

T R I N I T Y
B I B L E C H U R C H
D A L L A S

The Sermon

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Psalm 46

"A Song of Confidence"

October 1, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

Will you open your Bible to Psalm 46. It's a joy to be with you, because this church is so attentive to the word of God, so committed to the exposition of God's word and the applicability of God's word. We know when we open our Bibles we are hearing from the very mouth of God, and so we take it seriously and gratefully as we receive His word for us today. A series in the Psalms continues, and the psalm assigned to me is Psalm 46, so let me begin by reading it: "For the choir director. A Psalm of the sons of Korah, set to Alamoth. A song.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. Selah.

"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the most holy dwelling places of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered; He raised His voice, the earth melted. Yahweh of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah.

"Come, behold the works of the Yahweh, who has wrought desolations in the earth. He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the

bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire. 'Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.' Yahweh of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah." This is the very word of the living God.

[Prayer] Father, would You take this word with Your Spirit and work it deep in our hearts. Help us to see ways where we need to have more confidence in Your perfect, sovereign wisdom, and provide. God, would You provide for us, even in this hour? In Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

So this time of year, just to set the scene a little bit, I am mindful of autumn, and it was probably four years ago that I was here with my whole family to preach at Trinity. And our four kids, they were younger then – that's how time works – and we went because it was, I think, the first week in October even, we went to the Texas State Fair. Have you been to the Texas State Fair? We saw all the sites surrounding the Cotton Bowl, whole experience. Big Tex waved at me. I ate my weight in frozen – or, frozen; the opposite actually – fried foods; and, you know, I had the great experience of the State Fair of Texas.

I texted the family group chat yesterday when I was driving on the freeway because I saw it was that time of year. I saw the big Ferris wheel, and I said, "Do you guys remember going to the Texas State Fair?" And my wife Merilly responded with just these words, "One thousand and five degrees." I think that was about what it was that day, that beautiful October day.

Two-point-five million people, according to Google, go to the Texas State Fair every year, 2.5 million people pass through the gates. They even have a thing on their website that shows the daily attendance; it ranges on a low day about 50,000 sweaty people, to a high day, 125,000 or so go through the gates of the Texas State Fair. It's quite a grand event. Everything's bigger in Texas; and even the crowds, and even the temperature and the sweatiness.

And so I was thinking about those massive crowds that day when we walked around the fair and thinking about Psalm 46, a psalm that usually is linked to two events: one from the Bible, and one from church history. The biblical event involves a massive crowd of people, even larger than the admission on a daily basis of the Texas State Fair.

You can imagine all those people; but 185,000 of them; and not just people, but hostile soldiers, part of the Assyrian army encamped around the city of Jerusalem in the time of the days of King Hezekiah. The Syrian leader, his name was Sennacherib. He was notorious for his violence, his ruthlessness. He sent a letter – you can read the story in 2 Kings 19 – to Hezekiah basically telling him he needs to surrender, because Hezekiah knew very well how the Assyrians had treated the peoples that they had conquered. They were the world power at the time. And when they encamped around Jerusalem, it was 185,000 fighting men, a massive force; and Israel didn't stand a chance were it not for the LORD of hosts, the God of armies. Yahweh of armies is what that phrase "the LORD of hosts" means. And so most readers and singers of Psalm 46 over the years are being attacked by plagues, like the book of Exodus up here. So, also there's some new plants here that I'm excited about – just adjusting to my circumstances everywhere.

So, I was saying 185,000. So they're encamped around. Sennacherib sends Hezekiah a threatening letter that he needs to lay down his arms; and Hezekiah takes that letter and goes to the house of Yahweh and spreads the letter out in front of God, saying, "You're the only one that can help us." And, indeed, He does. And what happens in one single night is the Angel of Yahweh comes and destroys the entirety of the Assyrian army in one evening: 185,000 are laid waste. Sennacherib, with his tail between his legs, leg goes back home and is killed in political upheaval by his two sons. It's really an amazing story of God's provision, and it's one that's usually associated with Psalm 46.

Now there's reasons for that, because there is an epic battle scene where the desolation of an invading army is on display. You heard it in verse 8 and 9 where the desolations of Yahweh are shown. There's other kind of links that

you could make because of the emphasis on the city of God, but there's no specific attachment to 2 Kings 19 in Psalm 46; it's really a guess or conjecture or a possible context for this song.

