

The Presence of God

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: 23 January 2013

Preacher: Jonathan Dirrim

[0:00] Psalm 46. I'm going to go ahead and read it.

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 in foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

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. 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 his spear. He burns the chariots with fire. Be still and know that I am God.

[1:15] 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. A great psalm.

I've titled this one, The Presence of God. The Presence of God. A few things from background information as we start this psalm. The historical placement of it, when it was written.

Most scholars believe it's sometime after 700 BC, which would speak of deliverance from the hand of Sennacherib and the Assyrians.

They would be praying for this. So the authorship, it says in the heading, says to the choir master of the sons of Korah.

So some say, well, sons of Korah wrote this psalm. And that's most likely the case. But also some say Isaiah or Hezekiah because of the time placement.

[2:15] Because Isaiah and Hezekiah were both alive at the time of the Assyrian captivity.

Some people say, if it says of the sons of Korah, it means that they sang it. Some say, well, no, it means they wrote it. But I think the sons of Korah probably did write it. The perspective of it, you'll notice there's a lot of plurality of pronouns in here.

God is our refuge and strength. Help us in our time of trouble. We will not be moved. So it's definitely a psalm of corporate worship.

It's a psalm of corporate worship. So they would come together and sing this to one another as they worshipped the Lord. Alright.

Now, in the title, let's go over some of these terms real quick. To the choir master or the chief musician. I think he sang it to the skilled individual in charge of teaching others.

[3:21] And King David installed this office. You'll notice this was in some of his later psalms versus the earlier ones. Because they didn't have the skilled musician at the time doing all the things in the temple.

In 1 Chronicles 15, verses 16 and 22, it says this. David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint the brothers as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy.

And then verse 22, So, in seminary, and you're going into music, to have you study this a little bit.

This is where your particular position in worship kind of originated when David installed it at the temple. And then also, not only a chief musician, but of the sons of Korah.

They were also musicians, or also folks who worked in the temple. 1 Chronicles 9, 19 and 33. Now the Korahites were in charge of the work of the service, keepers of the thresholds of the tent, as their fathers had been in charge of the camp of the Lord, keepers of the entrance.

[4:41] And now these, the singers, the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites, were in the chambers of the temple, free from other service. For they were on duty day and night. So all they

did was sing praises to the Lord, play instruments to the Lord.

Okay. So, you had to give them something to sing. So, they wrote them a song. So, all right. Historically, they served various offices in the tabernacle and temple, but some were specifically designated to music.

And then you have the next phrase, according to Alamo. Nobody really knows what that term means, but probably a musical term, or a tune name, or maybe a special instruction.

The Hebrew word normally indicates girls or young maidens. So, that really throws it like, well, what does that mean? And some scholars have said, well, maybe it was sung at a higher pitch. Maybe a higher tune or something.

Or the tune name was a higher tune than the other ones were. And then the last instruction is just great. A song. This is to be sung. To be sung frequently.

[5:50] And Martin Luther actually did. A mighty fortress. The old hymn is built chiefly from this psalm.

And I'll be referring to it as we go along through this. Okay, let's get into it. So, verse 1. God is our refuge and strength.

A very present help in trouble. So, verse 1, I see imminent salvation. Imminent salvation. We have God here.

It says, God is our refuge and strength. Not our armies or fortresses. But God. Psalm 20, verse 7 says, Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

So, our boast is to be in the Lord. This is Jeremiah 9, 23 and 24 says, Thus says the Lord, Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man boast in his might.

[6:52] Let not the rich man boast in his riches, But let him who boasts boast in this, That he understands and knows me. That I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, Justice, and righteousness in the earth.

For in these things I delight, says the Lord. So, God is our refuge and strength. So, what is a refuge? A shelter, protection from danger.

Places of refuge were key in times of trial, of war, pestilence, whatever you think of. It's a place of shelter, protection from whatever is plaguing you.

