

NOTES FROM TIM SHENTON'S 5th May 2024 am

TITLE: "God of refuge" TEXT: Psalm 46

Scripture references from the ESV

Psalm 46 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah

4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. 6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. 7 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. 10 "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" 11 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

This whole psalm is intended for our comfort and encouragement. It lifts the veil on who God is and enables us to see him more clearly. In these verses we can see not only his strength but also his tender mercies towards his own people. On the one hand, we see his destructive powers against his enemies (vv8), and on the other we see his grace and support for his church (vv1,4-5). No matter what trial you are going through, he is your ever present help and he will give you the ability to see the trial through.

Any father, if someone is attacking his child, will be ferocious towards that enemy, but will be gentle towards his children. Throughout scripture, we can see these two sides of God on display.

Isaiah 40:11 tells us: He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. Only a few verses later (vv22-24), we read: It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; 23 who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. 24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

Lions have a reputation as a fierce predator, yet they are tender to their young, and female lions greet one another in friendship by licking the face and neck, or rubbing heads together.

Jesus Christ is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David –

so gentle to his friends, but ferocious to the enemies over whom he has triumphed.

Psalm 46 shows us God as a warrior to his enemies and a shepherd to his sheep. In verse 6 we see three things: the rage of God's enemies, the ease of God's victory and the peace of God's people. When we see the rage of God's enemies, it can cause us fear, but once we understand how easily God defeats them, our hearts will be filled with peace.

1. The rage of God's enemies. The nations rage against God's people. Incited by Satan, they have a need to destroy the church. It is surely surprising that Christians, a people who are called to be peacemakers, to be humble and gentle, as well as supportive of governments and those in authority, are so hated.

An Open Doors report for 2023 says that around 365 million Christians were subject to high levels of persecution and discrimination. That is higher than the figure for 2021. In the same year, 20 out of every hundred Christians in Africa were persecuted – again a higher figure than in 2021. Persecution is rising

Nations are in uproar against God's people.

Whether it is physical violence, threats and abuse or intellectual arguments against the truth and psychological

pressure, this world is full of God's enemies and they are raging against God's people. Even in England, they are knocking harder and harder on the door. If you look at past centuries, you will see that it has always been like this and it is no different for us in the 21st century.

Charles Wesley, hymn writer and preacher in the 18th century, had a gentle spirit and a sensitive soul. He was not a warrior. On his first visit to Cornwall to preach in St Ives, he took as his text 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people' (Isaiah 40:1). A group of rebels broke into the church, threatening to murder the people if they did not leave. They proceeded to wreck the building, while Wesley stood his ground. On being warned not to preach again, he told them of the love of Christ for them. They tried to strike him, but a stronger arm restrained them. The more they raged, the more power was given to Wesley from above, and he called on the people to stand still and see the salvation of their God. After about an hour, God's word came – Hitherto shalt thou come and no further. The rebels started quarrelling among themselves and drove one another out of the building!

This kind of treatment should not surprise us. Consider what happened to Jesus. Think of his words to his disciples in Luke 21:12-19: But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. 13 This will be your opportunity to bear witness. 14 Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate

beforehand how to answer, 15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. 16 You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers[c] and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. 17 You will be hated by all for my name's sake. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By your endurance you will gain your lives.

Paul and the other apostles all suffered terrible deaths at the hands of God's enemies, and if you read Fox's book of Martyrs, you will see how persecution was a constant in the lives of God's people as God's enemies raged against them. Scripture tells us in many places that persecution will come to us.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim 3:12)

If we left it there, we would be filled with fear but now consider:

2. The ease of God's victory. All God has to do is to speak. v6: he utters his voice, the earth melts. Moses, at the age of 80, conquered Egypt with the might of God's power. All the great and seemingly indestructible empires – Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, Roman and British – have gone. God has swept them away like chaff, but the church of Jesus Christ lives on.

Do you think that God is at all troubled by the rage of the nations? He is not disturbed by their threats and violence and nor is he fearful of what they might do next. The future of his church is not in any doubt for the earth melts when he speaks.

May we never forget that: His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done? (Dan 4:34-5 NIV)

To whom will we compare God? One word from him and the nations will fall as a sandcastle before a tsunami. Here we see the destructive power of the God whom we serve and worship towards his enemies. None can oppose him. Psalm 2:1-6 shows us the pointlessness of opposing God and the ease with which he destroys his enemies.: Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel

together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."

When we see God in all his glory, as we should understand him, then we are no longer anxious or upset. We find:

3. The peace of God's people.

· When we see God as we should understand him – in all his glory – and grasp that at his voice the earth melts and our foes vanish, then surely peace will fill our hearts. We remember that Jesus only spoke two words (Be still) and the storm was stilled. At the command of God, our enemies are brought to naught and at the sound of his voice, all nature stands aghast.

Surely peace will fill our hearts.

· When we know that God is the guardian and defender of the church, an impenetrable shield around us, and we see that he makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire, doing all that as easily as Samson snapped the new ropes that bound him, then

Surely peace fills our hearts.

· When we know that the world is in God's hands (and that includes all the minutiae of our lives) and can understand that the gentle God is also the one at whose voice the earth melts, then surely peace will fill our hearts. He is the God of the nations and the Lord Almighty who is with us. In Christ the conqueror, we are more than conquerors, and in Christ we have overcome all adversaries. Knowing all this then

Surely peace fills our hearts

On the eve of Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 he detailed his plan to a noble lady with such arrogance that she interrupted him and said, 'Sir, man proposes, but God disposes.'

Napoleon looked at her and haughtily replied, 'Madam, I propose and I dispose.'

The result of the battle: Napoleon's force upon entering Russia exceeded 450,000 men, over 150,000 horses, 25,000 wagons and nearly 1,400 artillery pieces. He lost around 380,000 men throughout the campaign, half of whom died from diseases (in the manner of an Old Testament plague). This catastrophic outcome shattered Napoleon's reputation of invincibility.

It is God who disposes! This is true in our lives, too.

The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

May God open our eyes to see him in all his tender mercies,

and in all his glory and power which he exercises to protect his church.

He alone is invincible and we bow before him.