

Be Still and Know
Psalm 46
March 22, 2015

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 the works of the Lord, 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. "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.

Grace, mercy, and peace from the God, who is God over everything, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When the economy is in a real mess, as it is today, where are the people likely to turn for help? Thomas M. Anderson writing for *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* magazine says this: "When storm clouds gather over the economy, people often seek shelter in a glass of whiskey, a pack of cigarettes, or the green blaze of a roulette table. That's why many financial advisors are telling clients to invest in sin as a hedge against recession."

Tobacco, alcohol, and gambling have long been called "sin stocks" or "vice funds." When the economy takes a downturn, historically these stocks have held up in the market. During the recession of 2000-2002, the Standard & Poor's index showed that broader stocks tumbled 47 percent as casino and gaming stocks grew 115 percent.

Shocking isn't it? A fact that shocking should make Christians take account of themselves. When things go bad where do you turn for help? When your back is against the wall and you can't see any possibility of a good outcome, what do you do?

The text for today's message is Psalm 46, especially verses 1,2, and 10. Listen to those verses once again: *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. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.*"

Psalm 46 is sometimes referred to as "Luther's Psalm," because it was always a comfort to him. Luther used this psalm as the basis for one of the most beloved hymns of all time: *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*.

The psalmist speaks of three things in this psalm; a tight space, a might fortress, and a divine strategy. If we learn the truths of this psalm, we can find the same unflinching comfort Martin Luther felt.

The psalmist calls God an *ever-present help in trouble*. The Hebrew word which is

translated as trouble literally means “a tight space.” Have you ever been in a tight space? A place where you were pressed on every side, where your options were limited, where your freedom was restricted, or your progress arrested? The psalmist speaks of two kinds of tight spots.

The first is an uncontrollable circumstance. Verse two speaks of natural disasters. There is nothing we can do about hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados, droughts, snow storms, and the like. However, we are told that even when the earth seems to be exploding at the seams, God is our sure and certain refuge.

When mother nature is throwing a hissy fit, remember that God created nature. God isn't responsible for the nasty temper tantrums that nature can throw – the blame for those lie in the problem of sin. But, no matter what physical circumstance exists, God is aware of it and he will use it for good according to his purposes.

Another form of uncontrollable circumstance comes from human things we can't control. One such time would be Moses and the Israelites up against the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army closing in fast. When there was nothing Moses and the Israelites could do, God took control of the uncontrollable.

Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, was another case of an uncontrollable circumstance. After years of childlessness, Hannah had to admit that she was never going to have children. And, she never would have given birth to a great prophet if God hadn't overcome what humans were powerless against.

The other type of tight spot is insurmountable opposition. Most of us know the feeling of no hope for victory. Life is full of times when we are just outmatched. Joshua knew the feeling of insurmountable opposition. When he stood and looked at the towering walls of Jericho, there had to be a moment when Joshua said to himself, “No way!” Or think about David staring at the mighty giant Goliath. Things may not have looked good, but the walls fell and so did the giant.

No matter how things look, no matter what the nay-sayers of this world tell us, our God is a strong and mighty fortress. God never has abandoned us. God never will abandon us. The book of Proverbs tells us: *The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe* (Prov 18:10 NIV).

Having said that, I must also say that God is not an over-indulgent parent. God knows that, because of our sinfulness and our hard-heartedness, he must sometimes use negative circumstances to keep us in line with his will.

We are stubborn people who want to come up with our own answers. When a problem comes our way, we get a pad of paper. We list all the pros and cons. We work through all the possible answers and make a logical and reasonable choice.

When something goes wrong, we know where to go. We know what books to read. We know who to consult. And we know what techniques to use. When the church is involved, we think we know what to do there, too. We form a task force. We call a committee. We do some research. We set goals. We recruit people. And we fund a program.

All too often, we act as though we don't need God. However, we will never truly know how much we do need God until we throw our pride out of the window, get down on our knees and say, "We don't know what to do, but our eyes are fixed on you, Lord."

Now it's time to ask the pivotal question, "If God can help with everything and anything, how do I get God's help?" Some people think God's help comes if you live a good life. Some people think God's help comes when you attend church every Sunday. Some people think God's help comes when you work hard and do your best.

While all of these things are good things we should be doing, they are not the way to seek God's help. God's help never comes from human effort. God's help isn't some logical human formula, because God's help is counter-cultural. Verse 10 of the psalm has the answer: *Be still, and know that I am God* (Ps 46:10 NIV).

That sounds simple enough, but it isn't. For many people, maybe for most people today, being still is next to being impossible. We live in a world that pulls us in many different directions at the same time.

Our society is running at a pace that makes things like road rage not only possible but common. Success has taken on the status of a god. Success is the only thing that matters; success with your children, success on your job, success on the golf course, success at all cost. Make more appointments. Make more phone calls. Never stop. Always be shuckin' and jivin'. Make sure you're always in the lead.

When you put all of this together and you live one high-speed day after another, it makes Psalm 46:10 sound beyond reach. The question now becomes, "How can we be still before God?" Being still before God happens in two ways.

First, we have to adjust our schedules. We must simplify. We must downsize. To do that, we must understand that you will never find time or make time to do something. The only way something gets done is when you take time to do it. If you try to push the things I'm about to suggest into your already too busy schedule, you'll only make your life busier.

How do you simplify and downsize? Stop trying to be everywhere and do everything. Instead, take time for devotions. Take time for prayer. Take time to rest. Take time to spend with friends and family, time to just enjoy each other. Most important, take time for Jesus. He always takes time for you. When your calendar is under the Holy Spirit's control, your priorities change.

Second, we have to become still in our spirits. As cliché as it might be, we have to let go and let God. I wouldn't try to guess how many people die every year from worry. If you combine lots of worry with tons of stress and non-stop straining and striving, you get headaches, ulcers, and heart attacks.

We must release our cares into God's hands. Only God can control the uncontrollable circumstances and defeat the insurmountable opposition. Only God can change hearts that are steeped in hatred and evil. Only God can bring sunshine from storms and make flowers grow in mud. Only God can protect you on the outside because he is your refuge. Only God can strengthen you on the inside because he is your strength.

No matter what is happening in your life today, or what might happen tomorrow, remember the Lord 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* (Ps 46:10-11 NIV).