

Refuge and Strength

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[0:00] Hey, church. Good morning. It's 1028, but I decided to go ahead and get this started, and I'll wait until 1030 before we actually get things rolling.

I was thinking about, man, all the things with COVID and what got us onto live streaming in the first place years and years ago. So if you had been at our church in 2018 or 2019 and there was a snow day or a cold day, we just wouldn't have a sermon, and we didn't do any live streaming.

And then COVID came along, and we had to learn so many things so quickly. And now we have the equipment, we have the setup, and I think at least once a year, we are here in my living room.

And so I was just reflecting on all those things this morning and how many years it's been since COVID and the world of live streaming.

And, you know, there was a time when we didn't have a live stream for our church. We didn't have a live stream camera. You know, if you missed the worship service, you just have to, the sermon audio recording was all there was. So it's just funny to think about everything that's changed in the world the last five or six years or so.

[1:15] And what I've learned, too, I remember back in COVID, just the learning curve of trying to figure out how to use the cameras and how to use Facebook Live and all those things. And now it's just something we do and we have to.

So, okay, we're right at 1030. So I'm going to go ahead and officially get us started. As you join on, I would ask that if you're willing to make a comment and just where you are watching from, you can greet one another.

That does a couple of things for us. First of all, it helps us understand who's actually with us. It gives us a sense of being together, even as we are actually separated physically.

And it also helps me not feel quite so crazy. So I'm not just here looking into a camera. Even now I can see folks commenting. So that's helpful for me, if for no one else.

We were supposed to have a congregational meeting today after church. Obviously, we're not going to do that. So that will be moved to next Sunday, January the 26th.

[2:19] I also do want to give you guys a reminder that my sabbatical is coming up very soon. February the 2nd will be my last Sunday with you all. So I have two more Sundays.

After this morning, I have one more sermon. This coming week, I'll be traveling for our regional church meetings three times a year. The churches in Wyoming and Montana and Colorado get together.

So I'll be in Summit County for some of the week and up in the Denver area for part of it. So Andy Perch will preach next Sunday. Then I'll preach on the 2nd. Then I'll be out. I also want to remind you that starting February 9th, Jonathan Clark is going to do a four-week series on evangelism that I'm really excited about.

And I hope you all are as well. I think those are our announcements. We've been in a very short series in the Book of Psalms.

The last couple weeks, the Book of Psalms is the songbook for God's people in the Old Testament. It is the prayer book, the hymn book, the guide for worshipping God.

[3:21] It's quoted all throughout the New Testament. There's sort of a competition between the Book of Psalms and the Book of Isaiah as to which is quoted more in the New Testament. Depends on who you ask and how you add up the numbers.

This week, we're going to be in Psalm 46. And for the sake of time, I'm actually going to hone in on verses 1 through 7. And we're going to leave off verses 8 through 11, just because this is such a rich passage with so much going on.

And Psalm 46 really asks one question. What do we do when life falls apart? What do we do when life falls apart?

It's with that I invite you to turn with me now. You can turn on your phone or in your Bible or in your computer, wherever you get access to the scriptures. Wherever you turn, remember that this is God's word.

He tells us that it is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now from Psalm 46.

[4 : 27] God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.

Though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage. The kingdoms totter.

He utters his voice. The earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for the gift of technology that allows us to connect, even as we're at a distance. And we ask that you'd help us. You'd help us to focus for a few minutes this morning on your word, that we would worship you, that we would see you clearly, and that you would remove the many distractions that come with this sort of technology.

[5 : 45] Instead, you'd help us. You'd help us to see you in your word. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. One of my very best friends in the whole world grew up in Asheville, North Carolina, which is in western North Carolina.

And he had a very hard childhood with a lot of significant trauma. And so home was not always a safe place for him.

But if you're familiar with western North Carolina, you know that that's the mountains of North Carolina. And while home was not safe, the mountains were. He looked to the mountains as a place of comfort and solace and safety.

