

For those of us who live in this planet, this world of ours provides a great many difficulties, pains, and terrors. We've watched recently as two huge storms demolished the islands of the Caribbean. We are watching crisis after crisis on the world stage. We just witnessed an incredible display of man's wickedness in Las Vegas. Many of us are forced to live our lives with fearful medical diagnoses. In one sense, of course, there's nothing new under the sun. There have been storms and cancer and wars ever since the dawn of time. What is new is that these things are happening to us in our time. These events are not simply afflicting a people who live a long way away or people who lived in the distant past. We ourselves are living in the middle of it all. As a result, a lot of us walk through daily life bubbling over with panic and stage fright. We are often frightened and paralyzed with fear. When fear rules us, it doesn't take much to convince us that we are unable and unworthy to live our lives for God.

There's a question I often hear in conversations: is God speaking through all these circumstances? Is God speaking through all these crises and disasters? We all face our own personal battles. Beyond them there are international issues that seem more and more impossible to solve. If God is speaking, what is He saying? If you are one of those who believe God speaks through disasters and the events of our time, I believe you are right. God is speaking. God speaks all the time. In Psalm 19: 1 - 2, David says: *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech."* In God's Word, we hear the voice of God. In His Word, God reveals Himself. He declares His character and displays His faithful and steadfast love.

When we talk about God speaking in the middle of a crisis, or through some terrible event, it is far too easy for us to apply God's Word to somebody else. We're always becoming angry with this or incensed by that. When something bad happens, we easily assign spiritual meaning to it. If we are going to do that,

though, we must be careful to ascribe only what is consistent with the character of God. We may perceive something prophetic about the things we are seeing and interpret them as having to do specifically with our nation and her many sins. While all this may be true, it also may be a little too easy to do so. As a result, we miss the greater word God is communicating. In other words, it's a lot harder for me to apply God's Word to my own life. I would rather not hear the voice of God urging me to change my ways!

Psalm 46 is a familiar psalm. This psalm is wonderfully declarative. It is filled with strengthening encouragement. The psalmist declares truths about God buttressing our weak knees with His might and His peace. He is saying that in the midst of whatever storm you and I are facing, whatever affliction threatens to engulf us, our God is sovereign.

Declarations are faith building. When we declare the creed, we are speaking affirmatively about the truths we believe. When we declare the goodness of God to each other, we speak life into the fear threatening to pull us apart. We are building, strengthening, and encouraging our own faith. We are preparing our own hearts to face struggle. *"And though this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us."*

Who do you call when the roof caves in? Who are you going to call when you find you are on the verge of despair? You and I face a choice: will we walk by faith or will we collapse into fear? It really is that simple. Have you trained yourself to stand under pressure? Are you practiced in seeking after and trusting in God? How do you find that place of safety where you experience the presence of God giving you His peace?

It is the God of Psalm 46 who is your refuge and strength. Many times we forget that. We tend to think this is just a sweet psalm we might have memorized back in Sunday School. In our imagination, we think our pension plan truly sustains us. It's our financial resources, or it's our strong health that is keeping us alive. We forget the stock market can crash. Our resources can become worthless. Relationships on which we counted can fail.

Our health can wither in a moment. We must know how to access the peace of God for ourselves. When storms or trouble come our way, God wants you to know you can experience that peace that is beyond our understanding, that peace Paul declares in Philippians 4: 7. He says there God Himself will keep you. God Himself will actually "*guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*" God will watch over you. He will stand guard over you and protect you. Our God is not some weak deity who is out of reach or out of touch. Our God is the Sovereign God who spoke and the world into being. He has all the power He needs to bring all His purposes to pass.

We all need a friend who can remind us of these things when life becomes unbearable. Here, the Sovereign Lord is that friend. Years ago, there was an Old Spice commercial on TV where one guy gets slapped in a moment of crisis, and he says, "Thanks, I needed that!" Many are the times when I have found myself in trouble once again. I have needed to be reminded – sometimes forcefully – of God's powerful presence, of His love for me, and of His faithfulness that will not falter. I panic easily and so I need to hear that God will not fail. I have lots of experience practicing fear. What I need is to practice is coming into the peace of God. The psalm says since God is our help in trouble, **therefore** we will not fall into fear. Verse 1 is really the preface to verse 2. The first verse is what the "therefore" is there for! Because the Lord is my hiding place and because He powerfully sustains me, I choose not to surrender to fear. How important it is to make that godly choice!

I need to be reminded every day that I am weak and I have never been strong. I have to depend on a strength that is not my own. The fact is, the strength and presence of God is real. Think about that. Those who do not know our God have no one on whom they can depend. They live life alone. They are left to fend for themselves because they have no hope. When I have occasion to pray for people, it is clear when folks have no hope beyond themselves and no faith to sustain them.

I want to encourage you to pray for the church to rise up in Puerto Rico and the islands of the Caribbean. Pray for the church in Las Vegas. Pray that God will help each believer grasp the

strength of God. Ask God to give each one of His children grace to stand in the midst of swirling storms of fear, doubt, and despair because those storms will not end any time soon.

