



HG224: God's Promise Of: **Refuge**

Psalm 46:1-11

Home Group Study Notes

27 June 2021 - Revd Margaret Fowler



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

The original Psalms were often songs to be sung. Sung as the introduction to Psalm 46: "*For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to alamothe. A song.*" People would have had their own favourite Psalms to sing. What is your favourite worship song and why?.



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Psalm 46:1-11

Home Group Sermon Notes

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I wonder if you heard a little while ago about the father and son in Monmouthshire who were sadly killed by a raging bull water buffalo, - the daughter was also injured. It was a really tragic event. The bull was known not to like the son, so he was always kept away from the bull. On this particular occasion the father entered the field alone because he needed to move a hay feeding ring. Sadly, for some reason, the bull charged at the dad, and on hearing the commotion the son went to help him, but the bull went for him too and unfortunately both were killed. The coroner said that what contributed to the deaths was that, against health and safety advice, there was no refuge or place of safety in the field for the father and son to run to. Maybe, the dad felt a refuge would be exhibiting a weakness in his own ability as an experienced farmer. We will never know the answer.

The answer as to where those who trust in the Lord should run to in times of danger, is given here by the Psalmist in Psalm 46 - to run into the arms of the Most High God who is our eternal refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble (v1). I need to be clear here, I'm not saying that the Lord will selectively rescue Christians from a raging bull if we fail to heed health and safety recommendations - we all have to take responsibility for our own safety in our day to day lives. God expects that of us. What the Psalmist is saying here is that whatever happens to God's people, we can never lose because we have an eternal refuge in Him - both in this world and the next. So let's unpack this Psalm a bit.

Background

This psalm was probably written when Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrians in 701BC. The siege would have meant God's people were facing an imposed lockdown, economic hardship, scarcity of food, and they would have been afraid - everything was in turmoil and there was nowhere to run to - they were locked in to their City. We have been in a similar situation, even though things are opening up a little now. In this present crisis there is nowhere to run - the crisis is everywhere, right across the world. It's like we have been walking in a disaster moving for the last 15 months, wearing facemasks; we've faced shortages (even now), and the world economy is not in good shape. The Psalmist says although there is no place to run to - there is a person we can run to, because "*God is our refuge and strength*".

Psalm 46 was Martin Luther's favourite. He wrote a hymn based on it called "*A mighty fortress is our God*". This Psalm gave Luther hope when he was being persecuted for his faith. God's people have often sung psalms through their suffering. If you remember Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi - they were praying and singing - and those songs would have been psalms giving them courage in their troubles that God is their refuge and strength.

This Psalm is one of what is known as “confidence” Psalms because it expresses great trust in God. We are all familiar with: the 23rd Psalm with the verse *“even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me”*; or maybe Psalm 121v 7: *“The Lord will keep you from all harm - he will watch over your life”*; or Psalm 91 *“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. They say of the Lord “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust”*. I try to skim over v3 because everyone laughs - it says *“surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare”!* Then we come to v 4 - a wonderful verse - *“He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge”*. Here we have that promise of safety and refuge as we lie on those gentle soft feathers in the Father’s arms completely safe and protected.

Confidence Psalms give us encouragement during difficult times and remind us that whatever situation we find ourselves in, we can run into the arms of Almighty God, our refuge and strength.

Verses 1-3

It is one thing to confess that God is our refuge, but it is quite another to believe it when we’re facing severe danger and say with every confidence, *“therefore we will not fear”*. If you are running from a raging bull, or have bombs dropping all around you, you will feel a great deal of fear, And if you look at the magnitude of the threat here in Psalm 46 there is every reason for God’s people to 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”*. Who would not be fearful in the face of such a threat? A fear that can withstand the collapse of creation is only made possible by having faith in the Creator as our refuge. Faith is not something we can romanticize - the Psalm dares us to believe in God even when the very ground falls out from underneath us. I wonder if you have you ever felt as if the ground is falling away from beneath you? I have.

Some might say the Psalmist in v 1-3 was just using pictorial disaster language when he wrote about the mountains falling into the sea and the waters roaring and the mountains quaking, but let’s remind ourselves what is happening in the world right now. Had you heard the word “tsunami” before the disaster in 2004 on Boxing Day? This Psalm was written before bombs could flatten mountains, and before the oceans were choked with millions of tons of plastic waste. It was written before mountains of ice crumbled into the arctic as the earth warms up, and before the sea levels began rising with their surging and foam. Look again at verses 2 - 3, somehow it seems quite prophetic and seems to align with what is actually happening today. I’m not being alarmist, but the words in this Psalm are not simply pictorial language - even if it was when it was written - it’s real now. These events in Psalm 42 herald a kind of disaster that is actually happening today. We need to turn to the Creator, our refuge and strength, who is the only one who can rescue us from this man-made disaster. We urgently need to run to the Lord in prayer for Him to guide us and rescue us from this very present ecological trouble.

