

“A Mighty Fortress”
Psalm 46
(Preached at Trinity, November 14, 2010)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Yet another Psalm dedicated to the sons of Korah – skilled musicians entrusted with this high psalm of praise. A “song upon Alamoth.” This was a designation pointing to young women – possibly indicating it was to be sung in soprano or possibly played upon high pitched instruments.
2. And a high psalm of praise indeed, for it sets God before us as the mighty defender of His people. Spurgeon called it “The Song of Holy Confidence.”
3. It has also been referred to as “Luther’s Psalm.”
The year 1527 was particularly difficult for Luther. While preaching as sermon on April 22 of that year a terrible spell of dizziness came upon him forcing him to stop preaching. He feared for his life. On July 6, while eating dinner with friends, he suddenly felt an extreme buzzing in his ear. As he was forced to lie down his friends were convinced he had come to the end of his life. Physical weakness continued to plague him and he became discouraged.
He wrote: *“I spent more than a week in death and hell. My entire body was in pain, and I still tremble. Completely abandoned by Christ, I labored under vacillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against God.”*
4. It was also during this time that the Bubonic Plague had entered Germany and Luther and his wife Katharina or Katy gave themselves to caring for the sick. Although Katy was pregnant with their second child their house was transformed into a hospital. Luther watched many of his friends die and then his own one-year-old son Hans became desperately sick. With death all around him he found refuge in God more than ever before. Psalm 46 became a great source of comfort and strength. It became the basis of his great hymn,
A Mighty Fortress is Our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing. . .

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also—
The body they may kill;
God’s truth abideth still
His kingdom is forever.
5. Psalm 46 is divided into three stanzas and so I will divide my sermon tonight into three points, each corresponding to each of the stanzas.
Verses 1-3 – God, our Protecting Refuge
Verses 4-7 – God, our Preserving River
Verses 8-11 – God, our Prevailing Ruler

I. **Verses 1-3** – God, our Protecting Refuge

A. God is a mighty source of protection

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

1. The word for “refuge” refers to a shelter, but as it applies here it is an impenetrable shelter

Luther referred to it as a “Mighty Fortress.”

2. God’s strength is absolute

- a. All other power is nothing in comparison to God

- b. As our weakness increases God’s strength is magnified

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 – “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”¹⁰

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

3. God is always present – “a very present help”

Luther – “Our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing”

B. **Verse 2** – “Therefore will not we fear”

1. This psalm provided indescribable comfort for Luther during his physical trials but how much more as he stood before the earthly enemies of the faith. As he stood before the Diet of Worms, the General Assembly of the Holy Roman Empire he was asked if he would recant his writings:

“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand, I can do no other. May God help me. Amen.”

- a. “May God help me.” God is our Refuge and our Strength.”

- b. Luther found God sufficient – “Therefore will not we fear.”

The body they may kill;

God's truth abideth still

His kingdom is forever.

2. We aren’t sure what the circumstances of the psalm were. It doesn’t matter. Whatever situation we are in God is more than sufficient.

Verse 3 – “*Though* the waters thereof roar *and* be troubled, *though* the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

- a. **Verse 3** describes great upheaval – great calamity.

- b. During earth shaking circumstances God is a very present helper who is in absolute control. When the very foundation of our life is shaken we can find refuge in our God.

3. As long as Christ is present we have comfort and peace

Hebrews 13:5-6 – “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*”⁶ So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

4. Elizabeth Elliot also found great comfort in this Psalm. She lost two husbands, one Jim Elliot who was martyred as a missionary and the other was consumed by cancer.
(Speaking of the shock of death) “Everything that seemed most dependable has given way. Mountains are falling, earth is reeling. In such a time it is a profound comfort to know that although all things seem to be shaken, one thing is not: God is not shaken.”