He eventually became an outdoorsman. He worked in the outdoors industry for a while and I think directly connected to those experiences. And you probably already know where I'm going with this. In September of last year, Hurricane Helene came in. And what did it do? It wiped out western North Carolina. Destroyed that part of the state with floods.

[6 : 49] And the mountains themselves were covered in water. Of course, not up to their topstrap, but they're flooded. Inaccessible. And so we find here, verse 2. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.

And to be honest with you, I've always thought of that verse in Psalm 46 as sort of being this exaggeration, this hyperbole. You know, of course, the mountains will never fall into the sea. It's just using this image to help us understand, well, the worst thing that you can imagine happening, which of course won't happen, God is stronger still. I'm going to have to eat my words on that because what is Hurricane Helene but water from the sea in a hurricane that comes in and floods the mountains?

So my image, my idea, my thoughts about Psalm 46 have changed because of that, because of my conversations with my friend. The point is this.

Sometimes the most stable things in the world are shaken, are removed, are destroyed. Sometimes the most stable things in the world are shaken and removed and destroyed.

[8 : 12] And if you've lived long enough, you have probably experienced that, something that you thought was the bedrock of your life disappeared. Maybe your spouse told you that he or she wanted out of the marriage.

Maybe the stock market crashed and along with it disappeared your wealth. And with your wealth, your chance of retiring.

We could think of another natural disaster, the wildfires that are going on in Los Angeles. There was an article in the Wall Street Journal that came out recently and the title was this. Their wealth is in their homes.

Their homes are now ash. And it featured folks who are in their 60s and their 70s in their home. Their house was a large portion of their retirement plan, of their wealth.

In addition to that, before the fires, insurance companies had stopped supporting, had dropped, I think State Farm especially, their coverage for wildfires. And so you have people who are in this double bind.

[9 : 12] On the one hand, they've lost their insurance. Then the fire comes in and takes out their wealth. Maybe the stable thing for you is your job that you lost.

Maybe it's that your mind and your body slowly start to fail and betray you. This psalm reminds us that we can't leave this life unscathed.

And so it's about this. It's about the question that I mentioned to you earlier. What do we do when life falls apart? What do we do when the earth gives way?

Well, it tells us in that very same verse, verse 2, we will not fear. Now notice what it doesn't say. It doesn't say we won't grieve.

It doesn't say we won't be sad. It says we will not fear. Why? Well, look one verse earlier, verse 1. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

[10 : 24] The psalm goes on immediately, verses 4 through 7, to give us a picture of what that means. There's this contrast. So you're going to want to look at your Bible now with me. We're going to be moving around quickly on different verses.

There's this contrast between what happens in verses 1 through 3, and then what we see in verses 4 through 7. So in verses 2 and 3, we have these threatening waters that destroy.

That's what's happening in the world. Verse 4, we have a river that brings life. There is a river whose streams may clad the city of God. Verses 2 and 3, what do we see?

The mountains are moved into the heart of the sea. Okay, so the mountains, the stable things in life, they can be destroyed. They can be upset. Verse 5, talking about God's city, Jerusalem, God is in the midst of her same word, she shall not be moved.

So I want you to see the contrast. Waters that destroy, waters that give life. Things that are stable, seemingly, but can be moved, God's city cannot be moved.

[11 : 34] Then we're told, verses 4 and 5, this is the habitation of God. This is where he dwells. He's in the midst of her. God's presence is there. Verse 5, we're told that God is going to help.

God will help her when morning dawns. And then verses 5 through 6, God is actually more powerful than all these other forces. Verse 6, the nations rage, the kingdoms totter, he utters his voice, the earth melts.

Whatever power there is in this world, God is more powerful. Whatever power there is in this world, God is more powerful.

The world, the things that we see as most reliable and most stable, may collapse. And at some point, they will.

God's city will not. Things that are most stable in this world, seemingly, can, and it sometimes will, collapse. God's people will not.

[12 : 41] The world may be falling apart. God's church stands firm. The waters are roaring and chaotic out there.

The waters are nurturing and safe and life-giving in here. So I want you to see there's this kind of black and white distinction. There's this contrast that's being drawn.

Here's the world, unstable, unsteady, always full of risk, volatile. Here's God's city, here's his church, unshakable.

Why don't we fear? Because there's a place where the waters are calm. Why don't we fear? Because Jerusalem, verse 5, shall not be moved.

Now you might be thinking, man, that sounds like a real pie-in-the-sky sort of hope. How does that help me now? How does that help people in Los Angeles whose houses have been destroyed?

[13 : 51] What does it mean on Monday or Tuesday that God is my refuge and strength, that he's a very present help? Well, to get at that, we have to remember that when we look at the Old Testament and we see references to Zion or Jerusalem, a place where God dwells, the center, the capital of his people, we now think of where God's people are now, which is not in Jerusalem, but is in the church.

God is here in the midst of his people, his church, he's very present, and he's very present in a variety of ways, a variety of practical ways.

Remember that God's church is where he's given us to each other, and so God gives his people to his people. One of the ways that God is very present with you is the other people who worship with

you at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church.

That is a piece, a part of God's presence. God does not merely call us as sons and daughters, but when he does, what does that mean? We also have brothers and sisters. And I think when we've been in the church for a long time, it's easy to forget how isolated the world out there is. how hard it is to make real, true, deep friendships outside of the community that God's given us. I'm not saying it's impossible, but in our current age in 2025, an age of isolation and individualism, it is hard.

[15 : 22] It is uphill. If you're in the church, God is present with you. If we were here together, I'd say the people next to you. We're not next to each other, but you know what I mean.

God's also very present to us in his word. He's given us his word to guide us and to instruct us. We could even say that this psalm, Psalm 46, is one of the ways that God is very present with us in trouble.

God's given us strength in the sense that he's given us this psalm. So it's not just that he's a refuge, right? Verse 1, he's also our strength. And he's our strength in a variety of ways. One of the ways is he reminds us of what's true.

We're told in this psalm we don't fear. Well, what is fear but a belief about the future? And what does God tell us in his word? He tells us what the future looks like.

He tells us what we need to know to not fear. We could also say that God is a very present help in trouble because he is immediately accessible to us in prayer.

[16 : 28] I told you a few weeks ago that you are in fact more powerful than Elon Musk. And you're more powerful than him in this particular sense that you have access to the living God.

You can pray to him whenever you want. And God himself is more powerful than Elon Musk. Verse 5, verse 6, the nations rage, the kingdoms totter.

He utters his voice, the earth holds. James chapter 1, verse 5, tells us God gives wisdom wisdom to those who ask for it. That's a promise.

He's saying, look, if you believe and you pray to God and you say, I need wisdom, this is a promise. There's no qualifications. It says God will give you wisdom. He gives wisdom to those who ask.

Actually, I think there is a qualification that we ask in faith, right?

James chapter 5, verse 17, tells us God really does answer prayer, right? Elijah prayed and God answered. Do we believe that?

[17 : 26] Do we believe God's promises about the power of prayer? Do we believe that he is more powerful than the other forces in this world?

Do we believe that he answers, that he hears when we cry out? Do we believe that he's our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble?

God's also very present with us by his Holy Spirit. Jesus makes promises in both John chapter 14 and John chapter 16 that he's going to send the Spirit to his people.

In John 14, he refers to the Spirit as a helper, the one who's going to be with us. John 16, Jesus says, hey, the Spirit's actually so powerful that it's better that I leave you because then I can send the Spirit.

And that's mind-blowing. I've talked about that a number of times in sermons that Jesus would say, actually, it's better that I go because the Holy Spirit is so valuable. You know, our instinct is to think, man, if Jesus were just here, and Jesus says, no, actually, there's something better than me.

[18 : 37] There is my Spirit. Verse 2, again, tells us, sorry, verse 1 tells us that he's our strength. It's our strength in a variety of ways.

The Spirit is one of them. The Spirit gives us what we need to obey God. It's also a strength in that he gives us truths that we need. Truths that anchor us, allow us to move forward.

God's our strength and our refuge because he's promised us things that we can't lose. Every once in a while, I try to remind you all of 1 Peter 1, verse 3, verse 4, excuse me, which tells us that because of the resurrection, we have an inheritance in heaven.

And that inheritance is described with three words. It is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.

Which is another way of saying, whatever happens out there, it can't touch, it can't damage what's in here.

It cannot damage what God has prepared for his people. There are some things in life that will not fall into the sea. There are some things in life that cannot be shaken.

[19 : 47] Those are the things and only the things that God gives to us. I said this already, fear is based on what we believe about what is going to happen in the future.

God's saying, don't fear. I've already told you the future. It's secure. It's secure and cannot be lost. We're not looking at verses 8-11 this morning, but verses 8-11 give us another glimpse of the future.

And they're saying, look, God wins. God wins and he is going to fully and finally be seen for who he is. He's going to bring full and final justice to this earth.

Hebrews chapter 13 gives us a reminder of this, speaking specifically about wealth. It says, keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have.

For he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear.

[20 : 50] What can man do to me? Why is it that we don't fear when the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea?

We don't fear because God has told us I will never leave you nor forsake you. We don't fear because we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper.

What can man do to me? Remember, Jesus says, don't fear those who can kill the body. Fear God, the one who has power over the soul.

You will lose things of great value in this life. there's no way around that. There's no amount of money you can pile up to keep you safe.

There's no friend with enough influence to keep you from harm. You will lose things of great value. There is something, though, of ultimate value that we cannot lose.

[22 : 06] There are things of ultimate value that will not be lost. Those are the things that God gives to us. And they cannot be lost because of Jesus' resurrection.

Peter tells us, 1 Peter 1, verse 4, I already quoted it to you. There's an inheritance. It's imperishable, unfading, undefiled. The verse before that, verse 3, tells us why we have this inheritance.

We have this inheritance because of the resurrection. That it's Jesus' death and his resurrection that makes those things unlosable and unshakable. Because he's promised them to us.

He's given them to us, those who believe in Christ and follow him by faith. And he's able to do that because of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. Because just Jesus died and took the punishment that we deserve.

and he lived and lived the life that we should have lived so that we can have life with him. So there's many things that can happen to you in this life that are terrible and tragic.

[23 : 11] None of them can take that away. I've told you before, you may end up in prison, right, for the rest of your life. You may end up because of something you actually did or something you're falsely accused of.

and in a sense that might feel like the end of your existence in this world. But it can't touch your future. Can't touch the future promise to those who are in Christ.

My friend, who I mentioned at the beginning, told me this. He said, I've always looked to the mountains as a stable thing, found comfort and solace in the mountains.

But the flood, that is the floods of Western North Carolina, showed me even the mountains are not unshakable. The mountains aren't my refuge.

Ultimately, the Lord is my refuge. That's one of the ways, by the way, that God uses tragedies like that. He uses them to shake us up and remind us of what is secure and what isn't secure.

[24 : 19] That's why we see after tragedy, often there's sort of this mini revival. Some of you will remember after 9-11, there was this mass return to church. Because people were shaken up, they realized, hey, the things that I place security in, those things are not as steady or as stable as I thought.

Catastrophes clarify how stable the world is. They remind us that it isn't. And there is, though, that one thing that is stable.

What's stable is the things that we have in God, with God, because of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus himself makes us a promise about that stable future.

We'll end with this, Jesus' words in John 14. Let not your hearts be troubled. Man, that sounds a lot like Psalm 46. Let not your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

[25 : 26] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.

Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, we do thank you and praise you for your word. We thank you for this psalm, Psalm 46. We ask that you would use it as one of your tools to be very present with us in our troubles.

That while we may grieve and we may be sad, we would not fear because we know that what we have in you cannot be lost. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks, church. Look forward to seeing you all again very soon.