And it says here, The Lord is standing against the enemy. So, God is our refuge and strength. The strength is talking about our vigor, our power, firmness, and courage.

And it's not what we do ourselves, but the true strength belongs to the Lord. So, we'll read that again. And God, not us, not anybody we can rely on, but God himself is our refuge and strength.

[7:59] And it says, A very present help in trouble. A very present help. He will not forsake us in our time of need. And I loved one commentator, as he put it.

He is more present than the trouble itself. It's a way of looking at it. You see the trouble out there. But if you look a little closer, well, God's in between that. God is very present.

More present than the trouble itself. And trouble could be anything. It describes people in tight places. But in light of when this psalm was written, the Assyrian captivity, they were in a tight place. They were in trouble. Listen to the words of Isaiah. Isaiah said to them, Say to your master, thus says the Lord, Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me.

Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land. And I will make him fall by the sword in his own land. He shall not come into this city, or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege mound against it.

[9:12] By the way that he came, by the same he shall return. And he shall not come into this city, declares the Lord, for I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake, and for the sake of my servant David.

This is Isaiah talking to the children of Israel, when they're scared of what's going to happen to them. This is also why some people think Isaiah wrote the psalm, because it's very similar to that passage in 2 Kings.

So God is a 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.

And then he has the word Selah in there. So verses 2 and 3, we have revelation and response. Revelation and response.

He's just told us something about himself. God is our very present help, our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, because we have this knowledge, in response to who God has revealed himself to be, therefore, we will not fear.

[10 : 25] If you really thought about that, how irrational it is to fear. If we believe verse 1, it could end the psalm right there, couldn't it?

But he has to kind of help us through a little more. It's very irrational to fear. But what it is, it's an act of rejection of despair. The more you fear, the more you get all tense inside, or get just knocked off what you're doing during the day, because of what's happening to you, the more you despair, the less you trust God that he knows what he's doing.

So he's saying, keep your eyes on the Lord here. He's very present. He's closer than the trouble. And it's an act of rejection, of despair. And then he says, though, though disasters loom.

And this is very powerful imagery, that the earth gives way. That's an earthquake, right? Though mountains be moved, a result of an earthquake, or a volcano, or something like that.

It's moving to the sea. And so it's roaring, it's foaming, it's swelling. The mountains tremble. They break apart in the sea. So, let's say you're watching all this.

[11 : 44] How are you going to stop any of that? You can't. In fact, you're probably kind of shaking where you're at. Am I okay here? The man is powerless to stop these events.

We can't do anything about it. And then, he says, think about that. Selah, meditate on these things. What seems unmovable, unlikely, terrible, irresolvable, irreparable, catastrophic, disastrous, doomed, whatever else you can put in there. God is our refuge and strength, in the face of that.

Here's a great, great quote from Spurgeon. In the midst of such a scene, the music may swell, may well come to a pause, both to give the singer's breath, and ourselves time for meditation.

So he's saying, you're singing along in this psalm, and you come to the word, Selah, but you've got to stop and think a minute. We are in no hurry, but can sit us down and wait, while earth dissolves, and mountains rock, and oceans roar.

[12 : 55] Ours is not the headlong rashness, which passes for courage. We can calmly confront the danger, and meditate upon terror, dwelling on its separate items, and united forces.

The pause is not an exclamation of dismay, but merely a rest in music. We do not suspend our song in alarm, but retune our harps with the liberation amidst the tumult of the storm.

It were well if all of us could say, Selah, under tempestuous trials. But alas, too often we speak in our haste, lay our trembling hands bewildered among the strings, strike the lyre with a rude crash, and mar the melody of our life's song.

It's a great imagery there. During times of trouble, keep praising. Keep preparing your heart.

There's going to be time for greater praising just around the corner.

Don't be caught unready to praise Him whenever the deliverance comes. And we want to praise Him with all we have. Okay.

[14 : 03] Well, verse 4, There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. Well, verse 4, we have indwelling grace.

