

Lord of the Armies

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 September 2017

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] 46. The title of the song is To the Choir Master of the Sons of Korah, according to Alamo, a song.

It's a beautiful song. It's a very helpful song, an encouraging and strengthening song. I'm eager to share it with you all.

I think it'll be encouraging for us all. So Psalm 46, I'll read the first 11 verses. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

Selah. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her.

[1 : 10] She shall not be moved. God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage. The kingdoms totter. He utters his voice. The earth melts.

The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah. Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes war cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the chariots with fire. Be still and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Selah. In Wittenberg, Germany, which is called the birthplace of the Reformation, because that's the place where Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the chapel church, sparking debate into the practices of the Catholic Church that needed to be reformed.

[2 : 15] And we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation next month, so it's even more apt. And if you look on the top, and I've not been there, but I've heard this, that on the tower of the castle church, at the very top around it is written in German the phrase, a mighty fortress is our God.

That's the title of Luther's most famous hymn that he wrote. And it's often called the battle hymn of the Reformation, because it strengthened him.

And historians record that Martin Luther, well, Martin Luther was excommunicated by the Pope, right? So he was opposed by the Catholic Church, which is one of the most powerful institutions of that time.

And he was also outlawed by the Holy Roman Emperor. And so he was, and because of his role in the Protestant Reformation.

And as he was doing that, he's basically being pursued on all sides and by the two of the most powerful institutions in the world at the time. And he was often basically discouraged and fearful.

[3 : 25] And in his worst days, it is said that he often turned to his friend, Melancthon, who was another Protestant reformer, and said to him, let's sing the 46th and let the devil do his worst.

And it's a song that he turned to for comfort, for faith, to be built up in trust in God amidst all the things, even all the things around him seem to be crumbling. And none of us have the world's two most powerful authorities and institutions after us at the moment, but we all experience our share of trouble, right?

To varying degrees. And Psalm 46 can help us too. They could teach us that we can rest securely in the midst of any trouble because God is our immovable fortress.

That's really the main point of the psalm. And so it, first, verses 1 to 3 talks about God's protection. Verses 4 to 7 about God's presence. And then verses 8 to 11, we see God's pronouncement.

So God's protection, presence, and pronouncement. And verse 1 is the thesis statement of the entire psalm. It says, God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

[4 : 33] So God is our refuge. Such a comforting image. He's our shelter. So imagine yourself in the field of battle, right? Just bombs and bullets raining down on you.

And you flee to a bunker. And all of a sudden, immediate relief. That's refuge, right? Or imagine yourself in a storm. You're caught up in a storm. And pouring rain and howling winds.

And all of a sudden, you enter your house and shut the door behind you. And it's quiet. And immediate relief. That's refuge, right? God is our refuge. And He's also our strength.

It says God doesn't merely protect us. He also empowers us, that means, right? He's not just our refuge. He's also our strength. He empowers us for whatever we are facing. And in this way, God is a very present help in trouble.

And this phrase can be more literally translated as a help in need that is surely found. That's what it literally says. A help in need that is surely found. In short, it's telling us that God's not far off, right?

[5 : 33] He's not aloof in times of our need. He's not distant or unapproachable or indifferent to our troubles. But He's very present. He can be found.

He can surely be found in our times of need. That's what that means. He's a very present help. And so God is for us and He is always with us. And therefore, verses 2 to 3 continue, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

Selah. So therefore, that's the reason why we can have this, right? So because God is our refuge and strength, because God is our very present help, we will not fear, right? The psalmist is saying.

And then he describes a pair of cataclysmic, literally cataclysmic events, right? It's the mountains be moved into the heart. The earth gives way and the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.

So that's, he's describing a huge earthquake, basically so big and so widespread that it seems like even the mountains themselves are crumbling into the sea. And then usually when there is an earthquake like that, especially near the sea, tsunamis follow, right?

[6 : 42] So that's, and then he describes the waves. The waves, waters roar and foam. The waves breaking. Though the mountains tremble at the swelling of the waves. So this is like, he's describing a pair of events that basically is the worst thing that could possibly happen in terms of a natural disaster, right?

