

"OUR TRIUMPHANT GOD"

Psalm 46

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Sometimes simply a phrase evokes memories of an entire event.

All you need to hear are a very few words and it causes you to remember all the details without rehearsing them verbally

Many families have such phrases:

Someone will just say a date (Summer of '93 and the entire family knows what event is being spoken of.

Sometimes the experience and emotions of an entire event can be captured in a song.

The year was 1914 and Francis Scott Key, a lawyer, was being held Prisoner on board a British ship off the coast of Baltimore.

That night Fort McHenry was shelled unmercifully by that British ship and others.

Supposedly through the night, Key could hear and see the bombardment and wondered if the fort and the city would survive.

But in those words we often sing so carelessly, Key wrote, "And the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there."

For years to come that song, The Star Spangled Banner, told the story of that night and through that one event told the larger story of the nation in those years - by God's grace it survived.

In greater measure than "The Star Spangled Banner" captured the history and emotion of America, Psalm 46 captured the history and emotion of God's people - and still captures it today.

This Psalm, this song, in few words, reminds the people of Israel of an

incredible event in their history.

And as they are reminded of the event, they are even more reminded of their God.

This Song, like the Star Spangled Banner tells a story - a great story - A STORY OF OUR TRIUMPHANT GOD!

This Song is a song of STRENGTH, OF TRIUMPH, AND OF SECURITY!

The mood is joyous, upbeat, and confident.

This song would never be sung slowly or mournfully.

It would be sung with life, with gusto, with enthusiasm.

Hundreds of years ago, S.W. Christopher wrote that at times Luther and his friends would become discouraged by all the political and physical attacks against them because of their fight for the truth of God's Word.

"But in such hours the unflinching Reformer would cheerily say to his friend Melancthon, 'Come, Philip, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm.'"

(pg 344 *Treasury of David*)

Psalm 46, is a spirited song that tells a story and reminds of us the sovereignty and mercy of our God.

I hope that by the time we are finished today, this will be a song of yours - a song so filled with truth and passion that it will lift your spirits in the darkest of hours and convey you praise of God in the brightest of days.

I believe there is sufficient evidence to support the idea that the history behind this Psalm is found for us in 2 Kings chapters 18 and 19. Find that place in your Bible please.

The country of Israel under the leadership of King David and King Solomon had reached the zenith of its power and influence in the world.

Its borders were secure, it was economically strong, and its neighbors were quiet if not happy about Israel's strength.

But 200 years later, after a civil war, the northern part of Israel was destroyed by invading armies and many of its people taken as slaves to other countries.

The southern part of Israel, known as Judah, was led by a man with

the name of Hezekiah.

It is said of him in 2 Kings 18:5 that he was a man “who trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook.

But in his 14th year on the throne, Hezekiah received word that the same nation that had invaded and defeated the northern part of Israel was now about to invade Judah - Hezekiah's country.

The nation about to invade was Assyria and the king was a man named Sennacherib.

He did invade and many of the cities of Judah were taken captive until the Assyrian army was literally at the gates of Jerusalem - the capitol city of Judah.

It is hard to imagine the fear that must have gripped the hearts of the people of that city.

According to the Bible, the Assyrians were as vicious in their slaughter of their enemies as the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia.

If you have ever read James Michener's The Source or have seen the motion picture, "Henry the Fifth" then you know something of the barbarism of sword and spear warfare.

In chapter 19, Sennacherib sends a message to Hezekiah reminding him and his people of the total domination of that part of the world by Assyria.

Sennacherib reminds Hezekiah that Jerusalem will have no more chance of keeping the Assyrians armies out than all of those other nations that they had already defeated.

The prophet Isaiah was a contemporary of these people and events.

In the 8th chapter of his prophecy he likens Assyria to a large river. As Isaiah predicts what Assyria will do as it rolls unstoppable as the German Bleitzkreig, he sees it overwhelming all of its enemies.

"The mighty floodwaters of the river...It will overflow all its channels,

run over all its banks and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck, Jerusalem.

That vicious army of the Assyrians stood ready to lay siege and then storm the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

The fear in Jerusalem could not have been greater.

The hopelessness of their situation could not have been more clearly understood.

The despair and the discouragement of the people could not have been deeper.