Indwelling grace. It says, There is a river. A river. A river. Well, water was a precious commodity back in those days, and it is today as well, as we've just been talking about.

Now, Jerusalem was not built on a river, was it? But King Hezekiah had built an underground water system from the spring of Gihon and Kidron to the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem.

Now, at the time when the Syrians were coming to take over, surrounded Jerusalem, they could have cut off that water supply. And it was a very real problem at any time if anybody had come to surround Jerusalem.

So, talking about a river in the city is an interesting imagery here. God is their source of life, supernaturally sustaining them.

[15 : 10] So this is a picture of what God is doing for them. It's a picture of grace that's also promised for the future. The new heaven, the new earth, it talks about Jerusalem, it talks about a river flowing from the sanctuary in Jerusalem, right?

Well, there's no river there now, so what is it? That's the picture of the Lord making fruitful everything that He goes about and does. Ezekiel 47 talks about this, but I just put in Zechariah 14a. It says, On that day, living waters shall flow out of Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea, and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter.

So this river never runs dry. It's always there sustaining and being a source of life for the people. So, and this river, of course, makes glad.

Joy comes from the Lord. Life comes from the streams of this river. So, His presence there, this indwelling presence, this indwelling grace, brings results.

[16:20] joy, life. And it also contrasts with the raging destructive waters of the sea we just read about in verse 3. But it makes glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

The city is dedicated to His praise. The city is glorified by His presence. So, you can kind of look at the words both ways.

City of God, it means like, well, we are about praising God. On the other side, of God, of the Most High, it is identified by, created by, sustained by, omnipotent God.

It's all about Him. So this river, with the picture of the Lord, giving grace to His people, brings joy to His people so that they praise Him back.

It's all part of God's plan. All right, verse 5. God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved.

[17:21] God will help her when morning dawns. Now, this is embedded security. I love this imagery. He says, God is in the midst of her.

It's rooted in the Lord. The Lord planted Himself there. So, who's going to change that?

You know, it reminds me of John 15, where it says, Abide in Me, and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you.

Unless you abide in Me, I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me, and I in him, He it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me, you can do nothing. Not only is God in the midst of her, it says, She shall not be moved.

Why is that? Because the enemy must first remove God. That's not going to happen. If God has pledged to be with His people, then He will be with His people. And He must win the battle.

[18:25] No one will come against the Lord. But notice the future tense of these things. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.

God will help her, when morning dawns. So these are terms of future salvation. And it's also telling us, that we need patience for God's timing.

God is with us, and He will deliver us, when He is ready to deliver us. Psalm 27, verse 14, Wait for the Lord, be strong, and let your heart take courage.

Wait for the Lord. Last part of that verse is, help dawns in the morning. When light comes, God's deliverance is proven true.

It's one of those things where, the stories in the Bible, where they woke up, and behold, the victory had been won. It's one of those things, when light comes, the first ray of light that comes across the eastern sky, I guess that way, wouldn't it be?

[19:28] Unless this way, okay. As soon as it does, the victory. And it's always dark, it's just before the dawn, that old saying. And it can be.

It seems dire, it seems like nothing's going to happen, but have trust, have faith in the Lord, that the Lord is with you, and He is. The victory will come. Alright, verse 6.

The nations rage, the kingdoms totter, He utters His voice, the earth melts. The earth melts. See, you have sovereign disaster, sovereign disaster.

Nations rage. And do they? Nations rage. Against one another, and oftentimes against God's people.

In Israel's day, ravenous peoples gathered against God's people. And this is imagery, picturing the roaring seas, from earlier, in the, verse 2 and 3.

[20:31] They're raging against God's people, they're roaring against them, they're foaming at the mouth, they're coming at them. Kingdoms totter. This happens because, their own welfare, as they attack God's people, is compromised.

