Psalm 46

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### God Our Refuge

A couple of week ago my son played soccer at a place called Millgrove, a small town about an hour and half away.

As you can see from the photo, it is a lovely little spot at the foot of Mt Donna Buang amongst some amazing forest. In general, the field is used during the week for recreational activities, people taking dogs for walks, sport on weekends. In general just a lovely, picturesque little spot.

What is not seen, or recognised by most people passing through, is that this spot, specifically in the middle of summer, is an important part of the community. Not only because of its use as a recreational facility, but because this place is a fire refuge. A safe place for people in the community to go to when a bushfire may be raging around them.

Some of you may have experienced this need to seek a refuge during what has come to be known as Black Saturday. Our church was having a camp in Marysville that weekend. They needed to seek refuge from what has become known as one of Australia’s worst bushfire disasters. At the end of the day, in Marysville itself, only 14 buildings of over 400 remained and 34 people died. Fortunately for us, all our congregation were safe. They found refuge in the town of Alexandra and none were physically harmed.

Today we will be looking at Psalm 46 – and we will be thinking about what it means to have God as our refuge

Psalm 46 is a Psalm which is a song. Intended to be sung as a victory song.

The Psalm is “OF THE SONS OF KORAH.” This is a reference to the authors of the psalm. The Sons of Korah were Levites. They were responsible for music ministry in the tabernacle. (cf. 1 Chronicles 6:33; 2 Chronicles 20:19).

Alamoth means maidens, so maybe it was for a female choir or group of young women playing tamborines.

Psalm 46 is written celebrating the victory won by God and that of the city of God., Jerusalem.

It is most likely related to the situation noted in 2 Chronicles 20 (which was read earlier).

The Ammonites and Moabites are about to bring a great army against Jerusalem and the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Jahaziel the Levite. Jahaziel says to the gathered host, as they hide within the walls of Jerusalem,

(v15) “*Thus says the Lord to you, “Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God’s.”*

I will pray for us now and then we will look at this great Psalm, reminding us that God is, was and always will be our refuge.

Pray:

So let’s look at the first point - God is a Radical safe refuge.

This morning’s Psalm begins with noting a characteristic of God.

*(v1) God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble.*

The Psalmist here, right from the beginning, wants us to recognise that God is our refuge.

Now God as a refuge is a regular theme through Psalms, (61:3, 62: 7-8, 71:7, 142:5) and this Psalm continues it. And when ‘speaking about’ refuge he is indicating that God is our protection, our place of shelter, our place of safety.

And note to, the verb tense: God is – that is present tense.

Not God was - as if that day has passed.

Not God will be - as if that day has not come.

God is, today, right now. God is our protection, our safety.

And not just our refuge either but also our strength. That’s right, God has the strength – the means to provide our safety. The original Hebrew for God here in verse 1 is Elohim. The same use of the word is also found in Genesis 1. - *In the beginning God – Elohim - created the heavens and the earth.*

We are reminded here that the creator God, who was before all and created all, has the means and the ability to provide that refuge.

And, unlike the fire refuge I noted earlier – which really only provides refuge in specific times and specific circumstances, like all other worldly refuges – God is a helper who is Always found in times of trouble. You don’t need to travel to find Him as our refuge. You don’t need a specific type of disaster or trouble to have God as your refuge. God is continually available. God is with you.

We must realize that God our Refuge is not only continually available, but He is thoroughly adequate. For it says in this verse, God is our Refuge, but also our Strength. There would be no good saying that “God is our Refuge” if He weren’t strong enough to provide safety. It would do no good to say “God is continually able,” if God were not adequate.

A refuge is pointless if it is not available. A refuge is of no use if it doesn’t have the power and the strength to provide the promised safety. Elohim is our refuge and strength. An active helper. Not passive.

And He’s not just a refuge but a radical refuge. A refuge that means that those who have that trust, that faith in Him, have nothing to fear. That is radical isn’t it. Nothing to fear.

*(v2) Therefore we will not be afraid*

Knowing who God is, knowing that God provides continual safety and protection, the Psalmist reminds the hearers that because of these amazing details of God’s character there is nothing to fear.