It's, I mean, it's particularly relevant as we think about this in the hurricane season. And so what he, the reason why he chooses these examples is he wants to show us that even in the most extreme cases, even in situations that seems to be completely out of our control, and it seems to be utterly devastating, that we can rest securely because God is our immovable fortress.

And that's why he picks these extreme examples to tell us that even in the midst of this, we will not fear. And so then we can ask ourselves, what is our trouble at the moment, right?

What is our need, right? And is it, it could be a natural disaster for some people, right? It could be a professional disaster, right? It could be an interpersonal disaster, maybe relationships that are strained with family or friends.

And no matter how bad the situation is, he's saying that God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. And then having reminded us of God's protection, the psalmist turns to God's presence in verses 47 of Psalm 46.

[8 : 08] There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved.

God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage. The kingdoms totter. He utters his voice. The earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Selah. There's a contrast of imagery here between verses 3 and 4. In verse 3, we see the destructive raging seas. And in verse 4, we see this nourishing, calming, refreshing, peaceful river.

And the difference between those two images is the presence of God, right? The reason why we have protection is because of God's presence. Because God dwells in the city of God. It's the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of her. And this image of the river really is, it's something that occurs throughout the Old Testament. So the original image, of course, is the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2.10, which is described as, now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, right?

[9 : 11] So Eden represents the presence of God. And so later, when Prophet Ezekiel prophesies about the fulfillment of the kingdom of God, he describes it as the new temple as having a river that flows out of it, right?

So it's this mention of the river whose streams make glad the city of God is a reference to that, the presence of God that nourishes and calms. And that's why the city of God, it says in verse 5, shall not be moved.

God will help her when morning dawns. It's, I wonder what morning dawns means. It could, of course, simply mean that when a daybreak will soon come and things will get better.

But I think it's more specifically an allusion to the Exodus. Because in Exodus 14.27, the exact same Hebrew phrase, when morning dawns, is used to say that the Red Sea, which was split in two to let the Israelites cross, came, caved back into itself and drowned the Egyptians.

And because he routed them and gave the Israelites the victory and let them leave. And it happened when morning dawned. And so it's, it's hearkening the memory of the Israelites and saying, remember God delivered you at the 11th hour.

[10 : 24] Remember you were hemmed in on both sides with seemingly, seemingly impassable waters ahead of you and the seemingly invincible Egyptians behind you. And then God's saying, but when morning dawned, God delivered you.

Right? And saying, so when morning dawns, it's, her help will come from the Lord. And the city of God shall not be moved. And there's a very insightful wordplay here in verse five when it says, she shall not be moved.

The word move actually occurs three times in this psalm. The first time is in verse two. It says, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea. And then again in verse six where it says, the nations rage, the kingdoms totter.

It's actually the same Hebrew word that's translated earlier as move. So what it's, it's drawing a contrast here. Even when the mountains are moved, the mountains, seemingly immovable mountains are moved. Even when seemingly invincible kingdoms are moved, the city of God will not be moved because God will help us when morning dawns.

There's another wordplay going on in verse three and six. It says that the waters roar and the nations rage. Same words in the Hebrew. And so our circumstances in our lives, the troubles that we face, the needs that we have might roar and rage against us.

[11 : 40] But then notice the contrast in verse six has simply says, God utters his voice, the earth melts. Literally just makes a sound and the earth melts.

Everything around us might be raging and roaring, but God's not panicking. He doesn't have to roar or rage. He simply utters a sound and the earth melts. That's his power. That's why the city of God cannot be moved.

And that's why verse seven praises God in this way. And it's a refrain that occurs again later in the psalm. The Lord of hosts is with us.

The God of Jacob is our fortress. The Lord of hosts literally means Lord of the armies. He is the Lord of the armies. He's a warrior God.

And it just reminds me of the scene in 2 Kings 6 when the king of Aram plots to kill Elisha, the prophet, and sends a whole army to kill this one prophet.

