

This morning we're continuing our series in the Psalms called Answering God. As you probably know, the Psalms are mostly prayers. In fact, many of them are the prayers of King David of Israel. In the Psalms, David and others are answering God as they respond to all the different ways God has acted in their lives. Sometimes the response is one of lament, as we learned last week. At other times, it's one of thanksgiving and praise. At still other times, it's one of confession of sin.

Today we're looking at what we might call a "Psalm of Confident Trust." There are many of these. It's like the writers of these psalms are experiencing something hard and threatening, but they come to God, and even though it's hard, they express their confidence and trust in Him.

That's not easy to do. Some of us are struggling with that right now. Unfortunately, we're getting more and more accustomed to hearing tragic stories of people who've gone through unspeakable pain and loss as a result of the Coronavirus. I think of the Fusco family in New Jersey. Grace Fusco and six of her adult children fell ill after attending a family gathering. She and three of her children have since died of COVID-19. Can you imagine? I think of over 50,000 people who've died in our country. I think of our first responders and health care workers. By the way, if you're one of them, thank you. I know most of us aren't experiencing this kind of tragedy first-hand, but they are, and it's very real.

The question is, how do we answer God in times like this? Let's look at Psalm 46.

**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. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see 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. He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be**

**exalted in the earth." The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Psalm 46**

### **The circumstances of the world are chaotic**

You can see the psalmist is answering God in a time of chaos and turmoil. He describes this chaos in the world of nature. He speaks of a time when *"the earth gives way, and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."* Several images are used here. The earth opens its jaws in an earthquake. A volcano erupts out of the ocean. Mountains are tossed into the sea. Tidal waves slam into a coastline. It's all very scary!

But that's not all. He also describes chaos and turmoil in the world of nations. He says, *"The nations are in an uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts."* The image here is of angry nations, kingdoms that totter and disintegrate like wax figures under a hot sun. In verse 9, he speaks of a frightening arsenal of weapons used to hurt and kill: wars, bows, spears, shields. The nations of the world are no less chaotic today than they were then. There's fighting in Afghanistan and Yemen. There's been a Syrian civil war since 2011. I was in Rwanda just a couple of years ago, where almost a million members of the Tutsi tribe were killed by Hutus. There's also chaos in our cities — murders, robberies, domestic violence, and drug abuse.

The question I want to ask is, "What do you in the midst in the midst of that kind of chaos and turmoil?" We feel that more than ever right now. Again, how do you answer God in times like this? The psalmist tells us how, and it may surprise you.

### **In the midst of the chaos, we can relax**

Look down at verse 10. It says, *"Be still and know that I am God."* Another way to put it is "Relax!" Can you believe that? That's what he tells us to do — be still, relax. Or maybe another way to put it today is, "Chill." I learned something this week. In the 1870s, you could actually take a chill pill. There was a book for housewives called *Housekeeping in Old Virginia*, with a recipe for homemade pills called "chill pills" to help with intermittent fever. I'm sure some of you moms and dads of little kids who've been sheltering in place could use a chill pill right now!

Oddly enough, that's kind of what the psalmist is saying, "Chill out! Relax! Another translation says, "Cease striving!" Now I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that whoever wrote this must be writing from an ivory tower. That's the last thing I'd

do in a time like this. I know that's true for me. Relaxing is hard for me. I'm an intense person.

But I'm telling you that's what he says. And it's not him who says it; it's God. If you read the whole of verse 10, you see it's God who's speaking. God says, *"Be still and know that I am God."*

What does it mean to be still? It doesn't mean being lazy or apathetic. It doesn't mean sitting around and do nothing. The word "still" is a translation of the Hebrew word *rapa*. Hebrew scholars tell us this word means "to let your arms down to your side." Metaphorically we want to lift our arms to defend ourselves. Think about how vulnerable you feel when you drop your arms. That's what God says. It's like, "Let go of your weapons. There is no need to fight; no need to rush around frantically. You can relax." This is exactly the opposite of what we so often do in the face of danger. When threatened, most of us get busy. We get to work and pick up our weapons rather than let go of them. But the psalmist says we can drop our arms and our weapons, and relax. Again, he's not saying to sit around doing nothing; he's talking more about the posture of our heart. You can have tremendous demands on your life and have a heart that is still before the Lord.

It's like Jesus in the boat with his disciples. A massive storm hits, and the disciples are bailing water and trying to get control of the situation. What's Jesus doing? He's sleeping. When he wakes, he looks into their panicked faces and says, *"Where is your faith?"* In other words, "Be still and know that I am God."

Or fast forward a couple of years, and he's in the Garden of Gethsemane. It's the night of his betrayal and arrest. The Roman guards come to arrest him, and Peter pulls out his sword and lops off one of the guards' ears. What did Jesus say to Peter? *"Put your sword away."* In other words, "Be still, Peter. Relax. Drop your arms."

How can he say that? How can he tell us not to fear and to relax when we consider the kind of world we live in; the kind of uncertainties we live with? Is he telling us to bury our heads in the sand, to deny reality, keep a stiff upper lip and pretend everything is fine? Is he saying to just stay busy, to stay preoccupied with other things, and you won't worry so much about what might happen?

### **We can relax because we know who God is**

No! The answer is God. He says to be still and "know that I am God." This relaxing stillness comes out of knowing God. This knowing isn't just head knowledge. It is also experiential. You see, the best kind of knowing is knowing that's personal and intimate. When you know God in an intimate way, you can relax; you can be still. You know and trust the very thing he says in the second part of the verse: *"I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth."* The reason we can be still and relax is His victory is guaranteed. God will be exalted.

In fact, throughout this psalm, the psalmist even gets very specific and tells us there are three things we can know about God in relation to ourselves to help us be still and relax; three bedrock convictions we can stand on.

### **We can relax because of God's protection**

The first conviction is of God's protection. He says in verse 1, *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear..."* Later in the psalm, he twice says, *"the God of Jacob is our fortress."* When you experience fear, worry, or anxiety, where do you run? Do you run to your best friend? Do you run to a bottle? Do you run to the mall or to the internet?

God is a place for us to run; a place to hide; a safe place to find shelter from the chaos and turmoil around us. He's a fortress where the attacks of the enemy can't break through. We're not strong, but he's strong. As we run to him, we find he's an *"ever present help in trouble."* His help comes right away. Verse 5 says it comes *"at the break of day."* We don't have to muddle through half the day, or half our lives before God shows up, rubbing his eyes and wondering if there's anything he can do to help.

Sometimes running to God and not elsewhere seems like foolishness to those around us. But it's the safest place to be. In the fall of 1996, wildfires threatened the campus of Pepperdine U. The fires moved quickly, and the campus was almost completely surrounded. During the fire, all students were urged to stay on campus. Pepperdine's campus is surprisingly safe in the event of a wildfire, and leaving by car posed a greater risk than staying in the safety of the field house.

Having the students stay was controversial. People thought the campus was the most dangerous place to be. The media began broadcasting stories about "dimwitted administrators holding students hostage." Parents demanded their children be let go. The drama peaked as a reporter put Pepperdine's president on TV and asked, "What would you tell parents whose children are in that field house tonight?" He said the field house was the safest place on campus. Then he said something no one expected: "My own kids are in there, and if it wasn't safe, they wouldn't be there." The complaints stopped.

Despite appearances, God is the safest place to hide. You might say his own kids are in there. Some people say, "I ran to him, and I cried out to him, but he didn't help me. He didn't protect me." But maybe he did. Maybe the help was right there, but you were looking for something different. We tend to focus on a temporary fix; sometimes, God's help doesn't fix the problem, but he fixes us. God's protection comes in many forms.

### **We can relax because of God's presence**

The second conviction that allows us to relax has to do with God's presence. He says in verses 4-5 that, *"There is a river whose streams*

*make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her; she will not fall; God will help her at break of day."*

The psalmist moves from the image of a place of refuge to the image of a river flowing through a city. In the ancient world, important cities were built on great rivers. Many great cities like New York and London have rivers flowing through them. In the book of Revelation, John describes a vision of the New Jerusalem with *"the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city"* (Rev. 22:1). Here the psalm points to the city of Jerusalem. But the river is a metaphor, a metaphor for the presence of God. That's why he says, *"God is within her."*

Today, that city of God, that holy dwelling of God is us—you and me. When you put your trust in Christ, God's holy presence rushes into your life like a river. Jesus said, *"Whoever believes in me...streams of living water will flow from within him"* (Jn 7:38). The psalmist says this river makes us glad. All hell can break loose in the world, but there's a joy that flows from within. It also brings security. He says in verse 5, *"she will not fall."* Though mountains fall (v. 2) and Kingdom's fall (v. 6), the one who's inhabited by God will not fall.

The river brings gladness and security. Some of my fondest childhood memories are those by a river. For two weeks out of the year, the Yuba River was our home and our playground. We swam in it. We fished in it. We rode on it. We skipped rocks across it. We slept beside it. We respected the river, but we also trusted it. When I think of that river, I think of security; I think of freedom from worry; I think of carefree joy. When this God flows into your life; when he's present, fear is swept away, and there's joy.

### **We can relax because of God's power**

We can relax and be still because of God's protection—he's our refuge. We can be still and relax because of his presence—he's our river-like source of joy and security. Look at verses 8-9.

**Come and see 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 psalmist invites us to come and see the works of the Lord. His works are unadvertised but also inescapable if we just look. They're everywhere. They're marvelous. So he invites us to come and see God's powerful works.

God's power is seen over nature when he points to the "desolations he has wrought on the earth." Every desolation on the earth isn't directly from God, but God is sovereign over nature, and he uses it for his purposes. Even something like the Coronavirus he can use for his purposes.

But it's also seen over nations when he says, *"He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth."* The image here is of a warrior. God is a powerful warrior, and under his hand, the world is disarmed. When he walks across the battlefield, no one dares to lift a hand against him. He's the Lord Almighty, the Lord of hosts, the one who commands armies of angels.

### **Because of God's victory in Jesus, we can relax**

For us, this is where Jesus comes in. You see, in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, God demonstrates his power over all that threatens to undo us. Through the cross and resurrection, Jesus says, "I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth. Sin couldn't hold me down. The devil couldn't hold me down. Death couldn't hold me down. Nothing can hold me down. So what do you have to fear?"

You don't have to fear sin. Sin separates us from God. Sin brings judgment. But in the cross and resurrection, God the Father said, "The death of my Son paid for it all. The death of my Son was enough. Through him, you can be forgiven. You need not fear my judgment for sin because I've already judged it."

You don't have to fear the devil. He's still working. At times, it seems like he has the upper hand. But as Paul said to the church at Rome who was in the midst of terrible persecution, *"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet"* (Rom. 16:20). His doom is sure. So when Satan reminds you of your past, you need to remind him of his future!

Best of all, you don't have to fear death. Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies"* (Jn 11:25). That's his promise. In all these things we fear, what's the worst thing that could happen? We could die. Someone we love could die. Jesus says, "No need to fear that. Relax! I took care of that too."

You know how all the sports we can get now on the TV or radio are re-broadcasts? Recently I was listening on the radio to Super Bowl XXIII when the 49ers beat the Bengals. I recall watching that game in 1989 and being so anxious. I recall the Niners were down 16-13. They were on their own eight-yard line with under three minutes left. I was curled up in the fetal position. But here I was a few weeks ago listening to the re-broadcast and guess what? I started to get nervous again. But then I caught myself and thought, "Why am I nervous? I know how the game ends! Joe Montana will march them right down the field and throw a touchdown to John Taylor with 34 seconds left to win the game. I can relax!

Guess what? It's no different for us. We know how the game ends. We know who wins — not sin, not the devil, and not death. So you can relax. You can be still. You can take a chill pill.

In the 1500's something called the Black Plague hit Europe hard. This was the same virus that killed 60 percent of Europe in the

1300s. During that time, Martin Luther faced one of the greatest trials of his life as the Plague threatened to kill Luther's son. In the midst of this personal conflict, Luther found himself contemplating the promises of Psalm 46. Though known to be an expert on the Psalms, he now found himself living them as never before. Many times during this dark time, he'd turn to his co-worker, Philipp Melanchthon, and say, "Come, Philipp, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm." He wrote this about it:

**"We sing this psalm to the praise of God, because He is with us and powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends His church and His word against all fanatical spirits, against the gates of hell, against the implacable hatred of the devil, and against all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and sin."**

And so, I say to you, "Come, Church, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm." You know God's protection, his presence, and his power. You know who wins this game. You can be still. You can relax. You can stop striving. God says, "I'm your refuge and strength. I'm your fortress. You have nothing to fear. My presence in your life can make you both glad and secure. I'll fight your battles and deal with your enemies. So get out of my way. Drop your arms. Step back. Let me be God. Don't try and do my job for me. Be still, and let me go to work."

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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