

Trusting God in Difficult Times

Psalm 46

Introduction: There are some who say that the preacher's pulpit plan should not be driven by current events. While this is probably a good rule of thumb to prevent the pulpit from simply being a source for political commentary, sometimes God's preachers must bring the Word of God to bear on situations that bring distress to God's people. This week has seen much turmoil in the world markets, we are still fighting the terrorists, our presidential elections loom near and it is perhaps one of the most important in recent history. In our own church, we have seen much sorrow and suffering of late. We need to hear what God has to say to us in the midst of these circumstances so that our vision is directed toward God through Christ rather than to ourselves or the world.

Trust in God no matter what.

I. Flee to God in the turmoil (1-3).

"Our true security is in God, not in God *plus* anything else" (Kidner, 174). God is our "refuge," in him we find shelter, nowhere else. He is unchanging and will always be our shelter. He is our "strength," the source of empowerment to face what rages against us, though it be war or famine or storm, and the fear our enemies might bring. The psalmist puts both of these together by saying that he is "a very present help in trouble."

Appl: This confession of faith must come first; we must see God in this way, as he is, if we are to be assured that he will preserve us in the midst of the turmoil and strife that is to come. This confession must be founded upon faith; was cannot wait to see if the Lord will be this and do this, we must come to him in faith, believing his Word alone. Heb. 1:6.

Some commentators think the imagery in vv. 2-3 reflects ancient Canaanite myths (Dahood, 1:278-279). They see this, then, as being Israel's confession that Yahweh is superior to the pagan Gods. The language, however, is probably not mythological, but eschatological (VanGemeren, *EBC*, 5:352), pointing to the end of time when God will consummate his plan in history. This is the language of the Day of the Lord, the coming Day of Judgment. Throughout this age, we may expect the Lord to shake the earth, in anticipation of that coming Day of Judgment, bringing about radical political, economic, and cultural change.

This is the language of the Revelation, of apocalypse, the language of the Day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment. The day of God's wrath is approaching in which he will judge the world with a great shaking just as Haggai prophesied (ch. 2), quoted in Hebrews 12, when the Lord will shake heaven and earth, overthrowing kingdoms and rulers and mighty armies and will fill his house with glory. His shaking will overthrow the mountains and the earth itself (v. 2). The mountain filling the sea signifies the end of the sea, one of the features of the New Heavens and new Earth (Rev. 21:1).

Appl: What will you do in that day? Faith must precede one's entrance into that day; to go into that day without faith is to face God as Judge rather than as Refuge and Fortress. Your safety in that day cannot be found in governments or markets or even the earth itself, because it, too, will be shaken. Days of turmoil, whether world-wide or national or personal, are calls from God to us, calling us to him. Whether we are touched by the turmoil of the world markets or turmoil in our individual lives, the Lord calls us to flee to him for refuge. *Proverbs 18:10*, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe." *Trust in God by realizing that nothing else is worthy of trust because he alone is steadfast and sure.*

Trans: There will be days of strife. There will be weeks worse than this one, there will be days in your own life, worse than any day you had this week. You must trust him and learn to flee to him so that you will be ready to face those days.

II. Rest in God in the strife (4-7).

The language of the second stanza is the language of siege. In the ancient world, when an army surrounded a walled city, cutting off its supplies and escape, the people in the city were in a dangerous state. If there were no water supply, as in the case of Jerusalem during Hezekiah's reign, they were in an especially dangerous state, one that would probably not outlive. They would either thirst or starve to death or be overtaken. The OT records stories of women killing their own children to eat during the final siege of Jerusalem, so desperate was the situation. They forgot that God is the satisfaction and supply of his people. What you need, God will provide. And his time, is always the right time.

This psalm (along with the following two) is often dated to the reign of Hezekiah, since its language is similar to the language of Isa. 36-37, which depicts Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem during Hezekiah's reign. The only source of water in Jerusalem was the spring located to the east of the city, just outside the city wall. Hezekiah's men dug a tunnel which can be seen to this day (my wife has waded through it), into the city and it has not lacked a water supply since.

The specific situation, however, only serves to illustrate this psalm and is secondary to the message. God dwells in the midst of his people. The city's strength lies in that and in that alone: that God is in her midst. Not its location or its fortifications or its army, but in its God, the Lord of Hosts. Likewise, the church's strength today lies not in her wealth, or her marketing or her relevance, but in this alone: God is in her midst.

The waters they feared, God will turn into rivers refreshing his people. God is the one whose coming is the breaking of the dawn, signaling a new day with the deliverance he brings (His mercies are new every morning, Lam. 3:22-23) bringing deliverance to them. God is the one who raises up kingdoms and brings them down again. God is the one whose voice shakes the mountains and melts the earth.

He is the Lord of hosts; the armies of heaven await his orders to fight for his people. But he is not just the God of Israel or of the church, he is my God, and your God. He is not just the God of Israel, that nation, but the God of Jacob, the man. Deliverance is not just of God's might, it is of his grace.

Appl: God's people will never fall. We need never fear, no matter what may happen, God will see us through. When the strife of the world and the turmoil of life comes close to overwhelming us, rest in him. Through him you can have peace. *Trust in God by resting in his sovereign care.* You do this by acknowledging that he controls all things and that all things that come to his children come to them as from the hand of a father and what father does not want what is best for his kids.

Illus: My son waiting for his test score. When it wasn't in his folder he said, "Oh great, now I have all weekend to worry about it." I know how he feels and what he means.

I usually don't like to sum up Christianity in witty saying, but this one I think is true in this context: "Let go and let God." What can you do about it? You can't stop the terrorists, you can't fix the markets, you can't stop a disease. You can't do anything about it. But you can know that God is in control and you can rest in him.

Trans: Much of our worry is really about that: the future. What is going to happen? But you can't do anything about it. All you can do is what God has already told you to do: trust him.

III. Trust in him for the future (8-11).

Prepare for the future by first looking to the past. "Come, behold the works of the Lord." Has God ever failed his people? No.

Only after considering the faithfulness of God through history, only then can you look to the end and see it as he intends. God will end the strife and turmoil (v. 9) by destroying his enemies (v. 8) which are also our enemies. Strife and turmoil will not cease until the Lord has laid waste to all things in this world, shattering the kingdoms of this world, and renewed the universe into the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. He will be exalted, no doubt about that; and his exaltation will bring our exaltation.

[Explain the significance of phrase "God of Jacob." Use of "Jacob" rather than "Israel" outside of Genesis usually signifies covenant relationship. No clue to that meaning here. Probably speaking of God's concern not just for his people as a whole, his "flock" (or family) but for each member of the covenant community, each of his "sheep" (or each of his children).]

Appl: "What do I do?" "*Be still.*" Stop striving and worrying and wringing your hands and holding your head in your hands. "*Know that I am God.*" We have future hope because we have present help.

Knowing God is knowing factual things about God, knowing who he is and what he has done, but it is also commitment to him, trust in him, based upon that factual knowledge. The life of faith is saying, "Since God is like this, I can trust him." "Since God is like that, I will live for him." "Since God is as he has said, I can be confident that will be like that for me."

The life of faith is trusting God, no matter what because you believe that he is sovereign, he rules all things, and will make all things right in his time.