

Psalm 46

Introduction

Welcome everyone to our time together looking at God's Word. Welcome to family from Matthew Henry and those who may be joining us who would not normally be with us. We pray that we will know God's blessing on this time of sharing together.

Today is a very significant day in my life. 60 years ago something very special happened to me - 60 years ago Dave I hear some of you say - were you alive then you don't look 60! (Thanks!). The answer is it was the first day I had independent life as it was the day I was born! I have been in denial for the last year that I am leaving my 50's and entering my 60's but the truth is I can't stop the reality of this fact. Although I have joked recently that until I can celebrate it properly I am staying 59.

We are in times like we have never seen before in the world and in our nation. A time that we would rather not live through, a time we could try to deny, hoping when we go to sleep and wake up it might have been a bad dream and somehow the lovely sunny weather we have been experiencing would be just that, a glorious end to March. But that is not the case and sadly we can't change the awesome reality of Covid -19 and what it means.

But this morning while recognising the seriousness of the situation I want us to be encouraged not by looking to ourselves, not the Government, scientists, the NHS, or any human agency but by looking to God and the certainty that we can have a place in His family through faith in Jesus.

If you have a Bible with you please turn with me to read a Psalm together. Psalm 46.

While you are looking and by way of introduction this Psalm was written to be used by the director of music in the temple in Jerusalem and was intended to be sung as the procession, possibly with maidens playing tambourines, made its way up to the temple. We can't have a procession and we are not going to sing it today but we can I encourage you to join in, reading it out loud together.

There is much in this Psalm but I just want to focus on a few things to encourage us this morning.

The first few verses start with this triumphant confession (v1-3)

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.

The imagery used here is a fearless trust in God the creator in the midst of what seems to be cataclysmic upheaval of the continents. It is as though creation itself is becoming uncreated. All that seemed stable and secure is being changed. Remember when we looked at the creation account in Genesis last year? Genesis 1v9-10 tells of water being gathered and dry land appearing. God created these things.

We are seeing this happen at the moment, maybe not in the physical world, but in society, civilization as we have known it in our lifetime is being completely shaken. The structures that we assumed were stable and we have all become so reliant on, taking for granted, are being rocked and disrupted, they are unstable and at the end of this period will have to be recreated.

Covid-19 is challenging and changing everything and it is not a localised issue (like a flood or a fire), it is global, it has transcended the division of countries, political structures, the economic models we have lived by, the stocks and shares, the way we shop, the delivery of goods, our education system and so I could go on.

As we stop and are forced to reflect on these things, things that we have made our gods (money, material possessions, sport, maybe even politics), things that are being shaken and are falling, we need to turn back (a word used in the Bible is repent) to the one and only living God - not a counterfeit god. For so many of us even as Christians, God has not been central in our lives - the first commandment is "You shall have no other Gods before me" (Exodus 20v3). For most in our own nation God has been left out completely, airbrushed away or photoshopped out of our lives or maybe left on the shelf to be taken down and dusted every now and again for special occasions (Christmas, Easter or weddings and funerals). That is the stark reality of our position. But the truth is God has not gone away, he is still the one and only God, the I AM, who created all things, whom we are told in the NT book of Colossians 1v17 as the person of Jesus Christ "is the one who is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

This God is our God. He is the one in whom we can take refuge and find our strength. The God who created the world is the one we can have that absolute confidence in - if we believe that then we can honestly say we will not fear. Even if the earth is to give way and all we know is disrupted and changed. We often talk of storms in our lives - well we are all facing a storm - it is a serious storm, for many the most serious storm they have ever faced, but God is our refuge.

A few weeks back Bernice and I went to see Joel in Bath. We had a walk in and around Cheddar Gorge and then drove over to a place called Burrington Combe. You may never have heard of it - but at one point in the cliff there is a massive cleft that runs up the rock face. Big enough to stand in.

Traditionally, it is held that Augustus Toplady, a local preacher in that area, drew his inspiration for writing the hymn "Rock of Ages cleft for me" from an incident in this gorge. Toplady was travelling along the gorge when he was caught in a storm. While he was sheltering in this gap/cleft he had the inspiration for the hymn. The reference to the rock is to the person of Jesus - he is the unshakeable one as He is God with us. Remember he is Emmanuel - God with us.

The Psalmist knew this which is why he also says in

V7 The LORD Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress

And then repeats them as his closing statement in v11. Like bookends to that section of Psalm.

These words are timeless and in the 16th century inspired Martin Luther to write the first song we sang today. A mighty fortress is our God.

You might have noticed that LORD here is in capitals, which means Yehweh or Jehovah Almighty is with us. He is present in our situation - He is not distant or far off. Nathan reminded us last week that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 10v12) but that does not mean he is far away and not interested in us. God is present because he has given us His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to indwell us and be His presence in us. Jesus in John 14v16 & 26 tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit will come as a counsellor or comforter. The Holy Spirit, the comforter - he is with us.

We may feel lonely and isolated and for many this is a significant issue. Practically we can help each other - let's make use of the technology that we have to keep in contact and chat to one another more. Phone, text, Facebook, Facetime whatever - Share and pray together - Encourage one another, comfort one another. When we do this we are acting as part of His body and in a small way recognising that the LORD Almighty is with us.

We are looking into the use of a piece of software called 'Zoom' that will enable those who have access to a computer or suitable IT to connect up, as in a meeting and share, even seeing each other!

In between the bookends of v7 & 11 is v 10 where the Psalmist speaks in the first person as God would speak to us to "Be still and know that I am God."

This is more of a command. Be still. But the stillness has a purpose.

How many of us find it hard to be still - we might want to be active doing things, especially now. In our 24/7 world of recent times being still could be almost impossible but times have changed. For many the things we normally would fill our time with have been taken away - there is opportunity like never in a long time to be still. However, for others life is even busier than normal (especially those in the NHS and those helping to address the complex needs of the wider community) - stillness seems far away. But we are encouraged to be still - why? To know that God is God. If you are even busier than normal seek to take time out each day to be still with God.

Many of our songs and hymns take scripture and use it for inspiration or are included as part of the song. Maybe when we can't be still we can use those songs to help us focus on God, sing a hymn or song, even quietly or in your mind.

We sang a hymn a little earlier that has these words in the chorus:

*But I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able
To keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.*

This is actually based on some words that the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1v12 which say:

*That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, **because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.***

Paul was suffering persecution for his faith and sharing the good news about Jesus. But he had this absolute confidence in the one he had believed in - Jesus Christ. He knew whom he had believed in, was confident that his faith would be guarded and he was trusting for 'that day'.

The Psalmist says after the direction to 'be still and know God' that God says

*I will be exalted among the nations
I will be exalted in all the earth*

This is God speaking. He will be exalted.

'That day' that Paul refers to is the triumphant day of Christ's return to earth in glory. It will come, it will be a real day just like today. Jesus is coming back again - and in Revelation 21v1 we are told there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Are we ready and waiting for that day? The most important question and truth is are we ready to meet with God?

That particular hymn has been special to me since my childhood when I understood how much Jesus loved me, because he had died to forgive the things I had done wrong to God, my sin. As a child I put my faith and trust in Jesus. That was over 50 years ago and I can honestly say He has been with me all those years. There have been good times and tough times but God has always been there, I have known him to be my refuge, my strength, the one I can be protected by like a fortress.

I can say ***I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.*** Can you? I pray you can and if not yet that you will consider what God is offering you today.

As we go into a new week, a week of additional uncertainty, a week where we could become more fearful, let us look to the truth and encouragement of Psalm 46

- God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble
- The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress; and
- Let us be still and know that God is God.