31 : 48] and it's a psalm that gives us massive confidence that you are our refuge, you are our fortress, you are the place that we can run into and take shelter in when we are living in this world, when calamity strikes, when the nations are raging against you and against us, your church.

Thank you that we can find shelter in you and in your son Jesus, who you have anointed and you have set up as the king over the universe. And yeah, we just pray for each one of us that we would be remembering that this week, Lord, as in the good times and in the bad, that we would remind ourselves that we can take shelter in him.

And we thank you that you haven't just left us to scuffle around in this world by ourselves, but you have promised to be among us today, among your people. You said it's better for me, Jesus said it's better for me to leave you so the spirit can come and to help us live for you.

So we thank you for sending Jesus to be glorified in the world. We saw that as he hung on the cross and he died for the sins of the world. And we pray for those of us who sit here this morning who haven't yet chosen to put their trust in Jesus.

I pray that you would help them to know that he is the son of God. He is who he said he was. He is a real figure in history, but he was much more than that. He was the son of God who came to suffer the wrath of God for all of our sins, Lord.

[33 : 22] So we thank you for Jesus and we thank you for leaving your spirit who dwells amongst us and is in our midst today and is our ever-present help. So help us now, Lord, as we turn and turn to a time of worship and help us to lift up our voices and worship you as our king and our God.

And it's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen. Amen.