

INTRO: Please find Psalm 46 in your Bible. While you're finding your place, let me say, there is a lot of innuendos, opinions, speculations, and theories, concerning our current crisis going around. You see and hear it everyday on social media, news channels, and all other forms of communications. And it has been said for years, "everyone has a right to their own opinion", which may be true, but quite frankly, I wish people would keep their OWN opinion, their own, and not be so quick to share it with the rest of us. I think if everyone would do that, the world would be a better place. Well, at least that's my... OPINION.

Filip, our Prayer Director here at the church, had a good post Thursday on his FB page about this very thing. In it he shared, we just don't know, with complete certainty, what's behind our crisis and woes of the past weeks. Is it God trying to get our attention and bring us to a place of repentance? It could very well be. Or is it just the natural effect of living in a fallen world? The Bible tells us that in this life, from time to time, we will have tribulation and trouble. That's the world we were left by Adam and Eve. It is what it is! The truth is we just don't know for sure. And Filip is right. We don't know. And when we don't know what's behind our current difficulty, the best thing we can do, is go to what we DO know to be the truth, and cling to that truth with all our might!

So today, I want to talk to you on the subject, THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR TROUBLES.

Preaching involves at least two responsibilities. The first is to explain the Bible and relate it to life. The second is to take life and explain it in light of Scripture. My goal today is to accomplish both of these purposes.

Please turn to Psalm 46. This song, written by the sons of Korah, is set in the context of catastrophic chaos, troublesome times, and unparalleled uncertainty. The writer's world was crumbling all around him. This Psalm was written with the nation of Israel in mind, but it certainly applies to us today.

Before we get into the text, I want you to take note of the word "Selah" after v 3, v 7, and v 11. This word is used 74 times in the Old Testament, 71 times in the Psalms and 3 times in the Book of Habakkuk.

Most versions of the Bible do not attempt to translate the word "Selah". They simply give us the transliteration straight from the Hebrew. We know the word PSALM means, a sacred song or hymn. From what we can gather, it seems likely that the word "Selah" refers to a musical rest, where singers would stop singing and only the instruments could be heard. According to one Bible dictionary, it can also signify a musical crescendo followed by silent reflection.

The Septuagint, which is the earliest Greek translation of the Old Testament, finished in the 2nd century BC, translates "Selah" as "intermission." The New Living Translation picks up on this by using the word, "interlude." The idea is to get us to take a breath in order to reflect and remember. I like how the Amplified Version renders it: "Pause and calmly think about that."

In addition, "Selah" is thought to be rendered from two Hebrew words translated as: "to praise" and "to lift up." Perhaps the singers paused so they would think about what they had just sung in praise to God. It's in the imperative, meaning this is something we're commanded to do. That seems to be how the word is used in Habakkuk 3 where we're urged to consider the weightiness of what we've just read or heard.

The best way to think of “Selah” is a combination of all these meanings. We could say it like this: In the middle of our crisis, let’s **pause, pivot and praise**. Because the word “Selah” appears three times in this passage, we’ll follow this natural outline by pausing, pivoting and praising each time we come across it.

Read with me now from God’s holy, inspired, inerrant and authoritative Word. And notice with me...

1) HIS PROMISE - HE IS FOR YOU: vv 1-3 *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah*

This name for God, here in v 1 is, “Elohim” which means and reminds us that He is Creator, King, Judge and Savior.

Whatever this is we’re going through today, God promises to be our refuge, our strength, and our help. He’s not pointing to a refuge – He Himself is our refuge. The word “refuge” is a place of trust and literally means “to flee,” as in running to an impenetrable shelter. We have been told to shelter in place, and while we do that, let’s seek His face. Let’s cry out in prayer like we hear in Psalm 142:5 *“I cry to you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.’”*

The word “strength” implies we can rely on His might when we feel weak and defenseless.

God promises to hide us in His SHELTER, and He can help us by His STRENGTH. He is also *“a very present help in times of trouble.”* The word “VERY” is the Hebrew word, MEOD (Meh-ode). And it means, muchness, abundance, enough, excessive, and great abundance. The word “PRESENT” reminds us He is with us in our crisis. There are those in the hospital today who can’t even have a family member present. But God is there! Aren’t you glad we serve a God who is able to come to our assistance when we are afflicted? He is always available and always accessible. Psalm 9:9 *“The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.”*

In v 2 the writer is imagining the worst calamity that could possibly hit as he describes earthquakes, volcanoes erupting, and mountains slipping into the sea. It’s a picture of the unmaking of the world – in Genesis 1, God divides the land from the sea and here we see the land thrown back into the sea. Even though the “earth gives way,” or the landscape suddenly changes, we don’t have to be afraid.

V 3 describes the roaring waters of the sea, which is a picture of our lives when things are out of control. *“Roaring,”* means to “be in great commotion, to rage, or be at war.” Every continent is in commotion about what the coronavirus will do next. Our sense of pride and invulnerability as a people has been replaced with quaking and concern about the future. It’s fair to say the entire world has been humbled by this pandemic.

Trevin Wax writes: “Right now, the world is experiencing a great humbling. All of the greatest and most powerful leaders and nations, including economies that just weeks ago were seeing unprecedented gains, have now ground to a halt. With supply chains disrupted, churches meeting virtually, hospitals bracing for large numbers of new cases, and grocery stores emptied of certain foods and necessities, we feel the precarious nature of our predicament.”