Reflecting in Song on those days, the Songwriter in Psalm 46 writes these words (vss 2-3 READ)

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging." *Selah*

Using the imagery of water that roars, foams and surges, the Songwriter probably describes Assyria.

Using the strongest most physically frightening language, the Psalmist describes the danger surrounding God's people.

I think he describes the emotional turmoil that many people experience in the midst of crisis or just the uncertainties of life.

Some here know what it is like to have the bottom drop out of life.

What do you say to a man who walks into your office and tells you that he has just learned that he has maybe 9 months to live?

What do you say when he asks how he is to tell his wife she is soon to become a widow?

Can you imagine the thoughts?

Can you feel something of the flood of emotions once the numbness wears off?

Hopelessness, discouragement, despair are feelings known to many people - many more than I ever before would have guessed.

Maybe the language of your life feeling like the earth itself is giving way

under your feet is too strong, but what are you facing that tempts you with fear?

Are you now out of work or about to be laid off?

Are you in a spiritual battle and you are afraid that you will fall?

Is someone such as a relative, a coworker, a neighbor making life so miserable for you that you aren't sure you can stand it any longer?

Are you facing a long-term or potentially life-threatening physical problem?

Are you graduating from school and you have no idea what the future holds for you?

The crisis you face may not be Assyrian armies but you know the temptation to fear!

But what are the Songwriter's words? FEAR? No!

In the first stanza of his three stanza song, we read:

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear..."

Why would the imminent invasion of an Assyrian Army not bring uncontrollable fear?

Why would a life-threatening illness not bring irrational fear?

Why would life's uncertainties not reduce someone to nagging fear?

The Psalmist says, for one reason only: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. THEREFORE we will not fear."

"Ever-present" means that our God is accessible.

"Refuge and strength" means that he is sufficient.

On what basis could the Songwriter make such a claim?

How did he know that God would always be of help to them?

How could he say that God would be their refuge and strength?

In verses 4-6 the Psalmist writes the second verse or stanza of his song.

READ

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
 the holy place where the Most High dwells.
 God is within her, she will not fall;
 God will help her at break of day.
 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
 he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

In contrast to the surging river of verse 3 that tempts us to fear - we find in verse 4 a different river.

The picture here is a quiet steady stream supplying the city with the water needed to keep its people alive.

Any city could easily be defeated if the enemy could keep it from getting water.

When Hezekiah, the king of Judah, heard that Assyria was coming toward Jerusalem, he ordered that the water supply, which was outside of the city walls be covered over and a tunnel be dug which would carry the water into the city secretly.

That "river" of water became a symbol for the Songwriter of God's steady, quiet supply of grace to his people.

When Hezekiah received Sennacherib's message of threat, our Bible tells us 2 Kings 19, that he took it into the Temple and spread out the message before God and prayed for God to deliver the people from the Assyrians.

God's response to Hezekiah was what I would call a quiet stream of grace.

Isaiah the prophet sent a message to Hezekiah and in the message, as a prophet of God, he told Hezekiah Assyria would not enter Jerusalem. God had told him that He, God, would defend Jerusalem and save it.

Now mind you, the mighty Assyrian army is still camped outside of Jerusalem and ready to attack - But God says they won't succeed.

Why should Hezekiah believe God?

Why should his fear be any less?

The Songwriter captures the first reason in verse 5:

"God is within her, she will not fall;"

God had chosen to take up special residence in the Temple in Jerusalem.

I don't mean that God's address was No.1 Temple Mount,
Jerusalem, Judah.

I do mean that God had told his people that he would be with
them in a special way.

Jerusalem belonged to Him and His presence there
would ensure her safety.

The only way the Assyrian army could conquer Jerusalem would be
to conquer God.

Child of God, if you are trusting in Jesus as your saving-Lord then God has
told you that he is residing in you.

AS certainly as Jerusalem was the residence of God in Judah over
2000 years ago, SO you are the residence of God today.

And the simple but profound truth is that God stands between you
and any situation that would threaten you.

There is nothing, not sickness, not unemployment, not attack, not the
future, not anything that can take you down, that can defeat
you, because God stands between you and failure.

And verse 6 says that at the break of day God will help.

According to 2 Kings 19, it was the very night Hezekiah prayed and Isaiah
prophesied that Assyria would not penetrate Jerusalem, that the angel of
the Lord moved into that army camp and took the lives of 185,000 of the
soldiers.

