

God is our Refuge

Psalm 46

Holy Trinity Tewkesbury
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Andrew Simpkins

Introduction

- Welcome to members of HTT and visitors to our Youtube channel
- I am Andrew Simpkins and I would have been speaking at our Encounter service tonight. But instead we are doing a video recording
- I expect you will be watching this at home, alone or with your family. So I don't want to do a stand up and preach type message. I see this as more of a 'fireside chat' where I am speaking to you more personally, more individually. So let's see how it goes !
- A couple of months ago now, I was given the theme 'God is our Refuge' which you may recognise as the opening lines of a psalm, psalm 46. Little did I know then how much this psalm would resonate with the current challenging circumstances in which we find ourselves. So I hope this psalm will really speak to us all tonight.
- If you would like to open your Bible I am going to start by reading this psalm, using the NIV

Psalm 46 - For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to *alamoth*. A song.

- God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
- Therefore we will not fear, though the earth
give way and the mountains fall into the heart
of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam and the
mountains quake with their surging.
- There is a river whose streams make glad the
city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
- The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
- 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.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."
- The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Some famous lines in this psalm

- *V1 - God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble*
- *V4 - There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,*
- *V10 - Be still, and know that I am God*

Outline

- Approach
 - Not taking any of these verses in isolation
 - But think about the psalm as a whole - this psalm has a particular resonance at time when we are facing tumultuous and unpredictable changes in the world around us
 - Its basic message is that in a time of trouble and fear we may still declare our faith and our confidence in God
- Aims
 - Be encouraged and strengthened by this psalm
 - Inspired to go and read other psalms especially at a time when we are being drawn to spend a lot of time in front of screens – and being faced with a stream of bad news
 - To help in understanding this psalm, I want to talk to you about six key features of the psalms in general which will help you appreciation and enjoyment of them.
 - The first three are these – a psalm expresses words from the heart, it is a song and a poem

NT on Using Psalms

- Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord
 - Ephesians 5:19
- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.
 - Colossians 3:16

A psalm speaks and sings from the heart to God

- When we talk about the Bible as 'God's word' we can think that all the words in the Bible are God speaking to us. But in the psalms we find words expressed by the psalmist to God rather than God speaking words to us (with a few exceptions)
- Psalms express very real and deep human feelings to God – joy and sorrow, pain and deliverance, hopes and fears, success and failures, and also praise and gratitude
- The psalms are very honest about these strong feelings – this makes them real and personal – helping us to say what we feel when we are lost for words (ps 3: Lord how many are my foes ! Ps 130 – Out of the depths I cry to you Lord)
- But they retain a deep trust in God even in the midst of perplexing and difficult circumstances (Ps 32:7: You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance)
- Psalms are powerful because in reading them we find words that can express our deep feelings especially when we are struggling to know quite how to say what we feel

A psalm is a song

- We have to remember that psalms were written to be sung not read – think of them as a hymn not a story, as a tune not a text
- See the heading of the psalm – ‘***For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to alamoth. A song.***’
- Alamoth – we can’t be sure of its meaning – its probably a musical term – one translator thinks it might mean ‘to be sung by soprano voices’
- If you asked an Israelite what they thought of psalm 46 they might just have replied ‘Ah, psalm 46, what a great tune !!’ Then they might have started whistling it !
- It opens up a different appreciation of a psalm if you can imagine what the tune sounded like, and what music accompanied it
- However musical, or unmusical you are, imagine what the tune may have been to each line of a psalm and it will give you a sense of the emotion and the energy that underpins the words

What did it sound like ?

- *though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging*
- The music here would be loud and dramatic
- *Be still, and know that I am God*
- The music here might be quiet and reflective
- *The LORD Almighty is with us*
- Here we might expect music that expresses confidence and hope
- Try it out, even as fun, it is good to do things that will make one another smile at times like this !

A psalm is a poem

- Psalms are not narratives or stories – they are not written to give you information but to help you worship and pray;
- The psalms are not trying to give you facts, they are there to enable you to express your emotions
- By articulating what is in your heart, they also help to increase awareness – of yourself, of God, of others.
- Like all great poetry, a psalm tries to get you to feel something rather than just know something
- The psalms as poems use particular forms of language – particularly metaphors to convey thoughts in a rich and dynamic way
- A metaphor is a word or phrase applied to a person or object or action to which it is not literally applicable but which makes a meaningful comparison
- e.g. God is our fortress - God is not literally a fortification - he does not have walls; but he can be compared to a fortress as a place of safety and security. The fortress is a symbol for God. E.g. Gjakova in Albania

Hebrew poetry has three common features

Parallel ideas

Powerful images

Prophetic imagination

• Parallel ideas

- *1 - God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.*
- *V5 - God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.*
- In Hebrew poetry you often get a pair of lines that express a very similar thought or where the second line in some way amplifies or gives deeper insight into the first line
- This repetition or parallelism helps to reinforce and apply the meaning of the psalm
- V1 - So if God is our refuge and strength then that means he is a very present in our troubles
- V5 - If God is with us then that means he will be there to help us at the start of every day
- Sara and I were in Majorca on holiday a week ago when the government there imposed movement restrictions, which also threatened hotels with closure. We were due to be there another week but were advised on the Saturday evening to return home as soon as possible. So we found an alternative flight for first thing on Monday morning; which meant we had to be at the airport at 6, and to get up at 4.30am.
- As I left the hotel with Sara my wife that phrase 'God will help her at break of day' had a striking relevance – thank you God for getting us away and taking us back home

Powerful images – or word pictures that we need to try to visualise

- ***Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging***
- There is a deliberate kind of exaggeration or hyperbole in these verses – in order to express that dramatic events are taking place – even the earth giving way, mountains collapsing into the sea
- How challenging is it to say at this time when ‘the earth is giving way’, of uncertainty and panic buying – ‘therefore we will not fear’
- We would do well to memorise and meditate on and repeat these words each morning – ***God is our refuge and strength, a very present help ...therefore we will not fear...though the earth give way***

Prophetic imagination

- *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.*
- The city of God to the Jews was of course Jerusalem, and the holy place where God dwelt was the temple
- But Jerusalem does not have a river running through it. Its water supply comes from streams
- So what is this river ? The river is a metaphor for life. Jesus talked about 'rivers of living water' in John 7, and John comments that he spoke this about the Holy Spirit. So the river that makes glad God's people is the life that is found in the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Holy Spirit
- I remember from quite a long time ago being in a meeting once where someone gave a prophecy that very difficult times would come upon the earth. But after the prophecy there was a period of great silence and stillness in the room where you felt God's presence imparting a deep peace to us.
- This is a time for us to come to that river and ask for God's presence to dwell with us

How does this psalm apply to us today?

- We are in a time of trouble
- Let us reflect on God's presence with us – The Lord Almighty is with us !
- Jesus said 'If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink' - We should drink the water of the river of God – be open to receive the Holy Spirit in our prayer and worship
- Take up your confidence in God, who remains with us when all else seems to be falling away
- ***'Be still, quieten your heart and mind, and know that I am God'***