If you go back and read, 2 Kings 18 and 19, the Assyrians were severely weakened, because of their siege on Israel. Not only that, just imagine fighting God's people.

God's going to take care of you. You're going to be, tottering, your kingdom will not last. It's a picture of the mountains, falling into the sea. And with the earth melting, it's the resultant consequence, for their actions.

They are destroyed. It's a picture of the mountains, breaking up in the sea. So I think the psalmist, is setting it up early, and they're coming back, and saying, though, though it's waters, war and foam, but the mountains tremble, the mountains be moved, but the heart of the sea, God is taking care of

all that.

You see this great big old thing, and you're scared, but you don't realize, it's the Lord working it all out, for His glory. It's a sovereign disaster. But, embedded in that verse, is my favorite phrase, of this psalm.

[21:52] It is, He utters His voice, and praise God that He does. God's supreme power, in Israel's protection. He created the universe, by His voice, He can destroy it, by the same cause and effect.

He is in control. And this is where, this verse from, A Mighty Fortress comes in. And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth, to triumph through us.

The Prince of Darkness, grim, we tremble not for Him. His rage we can endure, for lo, His doom is sure, one little word, shall fell Him.

He utters His voice, the earth melts. His doom is sure. So the true reason for calamity, is God's sovereign will. We may not understand it, and by the way, God doesn't owe it to us, to explain it all the way.

He's in control, not us. But He does it, to prove Himself faithful. Psalm 40, verse 11 says, As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me.

[23:04] Your steadfast love, and your faithfulness, will ever preserve me. So we have confidence, that the Lord is faithful to us. But He also does things, to teach His children, true dependence on Him.

Exodus 14, 13 and 14 says, Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians, whom you see today, you shall never see again.

The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent. So, it is a, it is a disaster happening, but He's saying, stand back, and be silent about it, the Lord is fighting for you.

Verse 7, The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress, Selah. He has this prevailing presence, here, prevailing presence, the Lord of hosts.

He's over all nations. It's talking about the far-reaching effect, of His Lordship. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob, that's becoming a little more personal, for the children of Israel, that is the author of the covenant, and the proven faithful shepherd.

[24:25] So, the Lord of hosts, and the God of Jacob, is with us. And again, it's the restated reason, for not fearing. If this is who is with us, why would we fear?

He is our God, who has helped us, in ages past, and He is our hope, for years to come. He also uses the word, fortress here, and this is where we get, the key verse of the hymn, a mighty fortress, is our God, a bulwark never failing, our helper, He amidst the flood, of mortal ills prevailing.

He prevails, His presence prevails, against everything. And then Selah, this verse restates the promise, of verse one, that God is with us, is aptly placed, to stop and ponder, our God's greatness, here.

Alright, verse eight and nine, 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.

And here we have, very apparent, authority, as we look here, at what the Lord is doing. It says, come, behold. It's an invitation, or a reminder, observe, acknowledge, celebrate, what the Lord is doing here.

[26:05] What is He doing? It's the works of the Lord. No one else is credited here. These are acts of God. This is not, behold, look what this king is doing, this ruler is doing.

This is what the Lord is doing. The covenant promises are upheld, the enemies are crushed, they are slain. The ESV also talks about, come, behold the works of the Lord, how He has brought, desolations on the earth.

That really hit home with me, not only what He does, but the manner in which He does it. Look how He is doing this. Look what He is doing. Take time to view what the Lord does.

The more you read His word, the more you see why He does what He does, how He does it, the more we marvel at His grace toward us, the more we marvel at His power in this world.

The phrase is, He has brought, He makes, He breaks and shatters, He burns. This is very active, and very aggressive terminology, but it is showing ultimate renown for His actions, for His people.

[27:15] No one else is saving His people, but Him. So He is pointing that out. God is doing this on behalf of His people, for His glory. The word desolations, it is kind of interesting.

The psalmist invites us to behold destruction. Look at destruction for a little bit. And then the next phrase, He said, He makes war cease.