But I told you there's another connection that's usually made to Psalm 46, a song that's been sung by God's people for thousands of years, and that's Martin Luther's robust version of the song. It's "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." You know that one: "A mighty Fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our Helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing." The 46th psalm was Luther's favorite to sing; and in his most difficult periods of life, he would find strength and confidence and say to Melanchthon or to one of his compatriots, "Let's sing the 46th."

This is a song, whether it's attended by an ancient celebration of a battle that the LORD fought on behalf of His people, or in the time of the Reformation becoming one of the most well-loved hymns of the church, it's a song of confidence; and that's what you could put as a title, if you're into that sort of thing. This is a song of confidence. It's a song that is useful to God's people, because it takes them to the most extreme circumstances on the earth.

And earth seems to be a theme that most repeated in this song. The word "earth" is in verse 2, "the earth gives way." You see it again in verse 6, "the earth melts"; verse 8, "desolations on the earth"; verse 9, "the end of the earth"; verse 10, "I will be exalted on the earth." And so a familiar stage is before us, a place where God will enact a portrayal of Himself of His ultimate victory, of His ability to provide, of His desire to be to us a source of confidence and strength and provision. And so the earth becomes a stage, a stage of tumult, of difficulty, of uncertainty; and then the contrast is God as the refuge of His people.

And so this is a song for those who are afraid. This is a song for those who lack confidence. This is a song for those who are in trouble or in trial, who need to hear from God, and need to know that God is for them, and will help them in whatever circumstance they face. And so by presenting,

whether it was a poetic recapturing of that Assyrian battle or the most climactic upheaval the earth could ever know, we see God providing and protecting and sustaining, and ultimately ruling and providing victory for His people. And that's what Psalm 46 has in store for us, a song to help us be confident no matter what circumstances we face. I think the best way to look at this song is the way that it was broken up by the original writer.

There's three uses of "selah." You remember that word "selah"? It means pause probably. It's a word of contemplation, a word of maybe musical pause. It divides this psalm very neatly into three parts: verses 1-3, at the end of verse 3, "selah"; at the end of verse 7, "selah"; at the end of verse 10, "selah." There's a repeated refrain in this psalm – just giving you kind of the look at the structure. See verse 7; this is the chorus or the refrain: "Yahweh of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold." The exact same words repeated in verse 11, "Yahweh of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold." And so we see God in control in the first half of the song, and then we see God step forward in action in battle in the second half of the song.

But I think the easiest way to think about the theme of confidence is to consider it in those three parts. And so let's first consider God's power as it relates to His people's confidence: "God's power" in verses 1-3. Remember, according to this setting the superscription, "belonging to the choirmaster of the sons of Korah, set to Alamoth." That a word that probably means high voices or ladies voices or strings of a high setting. And then it says, "A song. A song." Remember, this is a song, and God made us to be singers – not as good a singers as the people who are on the stage as the people who are off the stage. There's a reason usually some are here and some are there, right?

But all of us have song. We all understand the place of song and celebration and the expression that comes from a song. And so this song of confidence is intended to strengthen and fortify and help, and the first place it does is by reminding us of God's power, verse 1: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

How does God's power give us confidence? Well, God presents Himself in this poetic metaphor as a refuge, a refuge, a stronghold. This is a very common term in the Psalms. In Psalm 3, when we looked at Psalm 3 a few weeks ago, you remember God in Psalm 3 was presented as a shield, someone who is to protect us in battle. Well, similarly, a refuge is a hiding place, it's a fortress, it's a castle, it's a stronghold. It's a place to hide, a place to be protected, a place – walls, a city that is impermeable.

And so our confidence begins with this metaphor, this portrayal of God is both refuge and as strength. Both of these pictures are a picture of God's power. And the context of this poem is presented to us to show us a contrast here, a contrast between God's refuge-like strength that He provides for His people and the world in which we live. The contrast is that which is secure and that which is shaking in verses 1-3. You can see it in the verbs that he chooses, that which is permanent and that which is tumultuous. I count 14 jarring vocabulary words in these three verses. Look at them: trouble, gives way, moved, roar, foam, tremble, swelling, rage, totter, melts, breaks, shatters, burns – if you go to the end. That's a lot of movement; that's a lot of fire; that's a lot of tumultuousness.

But at the outset of the song, God is our refuge and strength; and it reminds us that stability is an attribute of God. Throughout the Psalms God is called a rock: Psalm 18, 61, 62 – all those places it says, "Yahweh our God is a rock." It's a reminder of His stability. In Him we find protection and strength. We find a place to hide, a stable place.