The next morning, at the break of day, the remainder saw and fled for
their lives.

A man called me on a Friday noon and told me how he was struggling with

going back to work that afternoon.

He had gone home for lunch and because of how down he had felt for the past couple of weeks he wasn't sure he could stand another afternoon of work.

He asked if we could meet and I said yes but that it would have to be a couple of days later. We talked some about how he felt and what he should do and then we prayed together over the phone.

It wasn't until two days later that I learned that man had had an Assyrian army camped at his door.

He was under a tremendous attack on his mind.

He doubted everything he knew of God.

He was certain there was no reason to go on living.

He had gone home that noon and pulled out a collector's bottle of whiskey and a revolver.

His intention was to numb himself with the alcohol so he would have the courage to pull the trigger.

Several days earlier a friend had asked him for my telephone number.

The man wrote it out on a piece of paper but had not yet gotten it to his friend.

By God's grace, when he picked up the whiskey bottle he spotted that telephone number laying on the table.

Instead of taking that drink he called the number.

After the dark of the night, at the break of day, God helped - that army of doubts and fears was defeated.

As powerful as the enemy is - he is no match for the God who dwells in us.

For as verse 6 says, " the nations may be in uproar, they may rage but they will fall.

When God lifts his voice, the earth melts.

The enemies of your life cannot stand against God who is in you!
After the second stanza of the song, the Songwriter sings the chorus –

verse 7 "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

Notice it is the same chorus he sings at the end of the third verse of the song (vs 11) AND it is the same theme with which he began. (vs 1).

But I want you to see the third stanza of the Song, which begins at verse 8.

READ

Come and see the works of the LORD,
 the desolations he has brought on the earth.
 He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth;
 he breaks the bow and shatters the spear,
 he burns the shields with fire.

"Be still, and know that I am God;
 I will be exalted among the nations,
 I will be exalted in the earth."

In this last stanza the Psalmist gives the last reason why he along with others will not fear when things threaten to overwhelm them:

Our God who is within us is more powerful than all the forces against us.

Can you imagine the word as it spread through Jerusalem?

Come, See!

And slowly, tentatively the people dared to move out of the city and see what God had done in the night.

And there before them were 185,000 dead Assyrian soldiers and all of their supplies.

These Assyrians had come up against them with bows and spears and shields or chariots and they were no more.

As we read in verse 10, God calls out "Be still!"

To all nations of the world, to all the forces that would attempt to defeat you, to all the temptations to discourage you, God says "QUIET!"

Cease striving, let your hands sink down, be still - know that I

am God!

Just as Jesus commanded the storm on Galilee to be quiet so here we see God telling the forces of this world to just settle down - it's all over for them.

Our greatest security comes **not** in hearing soft well-meaning words about how concerned God is for us.

Our security does not come from hearing that God has great intentions toward us.

Our security comes from knowing that our God is greater than any person, any force, any evil, any discouragement, and any temptation that can come against us.

Regardless of how things may seem now, my Bible tells me that God will be victorious.

According to Revelation 19 to 21, Jesus is coming again.
AND when he comes he will come not as a baby in a manger but in all his glory and power.

And men and women and all the forces of hell will once again rise up to attempt to defeat him but in a great battle Jesus will conquer them all.

Following that battle there will be a cataclysmic fiery end to the heavens and earth as we know them AND God will bring forth a new earth and new heavens in which we shall live in his presence for eternity.

When it is all over, when Jesus has come again, when that last great battle is fought there will be left standing only the Lord God and those who are his people.

And the Songwriter knowing this security finishes his song with the chorus,

the refrain, once more:

"The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

The Lord Almighty is a translation of the phrase "Lord of hosts" meaning that God is Lord over everything and everyone, human, angelic, or demonic. He is sovereign!

The God of Jacob is a reference to the grace of God.

Jacob was chosen by God not because of anything worthy in Jacob but purely by God's grace. God is Gracious!

He is our God who is sovereign over everything and gracious toward us.

What other conclusion could possibly be drawn than the one the Songwriter draws: vs 2 THEREFORE we will not fear.

I don't know what your situation is today?

All I know is that if you are trusting in Jesus Christ, the God of Psalm 46 is your God today.

And this Song is your song.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble"