

Refuge and Strength

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[0 : 00] Hey, good morning, church. Thanks for being with us again for our second virtual live stream.

It's good to be with you all, even if it's over the Internet. Before we get started, I just want to highlight a couple announcements, since we're not able to have announcements timed together like we would in a normal service.

First of all, we're going to have another church town hall this Wednesday, April the first at 7 p.m. And so if you're finding it here, you can find it in the same place. It's going to be on Facebook Live.

And just like we're doing for this message and our other videos, you can also find it embedded on our website because we know that not everyone has Facebook. So one thing that you all can help me with is spreading the word that you don't actually have to have a Facebook account to be able to access our videos.

The other announcement I want to highlight is that Chris Bradley is starting a Sunday school today at 4 p.m. And if you want more details about that, you can email Chris with your church directory that I'm sure you have.

[1 : 03] Or you can also find all the details in our Friday email. If you are not on the Friday email, that's one of our most important communication tools. And it's very simple to be added. You just need to go to our website and scroll down to the bottom right of any page.

And on the bottom right of any page, there will be a place where you can enter your email address to sign up. So I want to highlight that as we're beginning. This morning, we are gathering together like we always do, no matter what, because we believe that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it, which means it's important, whether we're in person or at home, to return again and again to God and his word.

Last week, we finished our series on 1 Peter, and we're going to return for this Sunday to the book of Psalms. If you've been with us for a while, you know that we've been in Psalms multiple times.

We were there for Advent in December of 2018, and then we were also there this past summer in 2019. So you'll remember that the Psalms are a book in the Old Testament, and they're the prayer book and the hymn book of God's people.

It's a guide for us of how we speak to God in various situations. It's our guide for worshipping him. And the Psalms continue to be used, not just by God's people in the Old Testament, but also by the church in the New Testament.

[2 : 24] It's an incredible resource for Christians, no matter what they face in life. This Sunday, we're going to be talking or looking at Psalm 46.

And as we look at Psalm 46, it's going to address the topic of fear. In fact, that's something that I've been thinking a lot about over the last couple weeks.

It's certainly our experience, right, during these times that we have the emotion of fear. And yet we're going to see in this passage that God's going to tell us not to fear, which can be confusing at times for us as Christians.

So we're going to look at what that actually means. Just like I'm concerned at times when people say, have faith, depending on what they mean by that. I'm also concerned sometimes when people say, don't fear.

Do they mean that this is a license for foolishness, for example? Does not having fear mean we can do whatever we want without fear of consequence? Perhaps telling someone not to fear is a tool of shame, right?

[3 : 26] They're sharing with you some of their frustrations and what they think might happen in the future, and you'd rather not listen to it. And so you just tell them not to be afraid. There are certainly appropriate ways to use fear and inappropriate, and so we're going to look at that this morning from Psalm 46.

What does it mean not to have a fear? It's with that question, we're going to turn to God's Word. You can turn with me in your Bible as I'm turning in mine.

You can turn on your phone, or you can also find it on the internet. Just search Psalm 46. And as we come to this Psalm, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we're going to read it now, starting at verse 1. 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.

[4 : 37] Verse 4. 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. Verse 6. 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. Verse 8. Come, behold the works of the Lord, how He has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the chariots with fire. Be still and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. I invite you to pray with me this morning as we come to this portion of God's word.

[5 : 39] Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you are our refuge and our strength. A very present help in trouble. And we thank you that one of the ways that you are a present help to us is through your word.

And so we thank you for Psalm 46 and we ask that you would use it this morning. That you'd speak to us through it. You'd comfort us in our fears. And you'd encourage us in our trials.

We ask all of these things knowing that you are with us. And you're with us not because of what we've done. But because of what Jesus has done. And so we ask it in his name. Amen.

In December of 2018, when we were looking at the Psalms, when we came to Psalm 13, I shared with you the idea of the open when letter.

If you've been in a long distance relationship or you just have someone that you care about, a friend who's gone for a long time, maybe this is something on a deployment. You might set together a list of letters, make a stack of letters, and you'd say you open this letter when a certain situation happens.

[6 : 46] Open this letter when you're sad. Open this letter when you've had a bad day. Open this letter when you're missing home. And as I told you then, the Psalms are God's open when letters.

He gives us different Psalms for different circumstances, knowing that we'll face all kinds of trials and struggles in this life. This Psalm, Psalm 46, is an open when Psalm for times of crisis.

God knows that there will be times when we feel like the world is falling apart. And he cares so much that he's given us a Psalm for moments like that.

And that Psalm, one of them, is Psalm 46. It's a Psalm for when the world is falling apart. And here, what's described is the world is actually literally falling apart.

Verses 2 and 3. 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.

[7 : 56] In other words, things are so bad that the very mountains are falling. I wonder if you've felt like the mountains are falling the last couple weeks.

And maybe, like, the world is literally falling apart. Maybe it's something in your personal life. Maybe you've lost a job.

Maybe you have fewer hours. You have less income. Maybe the world's falling apart because you're an extrovert. And you're not just a normal extrovert. You're a super extrovert.

And suddenly, you find yourself in your worst nightmare. Having to stay at home. Maybe your world's falling apart because you relied on the schools and what they provided.

The structure. And then suddenly, all your children are at home. And you have to figure out what's next. All sorts of things are collapsing. Maybe it's a bigger picture.

[8 : 53] Maybe it's not something in your personal life. But you look at the world around us. And you think, there are things that seem so secure. In fact, that's part of the point of this psalm. The mountains, right? What could be more secure than the mountains?

What could be more secure than our healthcare system? What could be more secure than our economic system? What could be more secure than our government?

Times of crisis highlight that there are many things that are not as strong or reliable or secure as we once thought they were.

It can feel like the mountains are falling into the sea. It was all a facade or an illusion, right? An illusion of security or control. That's what the psalmist is speaking to in this passage.

And he tells us in the middle what we can do. In verse 2, he says, Therefore, we will not fear. In the midst of this trial, in the midst of this trouble, in the midst of a situation where it feels like the world is literally falling apart, the psalmist comes and says, God's people won't fear.

[10 : 03] Which raises the question, what exactly does he mean by fear in that moment? What's being described here? There's different types of fear, different kinds of fear. And it's important for us not to confuse them.

I've been asking this question the last couple weeks. What is good fear and wrong fear? What's appropriate and inappropriate fear? And there's one man, a pastor named Michael Coggin, who's really helpful.

And he's given some categories for fear to help us think through these things. He gives four types of fear. I'm just going to highlight two of them. The first type is this, a God-given emotional response for our benefit.

A God-given emotional response for our benefit. In other words, there's actually types of fear that are good. There's types of fear that are helpful for us that are gifts from God.

I'll give you an example. Some of you may remember in September of 2018, I was gone for a couple Sundays, and I was in Breckenridge taking some time away. And while I was there, I took a hike on the Peaks Trail, which is in the White River National Forest.

[11 : 06] It's right by Peak 7, if you're a skier. And while I was hiking on that trail all by myself, enjoying some good introvert time, I came across a moose. Now, if you're familiar with the moose, you know that it's not a safe or tame animal.

And in that moment, when I saw this moose coming towards me, I'm walking along the trail. It's coming from my right side towards me. There's a sense of fear that I felt, right? And in that fear, what I didn't do was I didn't say, well, I have faith.

And God tells me not to fear. So I'm going to look this moose in the eyes, and I'm going to let him know that I'm not afraid. No, that wouldn't be faith, right?

That wouldn't be faith. That would be foolishness. The last thing I want is an encounter with this moose. This moose does not have good things in mind for me, and so I used my God-given Lamberfittis, and I got out of there.

In that moment, fear was a gift from God to me. It was a gift to help me take the right and appropriate action in that situation. I mention that because sometimes I've heard, even in this crisis, people misusing this idea of not having fear.

[12 : 19] They might say, well, we have faith, right? God is going to take care of us, and so we don't need to worry about the virus. We're going to go out into wherever we want, whatever group we want to, and we're not going to be scared or afraid because God is so great, and yet that's not faith.

That's foolishness. There is a right and good fear of things that are threatening in this world. God gives us fear to help us. It's an emotional response that's meant to propel us to action, often the right action, and so that's a category one of fear.

It's not always wrong to feel afraid. Sometimes, in fact, it's a gift from God. Imagine, for example, if I had decided I was not going to do anything about this moose. I was just going to stand there on the trail.

That might not have ended very well. The next category that I'm going to highlight is a different one, fear as a sinful response to God's providential care.

Fear as a sinful response to God's providential care. This is the kind of fear that's being talked about in this psalm. And this man, Michael Coggin, defines it this way, our default mode is to doubt God's goodness.

[13 : 39] We know that we've slipped into that kind of fear when our default mode is to doubt God's goodness. He also describes it this way, the belief, I have to do this on my own.

God isn't good, and it's up to me to make it happen. I actually don't believe that God's a good and loving father. Instead, I believe that he has left me alone as an orphan.

That's the type of fear that's being talked about in this psalm. And so that's what we are talking about in verse two when we say, therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way.

We continue to believe that God's a good father. And we know that we're not alone, and we don't have to do it all by ourselves. We know, as the psalmist is going to highlight later, that God is with us.

He says that in verses seven and 11. But before we get there, it's easy on the one hand to say, don't fear. It's a much harder thing to do. So what is it that helps us not to fear?

[14 : 46] What are the tools that we have when the mountains are moved into the heart of the sea? Well, the psalmist goes on to tell us, and he's telling us in verses four through seven about God's city.

And there's a contrast here being drawn between what's happening in the world and what's happening in God's place. In the world, the mountains are moved into the heart of the sea.

There's these threatening waters, right, that are roaring and foaming, verse three. In God's city, things are different. There's a river, not an ocean, and it's not roaring.

This river has streams that make glad the city of God. So rather than being a place of chaos, it's a place of peace and blessing.

It's not waters that destroy, but a river that gives life. We see the same thing in verses two and three in verse five. Verse two, the mountains are moved.

[15 : 46] God's city, verse five, is not. God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. God will help her when morning dawns. The mountains are moved.

God and his city and his people are not. Waters of chaos and destruction, river of life. Things that are moved, things that are not moved.

Then in verses four and five, we learn why it is that these things don't move. Verse four, this is the holy habitation of the Most High. This is where God lives. God lives in his city.

Verse five, God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. The mountains may move. God and his people will not because he is with them.

And it tells us in verse five that he's going to help them. So why is it that these people don't fear? It's because of this. God is more powerful than the other forces in the world.

[16 : 53] Verses five and six, especially verse six. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter. He uttered his voice, the earth melts. Again, a contrast.

The mountains may fall into the sea. God is so powerful that he can make the entire earth melt. And so the world around us may collapse.

God and his people will not. The world around us may collapse. God and his people will not.

They will stand firm because God is with them. Now this does not mean there isn't a real suffering.

God's people here aren't pretending that something isn't wrong. In fact, they acknowledge it. The mountains are falling into the seas. They're not putting their hands over their ears and closing their eyes. They recognize the real trouble that's going on in the world.

[17 : 57] That's why this psalm is here because there's real problems. And yet, it's not that they don't recognize that. It's that they have security.

It's not that they don't recognize that the world around them is frightening and unpredictable. It's that they also recognize that God is fixed and secure.

And so it's not that one is true and the other isn't but that the two truths are put together. The world may be falling apart. God is not. God is not.

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[18:57] when this passage is talking about the city of God the people in the Old Testament would have understood it as the city of Jerusalem now we know that we don't look to the city of Jerusalem specifically for God's presence as we're the church but we look to him as he's in the middle of his people in the same way he dwelled in the middle of his people in the tabernacle when they moved in the desert and so our hope is in what we can't lose not in what we can I had a friend remind me this week that if we have faith in God there's always a future for us if we have faith in God there's always a future for us and so that's what causes us not to fear the knowledge that because of our faith and trust in God we don't have to be afraid of this being the end I'll put it a different way and I'm not going to say this in any way to be morbid but to bring clarity to this situation what our hope looks like because of the coronavirus there will be Christians that die and they have a future and so in that sense they don't need to fear you can imagine this what if a dear brother or sister in the Lord became infected and it came to a point where because of that infection