[12 : 39] And this prophet is just with his attendant. And when the army comes, his attendant sees the army and he's fearful. And he says in verse 15, Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city.

And his servant said to Elisha, Alas, my master, what shall we do? Right? This is often how we feel in our lives, right? We feel outnumbered, outmatched, outmaneuvered.

And then Elijah responds this way, Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. Then Elijah prayed and said, O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.

And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elijah. That's what Psalm 46 is trying to do for us, to open the eyes as God did for that servant.

When we feel overwhelmed, when our circumstances seem bad and we feel in trouble and we're in desperate need, to remember that the Lord of hosts, the warrior God and his armies is all about us, is for us and with us.

[13 : 51] And so the God of Jacob is also our fortress, right? It's this unassailable, inaccessible fortress perched atop an imposing mountain range. We are safe with him.

We're secure with him. That's why we can rest securely in the midst of any trouble because God is our immovable fortress. And then, having seen God's protection and having seen his presence with us in the concluding section in verses 8 to 10, God makes a pronouncement, a final authoritative pronouncement.

I'll read verses 8 to 10 with me. It says, Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear.

He burns the chariots with fire. Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. This is a very frequently quoted verse, right?

Be still and know that I am God. Often we think of it and we imagine ourselves, you know, by a calm beach and meditating or something like that. Be still, right? Know that I am God.

[14 : 57] But it's, the nuance in the original context is actually quite different because it's not a calming assurance. It's a command. It's be still, right?

It's a strong word. It's the same word that's used in Exodus 5 to describe Moses' demand of Pharaoh to say, let the Israelites go. Let them go. That's the same word that's used here.

Let loose. Let it go. Seize. Desist. That's really what he's saying. It's not just be still. It's be still.

Stop it. Stop trying to maneuver everyone and manipulate everything. Stop being so tight-fisted with your life trying to maintain desperate control of everything around you.

Cease. Stop. Be still. And know that I am God. That's what he's saying. So that you might have a lot of problems in your life but nothing is bigger than God. You might have a lot of enemies in your life but no one is stronger than God.

[15 : 56] And so he says, be still and know that I am God and I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. And this is... And so...

And then he repeats the refrain in verse 11 and concludes, the Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah. And so if this psalm is true then we can rest securely in the midst of any trouble because God is our immovable fortress.

Unless we're not on God's side. Because then the whole story changes. If we sin against him, if we rebel against him and live according to our will and not according to his will, then of course God is not with us.

He is against us. And the Lord of hosts himself opposes us. And that alone is a fearful prospect from which there is no escape. No one else can be a comfort and help to us.

And the truth is that we've all sinned against God and we've all rebelled against him. And God who is holy can't be with what is profane. He who is righteous can't be with what is unrighteous. And so God has to.

[17 : 09] He must oppose us and our sins. And so the God who breaks the bow and shatters the spear who burns the chariots with fire now opposes us in his just and fiery wrath.

And to whom then can we turn for refuge if God was supposed to be a refuge himself is opposing us. And in the midst of this cosmic divine trouble not just trouble with nature not just trouble with nations but this cosmic divine trouble in the midst of an eternal need that we could never hope to meet our God proves himself to be a very present help even in the midst of that.

And in love he sends his only son Jesus Christ to save us and Jesus became a man and he knew all our infirmities he lived a perfect life of obedience and died a sinner's death in our place bearing God's wrath and our sins were imputed to him and his righteousness was imputed to us so that we can be reconciled to God and that's why Isaiah prophesied in chapter 7 verse 14 of Isaiah about Christ saying therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel which translated means God with us that phrase is found in this psalm twice in the refrain when he says the Lord of hosts is with us Emmanuel means with us Emmanuel is God with us it's because of Christ because we're in Christ we can be assured of the promises of

Psalm 46 once again that God's our protection his presence is with us and that we can be still in the midst of the raging seas we can rest in him in the midst of any trouble because God is our immovable fortress with that let's turn to prayer maybe we could sing another song great yeah sure thank you thank you