So now He invites us to behold peace. I think what the psalmist is saying, He is inviting us to behold God's decision on either one of those.

And it is God who holds all things in His hand. He decides when destruction happens. He decides when peace happens. And it is all working towards an end goal. And these terms of wars, the bow, the spear, the chariots, these things that God destroys, is showing us that man's tools of calamity are powerless against the Lord.

And I think Martin Luther was picking up on this. Did we in our own strength confide? Our striving would be losing. We're not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing. It does ask who that may be.

[28:32] Christ Jesus, it is He. Lord, sabaoth His name from age to age the same. And He must win the battle. Our own strength is nothing if we don't have Christ fighting the battle for us.

He must win the battle. Alright, verse 10. Be still, be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations.

I will be exalted in the earth. Humbling divinity. Humbling divinity. God's lordship over all should humble us.

He says, be still. Be still. Literally, cease striving. Cease striving. Hold off your hands, you enemies. Sit down and wait in patience, you believers. Isaiah 40, 31 says, But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles.

[29:33] They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. And Spurgeon says this, Since none can worthily or adequately proclaim His nature, let expressive silence muse His praise.

That's another great quote. At the end of the day, can you praise Him fully for who He is? We could probably learn more about Him if we would speak less and let Him speak to us.

But, it honors the Lord when you are still before Him. It honors His name whenever you listen to what He has to tell you from His word. But not only be still, but also know that I am God.

Understand it, admit, comprehend, and reconcile this fact that He is God and that He is in control. Then He talks about being exalted.

I will be exalted. As I have already said, this is God's goal. He wants all the earth to worship Him and bow the knee.

[30:45] All things are for His glory. And no one is going to usurp this. It will come to pass in His time. He says two places. I will be exalted among the nations either through blessing or through judgment.

As we see in Genesis 22 when He is talking to Abraham, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

And your offspring shall possess the gate of His enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice. So obedience, you bring God glory, you exalt Him and He blesses you.

And also through judgment. Psalm 51.4 This is King David talking about his sin. Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

David's recognizing here that the Lord in His judgment of Him will get glory for Himself. And that's the way the Lord works. If He did not judge sin, He would not be as glorious.

[31:57] He would not be as holy. And so, in both actions, the Lord is glorious. So, among the nations, but also in the earth, the whole earth, it's the global effect of God's Word as it spreads, as the gospel spreads, and it is the call to exalt God over the whole earth.

Psalm 86, verses 9 and 10. All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things.

You alone are God. So, I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. Our last verse tonight, verse 11.

The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. Another Selah at the end. So, we have Emmanuel. Emmanuel, God is with us.

As we look back over our main points, our imminent salvation, our revelation we respond to, our indwelling grace, our embedded security, our sovereign Lord over disasters, whose presence prevails upon us, whose authority is ever apparent, whose ultimate divinity brings all creation to its

knees in humble adoration.

[33 : 15] this is our God. It is He who is with us. And it's a final restatement of God's presence. So, he ends the psalm with another Selah.

Stop and meditate on this. Meditate on God's truth and may it transform your living. So, three questions as we close tonight to consider.

in what is your confidence placed? In what is your confidence placed? If something is taken away from you, how does it affect you?

Are you relying on that a little too much? It should be in the Lord. Put your confidence in the Lord. In difficult times, do you respond to the revealed presence of God? That is, His Word, His promises that are here.

How do you respond to His Word? And as we close, where can you go from the presence of the Lord? I'll read some of Psalm 139 here.

[34 : 17] O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You hem me in behind and before and lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.

It is high. I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me and the light about me be night.

Even the darkness is not dark to You. The night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You. And then David ends this psalm by saying, Search me, O God, and know my heart.

[35 : 22] Try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. So Psalm 46, again, the presence of God.

We should be grateful for it, recognize it when troubles come. Just remember, He is more present than the trouble and He will deliver His children in His timing.