

Be Still and Know That I Am God

Ps 46 (text)

17 October 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 16:30
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

My brother & sister in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Through the in-working of God's Holy Spirit, the Sons of Korah, wrote down the words of this psalm at a time when the city of Jerusalem faced a great onslaught by the enemy.

This is, of course, also a psalm which gave much strength to Martin Luther when he faced the onslaughts of the mighty pope and mighty emperor and, based on this Psalm, he wrote, "A mighty fortress is our God."

Well, currently quite a few of our members are facing hardships – grieving for some; surgery for others; still, loneliness & depression for some; and painful relationships for some others.

So, at the moment – like the Sons of Korah, and like Martin Luther – also we, the family of the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, are facing and processing various onslaughts – and, at least, about some of these, you & I cannot change a thing; it's out of our hands!

So, what does one do when one faces an onslaught that has you shocked, shattered and unable to reverse your painful circumstances?

My dear brother & sister, our text tells you & me to, in our irreversible circumstances remember the following three words, i.e., the three points of our sermon:

1. Mountain
2. River
3. God

Mountain

In verses 2 & 3, we hear the psalmists say, "...***we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea..., though the mountains tremble at its (i.e. the sea's) swelling.***"

Well, as recently as last Tuesday (with a 5.3 quake in the Cook Strait), a part of New Zealand has again literally felt, seen, and heard the mountains tremble. And will we ever forget that big quake in November 2016 when we saw the seabed rising up, and also the sea swelling to a certain tsunami level – especially in/around the Kaikoura area. Our own Queen's Gate Mall is still being repaired after that great trembling!

And, certainly, if you & I were not in fear & shock (which we might have), we were at least awestruck by the mighty powers in God's creation – so powerful that even the earth – the very ground which we sometimes refer to as "terra firma" (firm earth) – was not firm anymore!

But, my brother & sister, currently – and for at least some in our church family – the "mountains" are, as it were, trembling!

Yet, our text effectively says, "...though the mountains tremble or even be moved (or slip or fall) into the middle of the ocean, we will not fear!"

See? Despite our apprehension, fear and challenges, we will not fear!

To use the Apostle Paul's words in 2 Cor 4:8 & 9, "***We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.***"¹

Someone might ask, "But pastor, how is it possible that someone – yes even the psalmist – can say, 'I will not fear though the mountains shake and fall into the middle of the sea.'"

Well, the answer is in v. 1. You see, we will not fear, because ***God is our refuge and strength...***

God is our refuge – yes, a place where people run to for safety & protection, like, e.g., the highest point on a mountain when a tsunami rolls in from the sea and the sirens make their howling noise!

I ask you, what would people do if they don't have God?

What would people do if the tsunami rolls in and they choose not to run to higher ground?

God is our refuge and strength!

But v.1 also says, "***God is... a very present help in trouble!***"

"...a very present help in trouble..."

The Hebrew can also be translated as, "***As help in distresses He is thoroughly proved.***"²

Well, how were the Sons of Korah able to say, "God is a very present help in trouble" or "As help in distresses He is thoroughly proved!"? How were the psalmists able to say these words? Had they then experienced God's very present help in distresses? Did they then have any proof of God's present help in trouble?

Well, of course, the Sons of Korah knew of God's very present help when He once, with the fiery cloud of His presence, guided Israel up from Egypt, all the way through the desert; when He cleft the Red Sea for them, but caused their persecutors to drown; when He provided manna for them in their desert-time; when He caused the walls of Jericho to fall.

Indeed, "As help in distresses He is thoroughly proved!" God has a proven track-record of being a very present Help in distress!

And, here's the amazing thing: The Sons of Korah said this wonderful thing about God although they had not even seen Jesus Christ – THE expression of God's very present help in trouble!

But *you* & *I* know of the Father's deep love/help for us – i.e., that He even went to the great length of crushing His beloved Son to save you & me from not just a temporary earthquake and mountain that shakes, but from eternal catastrophe!

My brother & sister, what method/way does our God (our refuge) use to strengthen you & me in our times of great onslaught, calamity, and disaster – when the mountains around & under us quake and some even fall into the middle of the ocean? Yes, how will God

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (2 Co 4:8–9). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² I absolutely agree with Delitzsch (1959:90) that this is the best rendering of עֲזָרָה בְּצָרוֹת נִמְצָא מֵאֵד. More literal would have been, "As help in distresses He has been muchly found." But that's a bit clumsy. I cannot understand why the NIV, ESV, NASB (!!) and even the French of Louis Segond (1910!!!) have translated it as weak as they did! Even the modern Afrikaans has it weak. Thankfully the 1933-53 Afrikaans translation has it correct, "...as hulp in benoudhede is Hy in hoë mate beproef."

strengthen us as Wainui Church Family, at this very challenging time for many of our dear brothers and sisters?