But it isn't just God's power alone that's displayed at the outset of this song. Verse 1 tells us, "He's a very present help in trouble." That's one word in Hebrew, and it means not just that our God is powerful, but that our God is accessible, "a very present help in trouble." This is helpful, because if God were a refuge and a strength but we were unable to reach Him, He would be of no help to us.

And so God's power and God's accessibility are combined in this beautiful metaphor and in this wonderful phrase that should be underlined in our Bibles and internalized in our hearts and sung by our mouths: "He's a very present help in trouble." **Mutair** translates that little word as "He's exceedingly available." In other words, it's easy to find God, it's not hard to get to Him; He makes Himself available. Another person translates it "God lets Himself be easily found in times of trouble."

And many of you have this exact testimony. Your testimony of God's faithfulness, of God's deliverance in your life is built on the reality that in your deepest and darkest storms you were able to get to God. For some of us, it was what God used to bring us to Himself, or how God used to confirm our faith. There was something in our lives, a trial or a difficulty beyond what we could imagine. But God's presence and God's power, the accessibility that we have to His ability is what motivates us and helps us, because He is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Because God is a stronghold, a refuge, we can have confidence in Him. And that's why verse 2 says, "Therefore we will not fear." Because God is findable, He's also sufficient to meet our need there.

And then this psalm starts to really turn into its thematic movement, its jarring vocabulary. We will not fear in what circumstance? Verse 2: "Though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea." Well, what's happening here? There a whole lot of shaking going on. The mountains and the sea – you familiar with that phrase? The mountains and the sea seem to change places. And now that isn't just, you know, the normal Californian experience, because we do have shaking ground there, but it doesn't shake that much. I mean, Santa Monica and Burbank don't trade spots; it doesn't move that much.

So what is being depicted here? It's certainly something far more tumultuous and powerful and cataclysmic than a mere earthquake. Well, what's happening in the poetry is creation itself is being portrayed as reversal, as put into to rewind, as it were. In Genesis 1:9 when God created the heavens and the earth, it says that "He separated the land from the waters." In other words, out of the portrayed chaotic waters in Genesis 1,

the void that was formless from the waters, He brought the land; and in so doing by His very word, He created a world of order, a world that separated the chaotic waters before creation to a land; and the land would be filled with life and animals and plants and people. And so in that creation, land comes from the chaotic waters, it emerges forth, and there's a dividing line that divides the sea and the land. This is like the most essential part of creation in the creation narrative.

And so the poet in his song thinks of the most dramatic and the most cataclysmic event, which would be the very reversal of creation, that the chaotic waters in the land now go back into each other. It's a total reversal of God's order in Genesis. Creation is reversed, the land goes back into the sea. And verse 3 says, "though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling," - What? Well, verse 2 - "we will not fear," - working backwards, why? - "because God is our refuge and strength." That's who He is; but most significantly, He is a very present help in trouble. In other words, that refuge and strength is in the context of the entire creation being reversed.

The worst possible circumstances, cataclysmic event, whatever it is, we do not need to be afraid, no matter what significant global changes are happening before our eyes. The portrayal of that which is most immutable and impregnable to the Hebrew people - mountains and earth. And the one thing that's the most menacing and untamable - the sea. Hebrew people were not seafaring people. They would look to the Mediterranean beyond and they would see enemies - Phoenicians Philistines - coming on boats. They weren't thinking like, "Let's go find a new world." They wanted to stay by their holy mountain, Zion, stay in their promised land. They wanted nothing to do with the water; the only water they would go to is the little puddle they called the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan. They would just get in there, get some fish and get out. The sea was a place that was menacing and untamable to them. And so this portrayal puts the sea in a place of prominence over the mountains, the worst possible scenario.

But God's people are safe and secure and unafraid. And it's a reminder to us that whatever it is that brings you to a point of fear and that challenges

your faith, we have to remember that God's refuge and strength, His power is combined with His accessibility, so that we do not fear. We don't fear men, because God is our refuge. We don't fear death, because God is our refuge. And we don't want any other refuge to take ultimate priority in our lives, because there's all kinds of things we do to hedge our bets, right? You want a certain amount of money in your account, so when you get a case of the shorts you don't bounce anything. You understand that. You want to get your checkup, get a clean bill of health on an annual basis, you know, there's no creepy stuff going on in here. You want to have a stable group of friends. But those things get undone all the time. Financial crisis, cancer, car wrecks, calamity, confusion, commotion of every kind interrupts the serenity of our life, unless the serenity of our life is reserved for us, safe for us in the refuge and strength-like power of God, which is accessible to us, a very present help in trouble, exceedingly available to us.

