

God with Us

Jonathan K. Dodson | Psalm 46 | July 17, 2022

Some days it can feel like the mountains are sliding into the sea. Prime ministers resigning, raging political debate, gas prices soaring, summer family schedules, strained relationships. Where do you look for help? Psalm 46 holds out three helpful images: *Shelter, River, Altar*.

Shelter

The psalm is littered with a key image. Verse 1: God is our *refuge*; v.7 God is our *fortress*, and again v. 11 God of Jacob is our *fortress*. There's also frequent mention of God as *the Lord of Hosts*, the commander of divine armies. What do these images imply? Adversity, attack, conflict, the *need* for shelter. It goes on to address earthquakes, daily concerns, war. The Bible isn't a meditate under a tree kind of faith, disconnected from the demands of real life. It's engaged with the real forces that impact us. What does God offer in the chaos? Verse 1: **God is our refuge and strength**. A **refuge** is a shelter, often a rocky outcropping or cave. The anointed king David hid in caves to escape his enemies. A refuge is a protective image. Sometimes we need to duck out of life because the blows keep coming: a quiet evening, a day off, a vacation. Jesus himself often withdrew to a desolate place. Are you battered by conflict,

overwhelmed by world events, disheartened by what you see? Then seek shelter! Where do you go? Processing with friends, next bite, next episode, a rant? All cardboard tents. God is your refuge; God is your shelter. How do we rest in him? We have to give up on our flimsy shelters. But often we resist. Which is why, in part, God sends desolations (8), permits the earth to give way, the mountains to fall into the heart of the sea. He knows we have to feel the earth rumble beneath our feet before we'll run into his refuge. We have to see the mountains of financial strategies, nest eggs, democracies, curated relationships, and economies crash into the sea *so we will trust the Lord* as our refuge. What might that look like? Talk to God about your anxieties. I'm really worried about the economy. I'm afraid we'll lose all our savings. Will you help me not to be afraid? I'm scared my relationship won't make it. That I'll drive my spouse away. Will you be a shelter for both of us? *Transfer the weight of your worries to your real refuge*. Now, if we shelter in God will he meet all our needs? Not exactly. In the first three centuries, many Xns were killed as they sheltered in him. God helps us *with our greatest need but not always our perceived need*. You may think you need a certain amount of money, kind of marriage, political leader, or job. But Christians have *flourished* in their faith for centuries without savings, democracy, health, or home. In the 4th century, St. Basil and Gregory were compelled by Christ's love for the sick and

the poor. They kissed lepers, gave the sick refuge and care, building essentially the first hospital *in the face of Greek and Roman belief that the weak should be abandoned*. Their sister, Macrina, was a real model of faith. In famine, when flesh clung to bones like cobwebs, she would rescue abandoned infant girls and raise them as her own. Why? God was her refuge and **strength**. Strength is stamina to keep going, fortitude for the fight. We shelter in God to receive strength then step out in his mission. God is a very present help *in trouble*. This word help is associated with divine warrior. God fights beside you; is constantly with you, *very present superlative*, always available when we need him most. Tim Shorey has dealt with constant headaches for thirty years, always 6.5 or higher on a scale of 10. He calculates 12,000 days of pain in a row. During this time he's preached, counseled, planted churches, and written for decades. He comments, "*my headache has probably preached more of God than anything else in my ministry*." How? When people have a headache *they think of how God has sustained him*, and are inspired to trust God with their own pain. His weakness points to God's strength. So people turn *to God as their* refuge and strength. What about you? What weakness do you need to admit so God can be your strength? What fear do you need to entrust to *the Lord of hosts? So he can sustain your faith*. As Luther writes in A Mighty Fortress is Our God: *Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill:*

God's truth abideth still. His kingdom is forever. Verse 3: *selah*, means pause. Let this sink in. What flimsy housing do you need to exchange for true shelter and strength?

River

Next God doesn't just build a shelter for our faith; he moves into the city to bring us joy. Verse 4: *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.* It's a picture of Zion, where every need is met. A river flows out of the city bringing life to everything it touches (Ezek); waters trees of life whose leaves heal the nations, and if you trace the river back to its headwaters you reach a throne: *the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb* (Re 22:1-2). What is the river doing? Giving life, bringing healing, imparting joy. How? It's headwaters are *God and the Lamb*. Christ is not an enhancement to your life; he is your life. God doesn't just stay on the outside giving us shelter and strength; he moves inside imparting life and joy. How do we receive it?! *And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price* (22:17). You have to *come*, to cup your hands and plunge them into the crystal fountain of God's fellowship. To *take* the water without price. Where are your hands cupped? What do you look to to satisfy your thirst? This week our staff discussed our desire for God. One person confessed he used

to read and pray in evenings but now cups his hands before the screen. Are you hands outstretched to games, shows, shopping or dipped into the crystal river? *Another confessed settling for knowing things about God instead of knowing God himself.* Knowing the right answer to abortion debate, being able to refute nationalism, grasping the sovereignty of God...but not *kneeling before God and the Lamb*. Until we come and kneel our thirst will not be quenched. We all agreed we *want to want* God more. What do we do? First, confess your lesser fountains. Tell God you are sorry for seeking satisfaction elsewhere. Second, ask for new desire. Notice it's *the thirsty are satisfied. Those who desire that are delighted*. Third, take water without price. We took great encouragement from John Owen who urges Christians to ask God repeatedly for his mercy. God gives to *the thirsty*. This means asking more than once. In this 100+ heat, I get dehydrated easily. It can take a while before realize while I'm tired. I have to repeatedly return to the tap for water. Many trips are required before my thirst is quenched. It may take some time for you to realize your need. Keep coming. Finally, know you cannot purchase this joy. It's free. So don't count your asking, make a spreadsheet of your seeking. Just come. God will satisfy. *But* you should know that just because it's free doesn't mean there isn't a cost. The thirst-quenching river flows from God *and the Lamb*, a reminder Jesus is the lamb who was slain for our misplaced thirst.

Don't treat his offer with triviality. But also know he doesn't hold the cost over your head. He says, *Come. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment (6). Will you come? Selah.*

Altar

The Lord is our shelter: he drives out fear. The Lord is our river: he imparts joy. Finally, the Lord is our altar: he deserves our praise! 8: *Come, behold the works of the LORD.* It's an imperative. When is the last time you prayed simply out of gratitude for what God has done. Come behold. *Be still and know that I am God.* This is a command. Be quiet! Is a good translation. God is shushing us as our sovereign. Why should we be still? *Because he brings desolations. Because he does great works. Because he is our shelter, river, altar.* Be still. We recently returned from London, where one morning we hurried from Westminster chapel to Buckingham palace, and waited and waited *until* we saw the royal guard marching lockstep down the street. Then in hushed voices we marveled at their authority and power, capturing their greatness with cameras. That was just the British royal guard! We know *the Lord of Hosts*. Will you be still? Will you capture his greatness in praise? Our mighty shelter who drives out fear; crystal river who imparts joy, holy altar who deserves our praise! *One day he will be exalted among the nations and in all the earth! This, the Lord of hosts, is with us. Selah.*