



Psalm 46 - March 15, 2020

OPEN

Have you heard of the man who wanted to discuss the gestation period of a pachyderm? However, no one would talk about the elephant in the womb! Well, in these last few days nobody could miss the elephant in the room – the concerns that have been raised by COVID-19.

As these things began to unfold, my thoughts went back to a theme that has deeply impacted my life. God is our refuge. I have explored this thought through the years.

Now over last number of weeks we have been exploring a significant section of Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount". According to Luke 11:1 the disciples had asked Jesus a vital question: "Lord Teach Us To Pray." What was His response? It was to provide this prayer which is both a model and a curriculum. Though we are shifting from this series today we are still thinking about what is at the heart of our praying: knowing, truly and deeply, that **God is our refuge.**

The 18th Century English writer Samuel Johnson once said, "Going to sea is like going to prison, with a chance at drowning besides." A storm at sea is a powerful picture of the turbulence and the terror that can engulf our lives. For many in our world today, the COVID-19 pandemic is a significant storm in their lives. At times like this, we simply must remember the refuge that we can find in God.

In times like this, it is easy to be pulled toward two extremes. Some may trivialize and downplay the situation. Others may be traumatized, especially with all the media messages. But as followers of Jesus we have His peace and presence to lead us. At the very root of the capacity to carry on in the face of wind and wave is the fact that God is our refuge.

DIG

Read Psalm 46:1-11. Can you see the clear structure? There are three verses and a chorus, which is found in verses 7 and 11. This was written as a choral piece, by sons of Korah, to the Alamo tune or arrangement. Likely the chorus was also sung between verses 3 and 4. This psalm has a clear theme – God

is, Himself, our "refuge". We know a refuge as a shelter or protection, such as a breakwater or a safe room. This psalm has a vital word – *mahseh*. This refers to a literal shelter but often was used figuratively to describe the act of taking refuge or trusting. Don't forget the cities of refuge provided in the Law.

There are many synonyms for the OT word "refuge" such as a stronghold or a secure height. You may have heard or even visited the ancient Israeli fortress called Masada. But all of these terms reveal a trust relationship with omnipotent God. So, because God is our refuge, how should we live our lives?

- ***We should face storms with caution and consideration - vv. 1-3***

This psalm was not written in a vacuum. The writer had very real troubles in mind which led to caution...but also deep consideration. Verses 1-2 make it very clear that because God is our refuge, strength, present help, therefore we will not fear. Notice from verse 3 that this is intentional – not circumstantial. Our circumstances may be stormy – just as verse 3 describes, but it is even though we are in these circumstances that God can shelter and protect us.

What about a world-wide pandemic? Well, go ahead and practice appropriate cautions. Get good info from www.bccdc.ca. Keep doing all the common-sense things such as good hand-washing, staying at home if ill, and the like.

But take time for deep consideration also! Think of all the other storms in our lives? For the follower of God, fear is not an option! Yes, we default to despair if we take our eyes off the reality of who God is – much like Peter sank below the waves when he looked at the water instead of the Creator of the water. But when we really grasp, by faith, God's greatness and goodness, then we realize that there is no reason or purpose to fear.

- ***We should face storms with care and compassion - vv. 4-7***

The second verse of the psalm lifts our eyes from the storm which consumes us and directs our thinking heavenward. It is this eternal hope that transforms our lives. I saw this in principle in practice growing up. My father faced almost two decades of very ill health. What caused him to persevere? The more he looked heavenward, the more hope he had to endure.

Did you see Golden Ears yesterday? It was breathtaking. Psalm 121 urges us to look to the mountains and remember – where does our strength come from? Self? Circumstance? God, our refuge! No matter what kind of storm may be swirling around us, Christians must persevere.

A big part of perseverance is to stay on mission. We must continue to share the love of Christ through word and deed. How? Why? The answer to both of these questions is our eternal destination of heaven – to live forever in the presence of God! COVID-19 may just be the jolt that churches need to take our eyes off our problems and care for others in our communities.

- **We should face storms with calm and confidence - vv. 8-11**

Remaining calm and confident is much more than not just getting hysterical. It means increasing our comprehension and understanding of God and His ways. It means wrestling with the truth of His power and authority. Notice especially that verse 10 tells us to “stop!” In our English translations it is often “cease striving” or “be still”. This only makes sense because God is exalted over the earth.

Maybe we should ask ourselves if our confidence level lines up with our creed? In other words, is there a match between what I say I believe about God, and how that belief impacts my action. In **The Knowledge Of The Holy** A. W. Tozer wrote,

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.... For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like....Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God.” (Harper & Row, 1961, 7)

REFLECT

- **Keep praying**

Prayer in the time of storms is not just for calmer waters, but calmer hearts. In prayer, we not only ask God to change our circumstance, but to change us!

“Prayer is a nourishing friendship....Nothing but prayer will ever reveal you to yourself, because only before God can you see and become your true self...Prayer is learning who you are before God and giving him your essence. Prayer means knowing yourself as well as God.” (**Prayer: Experiencing Awe And Intimacy With God**, Timothy Keller, Penguin, 2014, 29,30)

- **Keep trusting**

Read Matthew 8:23-27 and Mark 4:35-41 to see the story of Jesus calming the storm. Become a follower of Jesus does not remove us from the need for refuge.

Read I Peter 4:12-14 and remember that since God is by nature our refuge implies that we will face storms. We must not think it strange.

Read Psalm 18:1-3 and think about how you can express your worship to God who is our Rock Fortress Deliverer Shield Horn of salvation Stronghold.

- **Keep connecting**

Our Fellowship Pacific executive director, David Horita said it well, “Continue to build and grow disciples. This requires us to be creative and supportive as we find ways to grow our sense of community...remember, our intimacy with Christ is not determined by the number of meetings we attend!”

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