Spurgeon commenting on these first verses says three words: "faith, smiles, serenely." That's that confident trust that we have that God really is our refuge and strength no matter what is happening on the most cosmic level God is still available to help and strengthen and protect His people. So we have confidence in God, because He is our refuge, and because His power is on display even in the most tumultuous of circumstances.

Well the second stanza, verses 4-7, present another aspect of God's character that helps us have confidence, and that is "God's providence." And providence is a little bit of a Christianese word, right; but it has in the root of it the word "provide." And so the poetic metaphor switches from refuge in verses 1-3 to that of a river, and it's stated very blatantly in the Hebrew verse 4. The translation is like this: a river – put an exclamation point – a river! It's like it appears suddenly, a river! "Its streams gladden" – verse 4 – "four the city of God, the holiest habitation of the Most High. God is in her midst, she shall not be moved." That's an important word, it'll be repeated. It's in verse 2, "the mountains be moved"; verse 5, "the city shall not be moved." You see it again in verse 6, "the kingdoms totter"; that's the word "move." Interestingly, the Hebrew verbs in those words "moved," they change too, changing tenses; it goes *qal*, *naphal*, and then a perfect tense. So even the words are moving and shaking; there's so much movement here.

But the picture is God is portrayed as being in the midst of the city, verse 5, and as a river that streams gladden the city of God. And so this is likely a reference obviously to Jerusalem – that's the city of God. And there is a river and water that supplies that city. Every ancient city needed a water supply to be a place that could sustain life. And any river in the ancient world today would be a source of life-giving water, as well as a source of vulnerability if that water is cut off from the city. The mightiest of a walled city could be defeated if the water source was cut off.

Here, God is portrayed river-like; and it really is a picture of His providence, of His ability to provide, to sustain, to uphold. And so the accessibility in verses 1-3 now moves from just being available to giving what His people need. He is our source of inexhaustible, and He is invincible. He'll never dry out or run out; a continual source of strength and sustenance. To say it really simply: God meets His people's needs.

Where I come from, I'm from a land – before I was a Californian I was a New Mexican – neither new nor Mexico. But I was, you know, your neighbor, your gentle neighbor over there. And the divides, Texas and New Mexico, one of the things is – civilization is one of the things. Another one of the things is the mighty, mighty Rio Grande, right, Rio Grande. We call it the Rio Grand. I don't know if you've seen it, maybe on the El Paso kind a spot where it starts to trickle out there, or if you cross the bridge in in Albuquerque. And I've taken friends there before and shown them my glorious hometown, my origin story; and we usually drive over the mighty Rio Grande; and every single person that I've ever shown it to has been thoroughly unimpressed, because it's been drained by the farmers and irrigation and government regulation. And, I don't know, it's a tiny little muddy line; you could easily wade across it, even when it's at its fullest.

That's not the picture here. The picture here is a Mississippi kind of a river. This is a picture of a river like in the book of Ezekiel. "River" is actually a quite significant theme in the Bible. Remember, the garden of Eden was surrounded by three rivers that we all giving life and sustenance to that perfect place. And then as you move through the Old Testament, water is obviously life-giving to cities. But in a symbolic way it becomes a picture

of provision in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 37. In Ezekiel's vision there's a river, a vast river that flows from the temple, and it gets deeper and deeper as the prophet explores its depths. And you can fast-forward to the end of the Bible in Revelation 22, there's a river in the New Jerusalem, because there's no sea in the new heaven and the new earth; but there is a river flowing from God's throne and from the Lamb.

And this river really is symbolizing God's steady protection, provision, God's providence. You see, when God provides for His people there's no threat that makes us vulnerable. And this vast, inexhaustible river portrayed here provides us confidence in every fearful situation. And so no matter how much moving is taking place – the mountains in verse 2 – the city is stable in verse 5: "She shall not be moved," or "she shall not be shaken." God's availability, His presence, His providence, in verse 5, is portrayed as God being in her middle, in her center, in her midst.