God brought them home to be with himself they died we can say they don't need to fear in the midst of that in the sense that they know that their relationship with God is not threatened by that and we don't need to fear in the sense that we know the same thing and so what does it mean that we will not fear well there's a healthy sense of fear right we actually fear what's going on right now in the sense that it could hurt our ability to care for others and ourselves and so that sense of fear propels us to the appropriate actions it propels us to be careful in certain situations it propels us to take precautions that are appropriate that's a right sense of fear we don't have fear in the sense that we know it can't threaten what's of ultimate value and so there's a right fear and a wrong fear

God's people have the kind of fear not that allows them to escape this world but to have hope beyond this world they know there's a river who makes glad streams make glad the city of God and this city of God cannot be moved no matter what happens in the world and so that is the kind of fear that we refuse to have about a year and a half ago almost two years ago I had a phone call with a friend of mine that helped me clarify what good and wrong fear looked like he was in between jobs at the time he was moving from one part of the country to the other and he wasn't sure what his future held for him in fact he shared with me that he had about a hundred dollars left to his name at that point and he wasn't sure where his next paycheck was going to come from but he was also someone who has faith in Jesus Christ and as he described to me the way that he was thinking through this and working through it as he had his own fears and anxieties

I found it so helpful that actually at the time I sat down and I wrote it down I asked his permission yesterday to share this this is essentially what he said to me he said something like this when our body and mind in a fallen state are going crazy we remember God's truth and love for us my body and mind are going crazy on me I know that God will provide for me and I have to trust him this is an opportunity for me to seek him and to exercise faith I know that God is not going to leave me I don't know the future and I'm really anxious about it but I'm choosing to believe in that that God loves me he is for me he is with me and it's going to be okay it might look like I'm failing but God is with me brothers and sisters that is what faith rather than fear looks like it's not a denial of the reality around us it's not a denial of the facts but it's a recognition that we can still believe and have faith as he says here this is an opportunity for me to seek him and exercise faith

I know that God is not going to leave me the same is true for us if we have faith in Jesus we know no matter what happens he is not going to leave us now this passage tells us verse 1 God's our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble I've given you some sense at this point of what it means for him to be that refuge and strength there's a refuge there right in the sense that what's most valuable can't be taken away from us but it also tells us that he's very present and he's a help what does that mean in practical terms what does that mean in everyday terms what does that mean this afternoon as we think about what's going on in our world and we're tempted with fear and anxiety I've made a list of a few things here that I believe are true from the Bible and true for us first of all

[25 : 04] God provides real help for his people verse 5 God will help her when morning dawns that doesn't mean we won't suffer it does mean God will never leave us nor forsake us second God provides his people for his people God provides his people for his people we should take these references to Zion now and we can apply them to the church there's a talk of a city well what is in a city there's people you're not alone not only in the sense that God hasn't left you but he's also provided a community for you he's provided other people to come alongside you and walk with you no matter what you suffer he is present in the sense that he's given us each other and so God's a help because he provides real help he's a help because he's given us each other he's also a very present help because he's given us his word to guide us and instruct us the fact that Psalm 46 is in the Bible and it's designed as a psalm for times of crisis when it feels like the world is falling apart is a very present help to us this psalm that we're looking at right now is part of God's very present help

God's also very present to us in the sense that he's immediately available to us through prayer and we have promises about that in the Bible in James chapter 1 verse 5 he promises to give wisdom to people who ask for wisdom in James chapter 5 verse 17 he promises us that prayer really does change things and so I said earlier God's presence his help doesn't mean that we're going to escape suffering that's true on the one hand on the other hand we believe that God really does provide help to people who pray to him for it both of those things are true they are part of God's help for us his very present help finally God gives us not just a very present help it tells us he's our strength part of that means he's given us his spirit to live in us it also means he's given us the truths and the story that we need to move forward it's that strength that my friend drew upon when he was in a moment of uncertainty with almost no financial resources and unsure of what the future held for him he drew strength from the knowledge of what we're reminded here in this psalm knowing that God was going to provide for him and God was not going to leave him