And that is an amazing statement of faith. Consider the disaster the Psalmist notes.

*(v2b) though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas,
3 though its water roars and foams and the mountains quake with its turmoil.* Selah

That is a pretty cataclysmic situation. The Psalmist gives us an understanding of probably the worst situation, the worstcase scenario. The work of creation is almost put into reverse.

Mountains are toppling into the seas. The waters, which has covered these mountains, are raging with foam. And even though these mountains have toppled, they are still quaking beneath the waters.

The picture is a dire one. It pictures a world in which it seems that the foundations are being destroyed. It pictures a calamity that is tumultuous and seemingly out of control—at least, out of our control.

And yet we are reminded that no matter the situation, there is nothing to fear.

Now the verse ends with the term ‘Selah’, which is most likely a pause in the singing or the song. So let’s pause and consider.

God is our refuge and strength.

Where do you run? Where do you turn to? In the middle of trouble, when you are in the heat of the battle, you will run somewhere for refuge.

Perhaps in trouble you run to other people, hoping that they can be your own personal messiah. Perhaps you run to entertainment, hoping to numb your troubles away. Maybe you run to a substance, trying your best to turn off the pain. Maybe you are tempted to run to food or sex, fighting pain with pleasure. Since none of these things can provide the refuge which you seek, putting your hope there tends to only add disappointment to the trouble you’re already experiencing.

Do you know the hope, the refuge that God has given us through Jesus? Do you know that God sent his son for us as a living hope? Let me read from 1 Pet 1

 **3**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead **4**and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

Jesus died because of sin. Our sin. Our turning away from God and His refuge. But God, in His great mercy, provides for all who would believe, an everlasting refuge. An everlasting hope. A hope given to us through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As Christians, because of God’s gracious gift of Jesus we have nothing to fear. We have safety from the judgement of God through our Faith in the Jesus. Safety from the punishment we deserve.

If you don’t know that refuge. If you don’t know that everlasting hope, come and chat with me afterwards or one of the pastors. we have in Jesus

Can I encourage you also to turn to God, as your refuge, in prayer? Ask him to keep you safe. Ask him to remind you of Him aways being there. Give thanks for the everlasting hope of Jesus. Maybe read Psalm 46 over and over and remind yourself that ***God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. Therefore, we have nothing to fear****.*

This brings us to our second point, that not only is God our refuge and strength, - God is Present with us, even in disaster.

*(from V4)*

***There is a river—its streams delight the city of God****, the holy dwelling place of the Most High. 5 God is within her; she will not be toppled. God will help her when the morning dawns.*

The mood of the song changes quite dramatically here from the previous verses. The Psalm goes from mountains toppling and raging seas to a serene new picture. A picture of a flowing river that provides delight to the city of God.

The psalmist would be aware that there is no actual river that ran through the temple courts, it is not a literal river. Rather, the river is a symbol which is in contrast to the first verses, involving raging waters and surging seas. Rather than destruction, the river feeds the City of God. The river symbolizes life.

We see this too in Revelation 22, where John is given the vision of a river, let me read:

*Then he showed me the river[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=rev+22&version=CSB#fen-CSB-31066a)*] of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the city’s main street. The tree of life was on each side of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations, 3 and there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.*

The river, in both these passages, symbolizes the life giving that God provides. And further confirms the Psalmists understanding of verse 2, that because of what God has done, we will not be afraid.

We also have the city of God. And not just His city, but the place where he resides. Where He dwells.

*There is a river—its streams delight* ***the city of God, the holy dwelling place of the Most High.5 God is within her; she will not be toppled. God will help her when the morning dawns.***

The psalm is also careful to point out here that there is nothing necessarily special about the city or the Holy Place by themselves. Rather, the thing that is special is that God is within her. It is the presence of God that is the special thing.

God is with us. God is present.

Now for the Israelites, the symbol that God lived with his people was the temple. The temple was significant for many reasons.