And then a word of assistance in verse 5: "God will help her when morning dawns." But it's at this point in the psalm, right in the center of it, that it starts to move from mere geographical kind of illustrations, the realm of physical creation, and it moves towards political, towards historical, the actions of men and of nations. And those are the kind of things that can cause us more concern, consideration. Look at the history of this world in things like World War I or World War II; or tensions between superpowers even to today could give anyone reason to pause.

Well, it's not just the earth that can seem uncertain at times, it's the people that occupy it, and the systems, and the movement of history. I mean, we just read about Assyria, for example. You can read about the great nation of Babylon in the Old Testament – massive superpowers that in their day it was unimaginable that their power would ever wane. We think like that today when we think about the composition of the nations in this world. The globe is relatively stable, the borders are relatively stable, but add a thousand years to that and it will look quite differently.

And so the psalmist says, verse 6, "'The nations rage, the kingdoms totter.'" Now he's using a word that's talking about to slip or to slide in the perfect tense. These kingdom have shaken out, they've fallen off. The language of Psalm 2, "The nations rage, the people's plot in vain." This is hostile kingdoms, hostile nations, hostile peoples who are threatening God's people. How are we to think about this? Well, the city is supplied by this river. "God is in her midst, and He will help when morning dawns." Certainly, that was the case when the angel of the LORD struck the Assyrian army down in a single night.

And so the portrayal of the nations raging and the kingdoms tottering is countered by something seemingly mere. Look at verse 6: "He uttered" – it's in the past tense – "He uttered His voice, the earth melts." That word "melts" should be translated "the earth is melting," it's like it's happening live on TV. It's an ongoing word: melting. The melting is happening right now. You can see it melting like a candle, where the wax is dripping off of it. And what caused the earth to melt, with all her political structures, with all her powerful men and armies and technology and kingdoms and borders and politics; what would cause all of that to melt like candle wax? Well, it's simply the utterance of God's voice.

God's voice is at the center of this song. Man's voice began the song of confidence, saying, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." We're reminded of the power of God's utterance. Just the speech from God could cause all of it to melt in an instant; and this song will end with the voice of God Himself in verse 10, saying, "Be still and know that I am God." And so the voice of God is one of the ways that God provides for His people, because nothing is more powerful than that voice.

Creation was begun by the very voice of God. Creation is sustained by God's voice. God's people are renewed and made alive by the word of God, by the voice of God. And so we understand that one of the ways God provides for us is through His powerful voice, through His providential voice, and that voice has something to it that can satisfy our very souls, verse 3. It gladdens our hearts, it gladdens the city of God.

Learning to delight in God's providence, in God's in the midstness is something that you learn when you study the Psalms. The language of soul-satisfying availability of God is replete in the psalmist's experience. Psalm 73, similar to verse 4, verse 4 saying, "This river makes glad the cities of God, He's in the midst of her." Psalm 73:25, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? There's none upon earth I desire beside Thee." That desirous language of finding satisfaction in God's providence Psalm 42:1, that's a famous one, "As the deer pants for water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

That desirous language in the Psalms reminds us that God's providence is not just merely something we mention on Thanksgiving Day, "Thanks, God, for all the stuff and the food, and that we didn't go bankrupt this year." It's more than that; it's that God provides all our needs, yes, but it's Himself that He gives. It's his word that He gives; and that's what sustains and fills our hearts with this satisfaction and confidence that comes from His providence, His providing of Himself to be a resource of strength and joy and gladness for His people. Psalm 63, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek You. My soul thirsts for You in a dry and weary land where there is no water, to see Thy power and glory in thy sanctuary. Thy loving kindness is better than life."

That's what we're talking about. That's the God who makes glad the cities of God, who makes our flesh long for His presence; and our confidence in Him is bolstered by His providence. That's why verse 7 gives us that first taste of the chorus of this song: "Yahweh" - covenant name of God - "of hosts," the God of armies. It's an emphasis on his power over all other possible potentates. He is the King of kings, He's the LORD of armies, and "He is with us."

Constantly God comforts His people. That was His word to Joshua when Moses was gone, and Joshua had to take over. God's comfort to Joshua, His providence to Joshua was, "Joshua, I'll be with you." God's presence, His providence is an antidote for our fear. I love that verse 7 says, "the God of Jacob is our stronghold." This is one of those weird churches that preaches through the whole Bible. So you guys actually did a series in Genesis - I

know, I was here for part of it. And I don't remember if I did a Jacob sermon or not; I don't remember what I had for breakfast this morning.