Well, the answer is found in point 2...

River

Verse 4 starts the second section of our text saying, ***“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.”***

Picture Ancient Jerusalem, around 700 BC. This city of God is under attack by the Assyrian enemy. The enemy is all around Jerusalem. They stand with thousands of soldiers; with battering rams; with ladders to scale the walls – to come into the city. But first, they want to hunger out the city. The city is under onslaught of the enemy.

But you know what?

The city has a lifeline feeding it. And the enemy is unaware of this lifeline, because – you see – outside the city there’s a spring – a fountain. And from this fountain there’s a tunnel going under the earth, under the enemy lines, under the walls of the city, into the heart of the city.

And, in the heart of the city, there’s a well.

And the people inside the city of God – a people supposed to be thirsty because of the siege – can come and quench their thirst there.

Looking at the size of this tunnel, I would be surprised if some Israelites would not have been able to sneak out at night and go and collect some food.

And so, the city of God has a lifeline – a river whose streams make glad these people under attack.

My brother & sister, you & I also have a “river,” which quenches our thirst in the onslaughts we are facing at the moment.

What is this river?

Well, this “river” is God’s Word which you & I have – a “river” which you & I read. And its streams make glad you & me, a people of God; a little “Zion,” a little “Jerusalem” under attack.

And, of course, it’s the Word of God which we read and reflect upon; which is proclaimed here in this sanctuary. It is also the Word of God contained in our psalm-and-hymn book – a word which we have memorised through years and years of reading and singing. It’s the Word of God which you & I repeat to one another when we have Bible Study or Life Groups, or when we simply pop in at one another’s place, and hug and comfort one another.

This Word is our “river” whose “streams” of Bible verses & passages make glad us – a holy city of God.

My brother & sister, this river with its streams – this spiritual river – is the same spiritual river which also the Sons of Korah and God’s Old-Testament people had amidst the physical & spiritual onslaughts against ancient Jerusalem.

Yes, those saints of God were strengthened not just by the city’s well of water fed by the river & streams from outside, but also from the Word of God – God’s holy writ.

But you & I, being New-Testament believers, have seen the fulfilment of that holy writ – yes of the holy word of God. We’ve seen it in the coming of THE Word, not written on parchment or on paper or microchip, but THE Word of God who came in the flesh as a human being like us – body & soul, yet perfect and without sin; yes, we have seen the Living Word come – Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came and brought us the Good News; and lived the Good News through all His miracles by which He healed the sick and

even raised some of their dead, followed by His own death and resurrection – foretaste of your & my future resurrection.

So, you & I have the Good News of forgiveness of sins; of being made right with God; of eternal life. As He Himself said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11:25-26).

Can you see? He is the Living Word – yes, the ultimate “river” whose streams make glad the city of God; yes, the people of God – you & me, as the Gospel feeds, nourishes us, and quenches our thirst, just as Christ once said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (Jn 7:37-38).³ See? See, how you & I, filled with the “streams of living water,” now comfort one another with this very life-giving “water” – God’s Word!?

My brother & sister, see how our Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression and living proof of the fact that ***God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*** (v.1, again)?

And I encourage us all to, in this time of hardship, drink deeply from this life-giving stream, for if we do, then even through our hardship, v.5 will be so true of us: ***“God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.”***

Who is this God? What’s His stature like?

Well, that’s what the last point is about...

God

In case the listener to Ps 46 – the one who has listened thus far – has forgotten who God is: His deeds, His sovereignty, His almightiness, His power beyond description, the psalmist in v. 8 exhorts – nay commands,⁴ ***“Come!”*** “Yes, *come* and *see the works of the Lord, the desolations (i.e., the destructions, appalments, horrors)*⁵ *He has brought on the earth.*⁶

Reflect again! Ponder again what the Almighty God has done, so that you can see His strength.

Yes, come see the destruction God, at times, brings about on the earth!

