

Praying With The Psalmists: A Study in the Psalms, Psalm 46  
Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008

**Intro:**

Psalm 13 is a short Psalm of lament that highlights the reality of our life in turmoil, given over to our Lord. Jesus clearly indicated that, "...in me you may have **peace**. In the world you will have **tribulation**; but take heart, I have overcome the world." This verse often is misinterpreted to apply to a physical overcoming of all our problems, but this is not only unbiblical, it is not our experience. As we get older, life poses some real conundrums as we encounter the reality of its harshness. If we live our lives with the viewpoint that the prize is the stuff of this world, we will continually be devastated by its cruelty. Only God can ultimately deliver the goods even when we feel like that is impossible. All too often our foundation (which is based on shifting sand) and the "goods" we are hoping for are a product of our idolatry and desire for a comfortable life, rather than hope in God. We look to family, employment, money, politics, education, human reason, etc. instead of trusting in the creator God of the universe!

In our Psalm today, we will see that only God can be our ultimate refuge and strength in harsh times. We cannot look to any other entity (human or otherwise) for our peace.

**From the Head...**

God Is Our Refuge and Strength In the Midst of Natural Disaster (Psalms 46:1-7)

In the midst of any pain and disaster that the world can give us, God is our constant joy and peace. Verse 1 is the centerpiece of this passage, and governs the entirety of the passage. It is because of this reality that "*we will not fear*." Many cultural anthropologists believe that humans assuaged their natural fears by creating gods to appease those fears and stop the natural disasters that they are experiencing. There is probably truth somewhere in that statement, in that we humans still turn to our idols to mitigate our fears instead of the river of life that is always present and can tame the seas (seas are often used in scripture as a metaphor for chaos). In **John 7:37-39** we see that Christ is this river, who "*Makes glad the city of God*." Our hope is ultimately in the "City of God," which is a big theme in the Old Testament, but is a culminating theme in the New Testament (See **Revelation 21:1-10**). We are told by the psalmist to pause after the first two verses to meditate on this truth (the placement of **Selah**), then he continues by giving us a more advanced reason to not fear. "*God is in the midst of His city*," which ought to give us hope in a very fallen and broken world. The segment ends by highlighting verse 1 and summarizing the truth that God is present in our trouble. He is the only fortress we can trust, which leads to the second time in this passage that we are told to meditate.

God Is Our Strength and Refuge In the Midst of Human Disasters (Psalms 46:8-11)

This second segment turns to the reality that human-made disasters are just as painful, and equally consumed by the presence of God. He is the one who brings the "*desolations on the earth*," and the one who is able to stop them. He alone is in control. No other entity is capable of changing world events and world disasters, because there is nothing outside of His control. And the reason for that is He is God, and will be "*exalted among the nations*," and in the earth. He ends this segment in the same way he does in verse 7, and once again calls us to meditate on this clear truth.

**...to the Heart**

In our sinful state we demand flesh and blood to rule our kingdom, and the fact is, flesh and blood (as great as it can be), will always fail us. Israel wanted a flesh and blood king to rule their land, not this invisible, ostensible absentee god. But three times in this passage, we are called to stop and meditate on the reality that only God can help us when everything around us is crumbling and seemingly hopeless. From a biblical point of view, as believers we should never live in a hopeless state. It is possible to be grieved and hurting, but never fearful and hopeless. Fear and hopelessness come when we move away from the truth that God is with us, and He is our fortress!

**Books for Further Study:** Baker Commentary on the Old Testament, Wisdom and Psalms, Psalms Vol. 1-2, John Goldingay; Answering God: The Psalms As Tools For Prayer, Eugene Peterson; The Message of the Psalms: A theological Commentary, Walter Brueggemann; Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible, Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Praying the Psalms, Thomas Merton; Bread in the Wilderness, Thomas Merton, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1, Peter C. Craigie, New International Biblical Commentary, Psalms, Craig C. Broyles, The Book of Psalms, Robert Alter, Psalms Volume 1, James Montgomery Boice, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, Phillip Keller

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