II. **Verses 4-7** – God, our Preserving River – “There is a river . . . God *is* in the midst of her”

- A. There is a great river flowing through the city of God
 1. Notice the contrast
Verse 3 – “*Though* the waters thereof roar *and* be troubled”
Verse 4 - “*There is* a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God”
 2. This river is an unending supply flowing through the city of God
 - a. There are several psalms that speak of the city of Jerusalem
48, 76, 84, 87, 122
 - b. These are referred to as “songs of Zion”
 - c. It draws our eyes beyond any earthly city
 3. This points to the peace and safety of God’s people of all ages and find’s its grand culmination in heavenly Jerusalem
 4. This river flows from the throne of God
Psalm 46:5 – “God *is* in the midst of her; she shall not be moved”
 5. There is no such river flowing through Jerusalem
 It stands here metaphorical of God’s mighty sustaining presence.
 It speaks of the continual outpouring of the sustaining and refreshing blessings of God.
- B. While the world seems to be in a state of constant tumult God’s people find rest in Christ.
 1. Paul referred to this as a peace that surpasses our comprehension
Philippians 4:6-7 – “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”
 2. God stands as our constant provider
Psalm 46:5 – “God *is* in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her”
 3. His timing is always perfect.
Psalm 46:5 – “*and that* right early”
 - a. This is where we often struggle. We often think God doesn’t come early enough.
 - b. This was Martha’s problem, yet she continued to trust God
John 11:21-22 – “Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. ²² But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give *it* thee.”

4. Let the heathen rage, let the enemies assault – God is with us
Psalm 46:6-7 – “The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. ⁷ The LORD of hosts *is* with us; the God of Jacob *is* our refuge.”

III. **Verses 8-11** – God, our Prevailing Ruler

Psalm 46:8 – “Come, behold the works of the LORD”

A. God is the Ruler of this world

1. God causes wars to cease

Psalm 46:9 – “He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth”

a. This isn’t through compromise or negotiation but through the conquering of a mighty King.

b. Every enemy lies broken and crushed beneath the feet of Christ

Psalm 110:1-2 – “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. ²

The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.”

c. It is like the defeat of the armies Iraq leaving Saddam Hussein defeated and hiding in a hole.

Psalm 46:9 – “he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.”

2. Jesus Christ is the ruler of this world.

He is King of kings, Lord of lords – the ultimate Sovereign

B. With such a mighty conquering King His people can rest in peace

Psalm 46:10 – “Be still, and know that I *am* God”

1. The word for “be still” means “to let go or release”

It describes a full submission to the sovereignty of God.

He is the ruler and determiner of all things. He can be trusted

2. This is not a suggestion but a command to bow before this mighty King

3. We must acknowledge Him as King and rest confidently in His reign.

We must surrender our will to His will

4. This is the nature of Christian conversion

It is forsaking all else and submitting fully to the rule and reign of Christ

5. This is also the nature of true prayer – submitting our will to His will.

C. There is an expectation here that every knee shall bow

Psalm 46:10 – “I will be exalted in the earth.”

1. This is the consistent teaching of Scripture. Although things may seem in disorder now Christ is reigning

2. All nations must bow

Psalm 2:10-12 – “Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish

from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all they that put their trust in him.”

3. All nations *will* bow
Philippians 2:9-11 – “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; ¹¹ And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
- D. The Psalmist ends by taking us back to the beginning
Psalm 46:11 - “The LORD of hosts *is* with us; the God of Jacob *is* our refuge.”

Conclusion:

1. Life is full of trials and tribulations. The Psalmist calls our attention to the desolations that plague the earth.
Psalm 46:8 – “Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth.”
- A. Wars have resulted in the deaths of untold millions. Their blood runs deep and wide.
 - B. Famines have left millions to die with nothing left but skin and bone. People searching for any scrap of nourishment; mothers eating their children.
 - C. Plagues have swept the earth leaving death in their path.
 - D. Floods and wind have left ruin and destruction in their wake.
 - E. Earthquakes have swallowed up whole cities
2. The psalmist reminds us that all these things are from the hand of God who rules over all the earth.
 But for God’s people He stands forever as a Mighty Fortress. He stands as a river of grace that flows with unending provision. God commands us, “be still, be at peace, bow in submission, wait in patience”
 And know this – “I am God.”
Psalm 46:11 - “The LORD of hosts *is* with us; the God of Jacob *is* our refuge.”