But, Jacob, you remember; one word describes Jacob: rascal. It's what his name means. Jacob's a rascal. And when the psalmist calls God "the God of Jacob," I think, mainly in a positive way, he's thinking that's the God of the tribes, because Jacob became Israel, and Israel is the father of the nation and the twelve tribes. And so the God of Jacob is a unifying kind of name, talking about God for all of God's people.

But you can't say Jacob without thinking rascal. I mean, the dude was the worst. And then God got a hold of him, and by His grace transformed him into the father of the nation. And so I think built in that phrase "the God of Jacob," that title is that unifier; and the unifier for God's people is that they're the recipients of God's grace.

And so how does God provide? Well, He gives us Himself, and He gives us His voice, and He gives us His presence in the midst of our troubles, and He gives us His grace. And so how God's providence gives us confidence is to know that we'll always have what we need, because the main thing we need is God; and He provides that for us Himself for us.

Well, third and finally, verses 8-11, we see "God comforting us with His presence." And there's obviously overlap here; but there's certainly is a change in tone, because God's presence isn't just His providence, like in the middle section, it's His presence as King and Ruler and LORD of the armies, which is what He's called in verse 7.

So this psalm ends by showing us that God is a victorious God. This psalm in its final verses depicts God as the one who has defeated, in the past tense, all who would come against Him. It also has in it an invitation, doesn't it, because there's four imperatives, four commands: "come," verse 8; "behold," verse 8; "be still," verse 10; and "know," verse 10. But all of that is happening in God bringing desolations on the earth, verse 8; bringing

an end to all conflict and strife, verse 9. He does so, not through by throwing a peace sign; instead, He does it by actual victory. Verse 9, "the bow; He shatters, He breaks the spear in pieces. The chariots," - it's the word for wagons, like the supply train of the army - "He burns them with fire.

So He wins by total victory. And then His exaltation as the King of kings is in verse 10, "I'll be exalted among the nations, I'll be exalted in the earth." The same earth that's been mentioned six times is a place of tumult and anxiety and opposition is now the throne of His exaltation. And so this song ends: bigly is the word. It ends with God on His throne showing us that He's present as King and Victor.

Davidson - I like his stuff on the Psalms - he says this: "The third section, verses 8-11, contains an invitation and a challenge to acknowledge God's rule, an invitation and a challenge. The invitation 'come' is an invitation to see the devastating things God has done, to experience them as they are recited and lived in worship, reaching back to creation and embracing all human history in this final scene. The battles are over; victory is won. The weapons of war are shattered, the shields are burned. There is a battle theme between God of creation and the powers of chaos, and the invitation becomes a challenge directed to the people who gather for worship and to all forces that seek to undermine God's rule." It's a challenge and it's an invitation to look at a battle, an ongoing battle in our experience; but from God's perspective, it's already won.

So what kind of confidence does that give us? Well, His presence as Ruler and King is on clear display. He brings desolations to the earth. What an odd thing to rejoice in: desolations to the earth. Desolations to the earth is the very righteous wrath of God. We're invited to look at God's wrath. Not something that comes to mind when we think of all the things we're grateful for that God has done for us.

And there is a tendency to avoid thinking carefully about the wrath of God, but this verse insists; in fact, it commands you to come and behold the

works of the LORD. And those works specifically are not just the deliverances, it's the desolations that He wrought on the earth, verse 8. One author says it this way: "The connection to the wrath of God seems strange. How difficult for us to think it true. Anger seems so unlovely in another person, an emotion to be restrained in ourselves. It's characteristic of our age that a great deal of theological talent has been uselessly devoted to explaining away the wrath of God. How foolish. We need God's wrath and can in no wise do without it. God's wrath is not human anger, God's wrath is the motive and personal reality of which judgment is the act. God's wrath is God's effective refusal to give way to human sin to turn the world over to us."

You see, if there was no wrath of God, there would be no righteous judgment. If there was no wrath and no righteous judgment, then that means sin would reign in this world, and none would be saved. And so we cannot celebrate the gospel, the good news that God saves unworthy sinners like us because of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross in our place, His resurrection from the grave procuring our victory. When we trust in Him, we receive full and free forgiveness, eternal life is ours. We can't celebrate that apart from the reality of the wrath of God. We can't rejoice and say, "I'm saved," unless we know what we were saved from. And it wasn't just the trouble that sin caused in our lives, we were saved from the very God who rescued us. We were saved from His righteous wrath.