The next image in verse 2 is of everything we know falling apart. It is a vision of something like an earthquake or a violent hurricane. The world as the psalmist knows it is collapsing around him, leaving nothing but devastation and chaos behind. Mountains are sturdy, firm, and rock hard; so when even the mountains start to crumble, all the familiar shelters are collapsing as well. In Romans 8: 22, the Bible says all of creation is groaning, yearning to be liberated from its bondage to decay. That liberation only comes when the Son of God returns. Between now and then, the peoples of the earth will go through lots of turmoil and lots of trouble. As a culture, we are discovering even now the foundations on which we have always relied have lost their stability. As a nation, we are entering a time of storm.

The believer already knows life is short. This world is passing, so frankly we should not be surprised when the props holding up our comforts are taken away. All the disasters and wars that rock the planet are the beginning of the birth pains. All of it speaks to the beginning of the beginning of the end. In the face of this, the believer, the one whose hope is in God, has such confidence in God that he is not rocked when the things of this world fail.

In verse 4, it looks like there is a pause that at first might seem out of place. The psalmist turns from the chaos around him to the scene before the throne of God. What a difference! There the river of God flows from under the temple in the heavenly city. In that holy place, God, the King of the Universe, dwells in majesty – the Living God, the Ancient of Days. Here is our eternal foundation. This is the reason why we do not need to panic or allow our hearts to cower in fear. When we want to run and cannot hide, the child of God is drawn to the presence of God. Those whose rest is in God know God will not fail them. Is your rest in Him? Is He your peace? Or are you shaken to the core when trouble comes your way? Are you unable to function as the child of God you are called to be?

A hard truth is that the enemy of our souls seeks to sabotage our walk of faith. Throughout the day and throughout the course of our lives, we feed on a steady stream of hurtful lies. Therefore, when trouble does present itself, many of us have little to draw on except the thought that we are unworthy or unloved. We think we don't matter to God. We think God doesn't care about us. The father of lies tells us we've blown it, that we have sinned too much, or that we are beyond hope and beyond reach. If you hear that refrain often enough, it begins to eat away at the very fabric of your soul. You are drowning in a cesspool of lies sourced in hell.

God has a prescription for you today, and may I say God's prescriptions are always refillable! Instead of giving lies access to your heart, begin today to fill your life with God's Word. It's simple, really. A steady diet of God's Truth will defuse and defang the lies of the enemy.

Our place of rest is not simply an escape from life when life becomes inconvenient. God gives us His rest when we cannot live without His peace and His presence. The psalmist declares in verse 7, "*The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*" Our God is Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus does not and will not abandon His sheep. He is with us, not just in heaven, not just in some philosophical sense, but He is with us right here and right now. He is here to give us His presence and His peace, but also His protection. He is our strong Defender! If you have a personal relationship with God, then you know that He is your mighty fortress, and it's not just a nice song to sing.

In verse 10, we hear the voice of God, and saying, "*Be still and know that I am God.*" I am often so full of my own agenda and the soundtrack of my life is so loud, there is no way I can sit still long enough to hear God as He speaks His peace into my life. I need to stop running. I need to quiet my soul. I need to silence my phone. I need to go sit in a corner and listen to God speak. He speaks perfectly through His Word and He is not hard to hear.

Before we go, there's one more point that needs to be made about Psalm 46.

The latter part of verse 10 is a powerful promise. It is a majestic declaration. Our world is filled with nations who do not know our God, and our own nation is among them. The nations do not know and do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. The nations of this world spend their love on gods that are not God, on false gods who make empty promises. In verse 10, God declares and promises these nations will one day exalt the name of the Lord! They will willingly surrender to Jesus. They will gladly and happily praise and worship the Lord. They will choose to live for the glory of Jesus. If you've ever wondered why there are missionaries and why Christians share the Good News with their friends and neighbors, this is why. People who used to be Moslem, Buddhist, Jewish, animist, or pagan – *"at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2: 10 – 11) Not some knees and not some tongues, but every person of every tribe and nation will bow and declare Jesus Christ is Lord.

Verse 10 is a wonderful and exceedingly positive word to receive, especially when we know that this life is frequently all too horrible and sad. The events many of us have to experience are devoid of rhyme or reason. So much of life refuses to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus. So today, you may find yourself in trouble once again even as you have been worshiping. When you return home you may find life has thrown you a wicked curve, one you never dreamed you'd live to see. There will be upheaval. There will be the possibility of fear and worry. What should you do now? How shall you rise above this storm?

Psalm 46 offers an invitation to every child of God who is beset by troubles and wars and sickness and the wickedness of this world. The psalmist says, *"Come and see."* Come and see the demonstrations of God's sovereign majesty. Come and experience what God can do. He says, *"Be still and know that I am God."* As you stop struggling against the One whose love is for you, allow Him to give you His peace. Let the Lord Jesus be who He is – Lord and King – in your life.

Blessing: Psalm 67: 1 – 5

*"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us — so that Your ways may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise You, God; may all the peoples praise You. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise You, God; may all the peoples praise You."*