Hebrews chapter 13 verses 5 and 6 tell us this 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 what can man do to me finally God tells us not just that we have a future but we see in verses 8 through 11 that he tells us the future that is part of our strength and help we see in verses 8 and 9 that one day God is going to bring wars to cease to the end of the earth there's going to come a time when there will be no more war in this world we could adapt this if we wanted to and we could say he makes pandemics to cease to the end of the earth there will come a time when we don't fear sickness or disease anymore and nothing that happens in this world can threaten that we're told at the very end of the book of Revelation that God's going to wipe every tear away from from our eyes and so we see a vision here of what's coming one day

God will bring wickedness and evil to an end we see that here in verse 9 bringing wars to an end and his name is going to be exalted among all the nations and all the earth the mountains may fall into the sea and we may tremble verse 6 the nations may rage and the kingdoms totter but verse 10 God will be exalted among the nations God will one day be recognized for what he already is which is the one who is in control of all things and the one who's more powerful than any other force in the world and so we can say as it said here in verse 11 the Lord of hosts is with us the God of Jacob is our fortress we can have hope in that now even when we know it won't be fully realized until the future in fact Jesus himself instructs us to look to the future when we need hope he tells us in John chapter 14 let not your hearts be troubled believe in God believe also in me and he tells us how our hearts are untroubled is a picture towards the future 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 and if I go and prepare a place for you

I will come again and I will take you to myself that where I am you may be also when we suffer and we face moments of crisis it's a wonderful time for us to look and focus on the glories of heaven to long for the time when Jesus is going to make all things right not as a form of escapism and not as a way to say that this world doesn't matter but as an act of hope and actually to say this world matters so much that God's coming back to restore everything one day and so it's that future orientation that helps us we're told twice in this psalm that God is with us verse 7 the Lord of hosts is with us verse 11 the Lord of hosts is with us now this would have been a comfort and an encouragement towards the people originally reading this psalm in the Old Testament and yet it wasn't fulfilled we know from the promise of Isaiah chapter 7 that there was going to be one named Emmanuel which means

[31 : 56] God with us in Matthew chapter 1 verse 23 tells us who this person is and it's Jesus our ultimate hope and confidence comes from knowing that God has not just given us words that he's with us but he's given us his action as well he's given us his very son who came as a man and walked on this earth living the life that we should have lived and dying the death that we should have died he's God's seal and promise to us that he truly is with us so much so that he became a man and so all of this hope is tied up with our hope and our faith in Jesus Christ the hope that's offered in this psalm the fear that we can avoid is something that it is for Christians and it's only for Christians it's only for people who long and want to be part of that city so if you're someone who is unsure about Jesus and Christianity this psalm holds out part of the hope that God offers for his people and it's for those who have faith in Jesus Christ faith has three parts to it according to

Charles Spurgeon it is belief it's believing the facts about the gospel that Jesus came that we deserve God's punishment for our sin but he took it on our behalf it's not just knowledge but it's also belief actually believing those things are true and then it's not just belief but it's also trust it's living as if those things are true demonstrating by our lives that we have hope and faith in Jesus Christ that's what's offered to God's people and so that's the offer for you as well to repent and believe the gospel and to follow after Jesus we're told a story in several of the gospels about a time that Jesus is with his disciples in a boat and a great storm comes up while they're in the boat and they're very afraid being very afraid they wake up

Jesus and ask for his help they wonder why it is that he's sleeping Jesus calms the storm and then he rebukes them and says oh ye of little faith because during the storm even before he calmed anything Jesus was with them and so they were safe and after the storm he was with them as well it wasn't their circumstances that determined whether they should fear or not but it was Jesus presence with them brothers and sisters that's our same hope as well and so why is it that we don't fear we don't fear because we know that even if the mountains fall God and his love for us will not the mountains can't threaten what's of ultimate value to us we don't fear because we know that we have a future and we don't fear because we know that

God is a very present help to us in trouble and so we can say with the psalmist 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 please pray with me our father in heaven we thank you that you give us tremendous strength and encouragement through your word we ask you do that this morning you remind us of what's true and you use it to give us an unshakable confidence even as we see mountains falling around us we know that you will not and so we can trust you and hold on to you no matter what happens we thank you that this is not because of anything that we've earned or deserved but it's because of Jesus and so we ask it in his name amen