And so He tells us, "Look at the desolations He has wrought on the earth," and the scene is all these burned chariots, and broken spears and bows, and melted down armories; and we're to come and we're to behold, and then we're to "be still and know I am God." I mean, that word "come" is a reminder that God is a refuge, but only if you come to Him, come to Him in faith, seeking His mercy. And because of His nature as a Savior, He loves to provide for us and be that refuge to us. Abandon the other things you trust in and trust in God, my friend.

"Behold" is to see what He has done, mainly these works of desolation. One Puritan said, "Either by terror or by love, God will subdue all hearts to Himself by wrath or by mercy." "Every knee will bow," Philippians 2. But

then these two very familiar kind of refrigerator magnet commands, "Be still and know that I am God," Right? Isn't that just crocheted or cross-stitched or something?

"Be still and know that I am God." What's that command mean? Well, after coming and beholding, we're to see the majestic holiness and wrath of God's judgment, and we're to be stunned in silence. That's what it means to be still. It's a rebuke to the restless. The word means to sink down, to be quiet, to slink back, to cover your mouth, to be shocked and awed, but then "to know that I am God."

Now that doesn't mean, "Let God be God," whatever that phrase means; people say that. He is God, you can't do anything about it. But "know that I am God" means that He defines His own existence. Let that hit you. Let that smash your idols, the other things that you trust in, and worship the God who utters and the earth melts.

I mean, you see it, don't you? God is refuge, providing the power, this unlimited power that is God's, that's accessible to us. God is a river in His providence meeting all our needs. God is a ruler with His presence and His ultimate kingly victory, ensured and guaranteed. No wonder the song has been beloved and sung in commemoration of every battle, the ones that God has won and the ones that we know He will win. And so whatever we face in this world, we can have confidence and sing songs of confidence because of who God is and who He is to us.

Luther was a very confident man; but in 1527, it was a year that could have easily shaken him. Ten years prior he nailed the "Ninety-five Theses" to the castle church at the door in Wittenberg; sparked the Protestant Reformation aflame, set Europe on fire with the gospel. In those ten years Luther had been banned, hunted, captured, kidnapped, censured, excommunicated. He'd gone on toe-to-toe with Tetzl fighting the system of the indulgences to purchase forgiveness. He struggled to learn Greek and Hebrew so he could translate the New Testament into the common German language. He'd gone into battle with three different popes. He engaged in this massive

correspondence with a theological opponent named Erasmus – just a full battle against Erasmus, maybe the smartest guy in Europe. He abandoned monasticism. He got married. It was a big year.

In the middle of a sermon on April 22nd a dizzy spell came over him. He stopped preaching; they had to carry him out of the pulpit. Early that summer, same year, he fell over; he had an acute buzzing in his ears, and the doctors believed that Luther was on his deathbed. It was that same summer that the Black plague had entered Germany. Families were fleeing the cities. The disease spread like wildfire. But Luther and his wife Katie stayed and transformed their home into a hospital for the sick and dying. Katie was pregnant. Luther's one-year-old son fell desperately ill. Katie gave birth to their daughter Elizabeth; she died when she was 8 months old.

It was in this tumultuous and difficult and traumatic year that Luther was driven to Psalm 46. It placed this desperate man's confidence in God, and it became his favorite song, the strength of his soul. He expanded it into that hymn that we love: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." Remember how it begins: "A mighty Fortress is our God, a Bulwark never failing. Our Helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing. Let goods and kindred go," the song continues, "this mortal life also; the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever." That's the message of Psalm 46. God's forever kingdom ensures that our confidence can and ought to always be in God and in God alone.

[Prayer] Father, cast from us fear and doubt and despair and discouragement. We know that man will not prevail, that Your righteous judgment will prevail, that none will stand in opposition to You, but that You will bring all Your enemies in Your footstool. Father may we see Your power and Your providence. May we see Your rulership and Your presence. May Your accessibility give us the hope and confidence and fearlessness we need to live this life in the ways that You've called us to live, to be workers and spouses and parents and citizens in all the ways that You've called us. With every difficulty we face, may we see You on Your throne, the LORD of armies, the God of Jacob, who's triumphant ultimately, who brings us along in victory, and who's there to help us in our time of greatest need.

Father, thank You for these beloved people. Continue to work in their lives to bring glory to Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.