Again, we think of the earthquakes New Zealand often has; and of world-wide floods; of the COVID pandemic! The Almighty God without whose active or allowing will⁷ nothing happens in the universe – He can make things happen (and, indeed, has made things happen) that will shake and have shaken many, many a human being.

Destruction! Appalment! Horror!

³ Also cf. Is 55:1 “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

Also cf. Jn 4:10 & 14, ***Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water...”*** ***Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”***

⁴ cf. לָכֵן וְהָיָה לָכֵן Both verbs are imperatives

⁵ שְׁמֹת Noun Feminine Plural of שָׁמָה “waste; appalment; horror,” from the verb שָׁמָה “be desolated, appalled, awestruck” (Qal); “causing horror” (Po`el); “devastate, ravage, shewing horror” (Hif’il) (BDB)

⁶ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Ps 46:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁷ Both wills of God are decreative

And, even though God is not the author of evil – even though God is not to be blamed; even though God is not answerable to any higher authority, and even though God is love – such destructions do not happen outside of God’s eternal decrees!⁸

So, look at the cyclone devastation on earth.

Look at volcanic eruptions and the power that is released!

The LORD (Yahweh, i.e., the Great “I am who I am”) does all of this.

And even the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar came to acknowledge, “***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?”***”⁹

See our God’s Sovereign powerful action, which you & I mostly cannot explain? For His Word says, the things revealed belong to us and our children, but the secret things belong to the LORD our God.¹⁰

Yet, this we know, for the Bible says it: that even the greatest disaster ever to have happened, came about by His decree, i.e., when human beings (can you believe it?) went so far as to gruesomely murdering the... *love-giving* Son of God!¹¹

Yes, also/even this most appalling deed fell within God’s decreeing will!

Well, so far re the *destructions* which the Sovereign LORD, in His will allows to happen.

Our psalm also shows us another side of God’s decrees & actions – the side of Peacemaker!

So good is God at making peace that even people whom you thought would never be reconciled – e.g., married couples who had been fighting like cats & dogs; and people who would never lay down their weapons or hold their blade-sharp tongues – suddenly, they embrace one another in peace!

That, too, is the Sovereign LORD’s doing. As v.9 says, “***He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.***”

God brings peace!

My brother & sister, it’s up to this point in the psalm (end of v.9), that the psalmist has guided you & me to look with Spirit-enlightened human eyes at 1) disaster, 2) help, and 3) God; yes, at 1) mountain, 2) river and 3) God!

But now, at this point, it’s as if God says to the psalmist, “You’ve spoken enough!” “You have highlighted My sovereign power!” “Now, I myself am going to speak!”

People of Wainuiomata, hear, therefore, what God Himself is now saying to us in this challenging time, v.10, “***Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.***”¹²

⁸ cf. Eph 1:11 “***In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...***” Rom 8:28 “***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.***”

⁹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Da 4:35). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁰ Dt 29:29 ***The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.***

¹¹ For God’s decree on this, cf. Lk 22:22 “***The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.***” Also cf. Acts 2:23 ***This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.***

Also Acts 4:28, “***They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.***”

Also cf. Acts 10:42; 17:31

¹² *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Ps 46:10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The Hebrew can also be translated as, “Cease”¹³ all of your own efforts in trying to change something which you cannot! Yes, surrender¹⁴ to God!

Well, in light of the great “mountains,” which God is currently allowing to tremble in the lives of many of our members, I encourage them & us all to now take enough time out! Put, for once, aside your tablet, laptop, cell phone! Swap your TV time for devotions so that you can have the life-giving streams of God’s Word feed your soul!

If you can, go to a safe & quiet place in nature!

And so, be still and know that the LORD is still your God!

If you did this, then even amidst/through your challenges (rough as they are) you will experience the truth given in our psalm’s refrain (of v.7 & 10)

***The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.***

And v.1

***God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble!***

AMEN (2544 words excluding footnotes)

¹³ This could be a command given not only to God’s awe-struck loved ones, but also to their enemies to cease action! Anyhow, all human beings (loved-one or enemy of God) will do well heeding this call.

הִפְּלוּ Hif’il imv m pl of נָפַח (Qal: “become relaxed” [German: “schlaff werden”]; “collapse.” Hif’il: “let fall/drop;” “abandon, give up” [“aufgeben”]; “cease;” “let alone” [“in Ruhe lassen”], cf. Koehler & Baumgartner (p.904).

¹⁴ Actually, I think this word (surrender) may just be the best way to render the Hebrew!