Some people say “Come to Jesus and all will be fine” - this simply isn’t true. Troubles come to us all, Christians or not. Bad things not only happen to good people, they can happen to God’s people. This world isn’t fair because its fallen.

Yes, God is our refuge in trouble, but being a child of God doesn't exempt us from the troubles that happen in this fallen world.

Verses 4-7

Looking now at vv 4-6 - our earthly cities may be besieged by Covid, cities can be bombed in war, or overrun by an army or a flood, but in these verses the Psalmist is contrasting disasters which will happen in this world, with what it will be like in the City of God. The river which runs through the City of God is a metaphor of both blessing and restoration. And the original readers of Psalm 46 would also have known that a city with a river running through could not easily be besieged by an enemy. It was much harder to besiege a city with a river because it would have a supply of fresh water and fish for food. The Heavenly City has a river of blessing and restoration running through it.

We are all citizens of an earthly town, but Philippians 3.20 tells us that our true citizenship is in Heaven. A plague, famine, or war can take away the benefits of our earthly citizenship, but nothing can ever take away our Heavenly citizenship where the Most High dwells. Even if disaster strikes, *"The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress"*.

Verses 8-9

But before we get despondent with talk of disasters, let's move on to v 8-9 - and here we find an invitation to think positively. It may not sound positive on a first reading, but I assure you it is! *"Come and see [or remember] what the Lord has done, 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"*. The desolations which we are invited to "come and see" or "remember" is probably that which I referred to earlier when Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrians (see Isaiah 37). The people (Israel) woke up one morning and found the Assyrian army were all dead, put to death by an angel of the Lord, and God's people were saved.

Part of the theology of Israel is to continually remind themselves of the great deeds of God in the past, and to pass these memories on down the generations. By remembering what God has done for us in the past will build up our spiritual confidence for what the Lord is able to do in the present, and in the future. *"Come and see what the Lord has done"*.

Some more good news for us can be found in v9. Included in God's plan for the world is the cessation of wars and an era of peace. God's people have reason to be glad because of God's presence with them in times of distress, but how much greater will our joy be when the causes of distress cease completely and we are restored to peace! Again, this is a reference to our eternal refuge in Heaven from Rev 21 when one day, *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, every threat will be gone for ever."*

Verses 10-11

The lectionary reading for last Sunday was Jesus calming the storm on the Galilee. Jesus was at peace sleeping on a cushion in the boat, but his panicked disciples woke him because the storm was so violent they thought they would drown. Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith - they had given way to fear. He got up and said to the storm *"Be still"*, and the wind and waves obeyed Him.

In the cluttering of our busy lives the Lord says “*Be still and know that I am God.*” How many times a day and for how long are you still, taking time out of your busy day to listen to God? This verse challenges me every day. But God has been speaking those words to our wounded world for centuries - “be still”. Our natural instinct if we were caught in a flood or earthquake would be, just like the disciples, to panic, but the Lord says “*Be still ...*” Don’t look at the size of the waves or your problem, look to God. Bed yourself in the Rock of Ages - he is your security in this life and in death - He always has been, He always will be.

Hudson Taylor, the great evangelist to mainland China, said when he was dying “*I am so weak that I can’t work or read my bible and I can hardly pray. I can only lie still in the arms of God like a little child and trust him*”. That’s all our heavenly father asks of us particularly when we are in situations out of our control: “*Be still and know that I am God*”.

Will this world take the Bible’s health and safety advice and cry out to God to be its refuge as we work through this pandemic? Who knows? But we can have confidence from this Psalm that when we who trust in the Lord run into the arms of Almighty God, He will rescue us and calm all the internal storms raging in our lives. “*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear*”.... “*Be still and know that I am God.*”

Emmanuel Text 2021

WE HAVE
this **HOPE**
as an anchor
for the
SOUL
firm and secure.
Hebrews 6:19

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Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Can you think of a time when your life was being threatened?

2. This is a psalm which manages to mix world turmoil while remembering God is in control. Do you find it difficult to hold the two in focus at the same time?

3. We're human, most of us are likely to feel panic if a disaster threatens. How can we remember that God is in control when everything around us seems to be falling apart?

4. The world doesn't much like the idea of "being still", but being still is a way of surrendering to God. When do you take the time to be still before God?

5. The Psalm seems to be in a 3-part movement. Can you identify the parts? What is repeated in each part as the "take-away" message?

6. Finally, take some time to "be still" as you reflect on what you have learned through this Psalm. What new thing has God been showing you?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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