The temple was the house of worship and prayer, sacrifices were made, festivals were held there, but, most importantly, God’s presence was in the temple. It is where God was with His people.

But for us now, as Christians, we have something different. Something better.

A couple of weeks ago we remembered Pentecost, God giving of His Holy Spirit to His people.

In Acts 2, after Christ rose from the dead the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles and all believers.

This is a wonderful gift, for all of us who trust in Jesus. We are given the Spirit of the Holy God. And the Spirit, the Spirit gives us new hearts. The spirit assures us that we are Children of God. The spirit is the guarantee of our heavenly inheritance. (Eph 1.13)

The Spirit means that we are never alone. That we have God’s strength to live His way, to trust Christ. The presence of the Spirit means we don’t need to be afraid.

God is within us. God is present

And note the words here too, He is **the Most** High! In other words, He is the One who is seated on the Throne above all thrones as the One who is ordering the universe. Therefore, He is a God of power and purpose.

What an exciting thing it is to be a Christian. It doesn’t mean that you are immune from trouble. It doesn’t mean that you won’t have problems. It may mean that you will have more, but the exciting thing about it is — in the midst of trouble you know what it is to have God alive and alert within you, who is seated on the Throne of the Most High. The God who ordered the universe, who is our refuge, lives with His people. Now. God’s promised spirit is within you. Guiding you. Being your ever present refuge.

And what does that mean? Well the Psalm speaks of Nations raging, kingdoms toppling. And even though this may be happening all around you we have the Lord, who just has to speak and all else melts with just His word.

And this section of the Psalm ends with a refrain, a reminder that God is with us. A reminder that He is our refuge.

*(V7) The Lord of Armies is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah*

Here we have an emphasis on God's role as commander of the armies of heaven, His covenant relationship with the people of Israel, and His almighty power to preserve His people

As the Lord of Hosts, God commands all the armies of heaven. He can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We face no problem that He cannot solve, no temptation that He cannot defeat, and no trial that He cannot overcome.

Best of all, He is "with us." When Jesus commissioned His disciples, He promised to be with them always (Matthew 28:20), and Hebrews 13:5 assures us that He will never leave us or abandon us. God is present.

Now this section also ends with the term ‘Selah’, So let’s pause and consider.

*In 2012 18-year-old Ben Breedlove filmed a YouTube video in his hometown of Austin, Texas. The video tells of several near-death experiences and the supernatural peace Ben felt when he almost died at school. In the simple, short, silent film, he holds small, white notecards in front of his face, describing his serious heart ailment, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, which makes it difficult for his heart to pump blood normally.*

*As the video ends, the last card asks: "Do you believe in angels, or God? I do."*

*The video went viral overnight.*

*Ben wrote the following day "I cannot even begin to describe the peace, how peaceful it was," he wrote. "I will never forget that feeling or that day. I knew God was with me. He was there.”*

*Ben insisted that he knew God was with him. That God was safe. And he experienced a peace, not of this world, but in God’s presence. In God’s refuge.*

*Ben passed away a few short days after making the video.*

The Lord of Armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

This now brings us to the final point that God is a Peace bringer

Come, see the works of the Lord,
who brings devastation on the earth.
**9**He makes wars cease throughout the earth.
He shatters bows and cuts spears to pieces;
he sets wagons ablaze.
**10**“Stop fighting, and know that I am God,
exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth.”
**11**The Lord of Armies is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold. *Selah*

Now initially it might seem strange that I am speaking of God as a peace bringer when the verses here note that God brings devastation to the earth.

But the Psalm is reminding us initially to see the works of the Lord. The earlier verses of this Psalm have been noting the nations raging, kingdoms toppling. The works of the Lord that the Psalmist wants us to see is that the Lord has the power to make wars cease. And how does He do that? Through breaking the implements of war – the bow, the shield, and the chariot - or ‘wagon’ as noted here in this translation. God wants peace. He wants the fighting to stop. It might seem strange to say. Any reading of history will show that war has been common theme across the generations, even now.

But, for us there is a warning. Devastation upon the earth. As Christians we know that Jesus will return. That he will come to judge all.