I) HIS PROMISE - HE IS FOR YOU: vv 1-3 The first “Selah” is found at the end of v 3. Let’s **pause, pivot and praise** God for His promises right now. Even when the whole world is turned upside down, you can run to Him for refuge. Do that right now in your heart and mind.

PRAYER: God we flee from this calamity we find ourselves in to you. And if the world should crumble around us, we will know peace and comfort in the PROMISES you have made. Thank you and Amen!

II) HIS PRESENCE - HE IS WITH YOU: vv 4-7 “*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. 6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. 7 The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah*”

V 4 is easy to read through and miss the meaning if we’re not careful. First of all, the city of God is Jerusalem. While it was and is, a very beautiful city, it didn’t have a river running through it like other major cities and countries of that day. Babylon was built on the Euphrates. Egypt had the Nile. Rome had the Tiber River. The tri-state area we live in has the Tennessee River. But Jerusalem did not have a physical river. But wait, v 4 says there was a river. It does! But this River was not like any other. It was something far better – the River spoken of in v 4 was the very presence of God!

The title “Most High” is the Hebrew word, Elyon, which refers to God as the highest of all. He is sovereign and supreme, and He is PRESENT with us. God’s grace flows like a river to bring gladness and joy to His people. While the ocean rages and foams, God’s PRESENCE is depicted as a calm and gently flowing stream. God’s favor is often denoted by a river as in **Psalm 36:8** “*They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.*” This image in Scripture is used to represent happiness, abundance, and peace, even when everything else is falling apart.

God’s presence with His people is one of the central truths of Scripture. V 5 says that “*God is in the midst of her*” and v 7 declares that the “*Lord of Hosts is with us.*” This is from the root word “Immanuel,” which means “God with us” and was used in Matthew 1:23 to refer to Jesus. This means when we put our faith in Jesus, we have “God with us” at all times.

I love how this section ends: “*...the God of Jacob is our fortress.*” As in v 1, God is depicted not only as powerful, but also as a fortress that we can run to for safety. By the way, this is the text that moved Martin Luther to write the hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.”

Don’t miss that He is the God of “Jacob.” Jacob was known as a deceiver with a twisted mind and heart. We have a lot in common with him. Even though Jacob had a lot of faults, God stuck with him, shaping and molding him into a man of faith, changing his name to “Israel,” which means, “prince of God.” Aren’t you glad God takes selfish sinners like us and changes us from the inside out?

Let’s **pause, pivot and praise** at this second “Selah” by thanking God for His presence with us. **PRAYER:** God, thank you for your promise that you never leave us nor forsake us. What an awesome God you are!

I) HIS PROMISE - HE IS FOR YOU: vv 1-3

II) HIS PRESENCE - HE IS WITH YOU: vv 4-7

We can depend on God during times like this because of His promise, His presence, and finally notice...

III) HIS POWER - HE IS ABOVE YOU: vv 8-11 *"Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. 10 "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" 11 The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah"*

According to v 8 we're called to *"come, behold the works of the Lord."* We're to "run or pursue" in order to "behold." The word "behold" has a number of nuances. It means, "to perceive through sight, to peer, to spy out, to gaze intently upon, to observe fully". To "behold" has the idea of vividness and emotional involvement and is used in the imperative, meaning it's a command. This verse tells us we're to behold the *"works of the Lord."* The word *"desolations"* means, "ruin, astonishment, wasting, dismay and horror."

I've been amazed at how people are seeking the Lord right now. Even though we're hunkered down, there's a hunger for Him. That's why we must be the church now, more than ever in our life time! We must seize the moment God has given us! The TRUTH is, we don't know what tomorrow holds. But we know WHO holds tomorrow. RUN TO HIM. RUN TO THE FATHER! He is our refuge and strength. Behold Him!

Someone posted a couple weeks ago, "Covid-19 has ripped away the illusion that we ever had any control over the details of our lives." Let that sink in, before you go back to life as normal. You need to keep close to your heart the truth that ONLY GOD IS IN CONTROL.

The majority of this psalm is written in the third person as the psalmist speaks about God. In v 10, however, the Lord speaks in the first person from His position as sovereign ruler. We're called to *"Be still and know that I am God."* To *"be still"* means to "cast down or let fall" and was used of dropping weapons. It's the thought, that we're to cease fighting a battle we can't win. Psalm 37:7 captures it well: *"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him; fret not yourself..."* The purpose of being still is so we can know God. To *"know"* means to "acknowledge and comprehend, to discover intimately." It's not enough to just know about Him; we're called to know Him relationally. But we can't know God experientially until we become still before Him. This is actually a rebuke. We're to cease striving and fretting and working in our own self-effort and fully submit ourselves to God.

Notice the last part of v 10 *"I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"* As we quiet our souls and reflect upon His position of power as Lord over the whole world, we will recognize His supremacy and inevitable triumph over the nations.

V 11 is a great summary statement of this entire psalm as it repeats v 7. Because *"the Lord of hosts is with us, and the God of Jacob is our fortress,"* we can trust Him. THAT'S THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR TROUBLES! Let's pause here at the final "Selah" and praise God for His power. PRAYER: Thank you God, for your great POWER!