And when he does, on that day, the fighting will stop. The wars will cease. But those who want to rule the world without God, without Jesus will perish. That is the devastation upon the earth.

As Psalm 2 says

**10**So now, kings, be wise;
receive instruction, you judges of the earth.
**11**Serve the Lord with reverential awe
and rejoice with trembling.
**12**Pay homage to[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+2&version=CSB#fen-CSB-13958d)] the Son or he will be angry
and you will perish in your rebellion,[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+2&version=CSB#fen-CSB-13958e)]
for his anger may ignite at any moment.
All who take refuge in him are happy.

The warning is that the son, Jesus rules. Those who want to rule the world without God, without Jesus will perish.

And, in Psalm 46, God has something to remind them of what He wants. God wants peace (v10)

***10****“Stop fighting, and know that I am God,
exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth.”*

The translation here is ‘Stop Fighting’ but I think the NIV is more helpful

 *“Be still, and know that I am God;
    I will be exalted among the nations,
    I will be exalted in the earth.”*

Yes, the Hebrew word does have the understanding of probably something more like ‘cease’ or ‘desist’ which makes sense in terms of wars and raging. But I am not sure that fully conveys what is being requested here.

When I was growing - some of you may be surprised to know - that I wasn’t always a perfect child. My brothers and I occasionally had fights. Ok, maybe a bit more than occasionally.

But the point is that many times my mum would say, “Boys, cut it out” or “stop it.” Which is fair enough. But after that, I never really had a feeling inside me that made me feel at peace. Yes, the fighting would stop after a while, but I never really felt at peace afterwards and it would take a long time for me to feel calm. To be at peace. The fight may have stopped in action, but the fight was still with me.

The Psalmist is pointing out that God does want the wars to cease. The fighting to stop. But He wants us to **be still**. To be at peace. To know who He is and that He has everything in control. Stop fighting against him and trust in Him and His refuge, His eternal refuge in Jesus.

And again, the Psalm ends with the same refrain from verse 7

***11****The Lord of Armies is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah*

A reminder that God is with us. Strong and constant.

Alicia is a mum who talks about her experience on a podcast ‘Vibrant Christian Living’. This is what she says:

*In a nutshell, my life as a mum became wrapped around helping my then 11-year-old son (who has ADHD and Autism) learn how to cope and function as he went* through *some extreme emotional issues.*

*He became nearly impossible to handle. Not just “I-don't-want-to-do-this” defiant, but yelling at me, throwing things, and constantly causing a scene in our home. It became downright impossible to do anything with him (let alone to help our three other kids who were then 9, 6 and 2).*

*I felt incredibly helpless. Every single moment of every day was an all-out battle. I was utterly spent–emotionally, spiritually and physically.*

*To top it off, my hard-working husband traveled nearly 50 percent of the time. He was incredibly supportive, but he wasn't physically there a lot. So that meant I spent a lot of time alone in the trenches of this trial, carrying this immense emotional and physical burden on my own.*

*Eventually our precious son was hospitalized for several days. It required loads of trust and faith in God in order to bring him there, but we knew it was the best option for him.*

*Afterward, he was assigned to a special therapy 3 days a week for 4 hours at a time (at a location over an hour from our home). Getting him to and from therapy (while finding childcare and rides for my other 3 kids) was extremely taxing in itself.*

*I felt like a zombie many days as I spent every last ounce of energy trying to keep life going for all four of the kids (who of course still needed my constant attention).*

*God became my only solace. I prayed continually and asked God to help my faith to be strong and to even have joy during this parenting trial.*

*God taught me many things about moment-by-moment faith during that life challenge. Specifically, God taught me that He is to be relied upon. He is a refuge in hard times. When the world is upside down I can turn to Him always.*

God really is your refuge and strength. Only he rules every location where your trouble exists. Only he has the power to rescue and deliver you. Only he has the grace you need to face what you are facing. Only he holds the wisdom that, in trouble, you so desperately need. Only he is in, with, and for you at all times. He is the refuge of refuges. Turn to Him.