

Calm in the Chaos

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Hi everyone, please keep your Bible open at home to Psalm 46. We're going to look at that in a bit more detail. Or you think the coronavirus is bad, try transporting yourself back to the 1940s in Europe.

World War II was raging. If you lived in London, at any time the Germans could come and bomb you. They regularly, during the Blitz, would drop bombs.

And of course they never sent a schedule. They never warned you. And you had to try, go about your daily business. But at any moment the building that you were looking at 100 meters away could have just blown up.

That's the kind of crisis people then were living in. And during that time there was a preacher, Martin Lloyd-Jones. He was one of the main preachers in London during World War II.

In fact, he started his job at Westminster Chapel in 1939. I think a few days before, war was declared with Germany. So, quite a start.

[1 : 03] But he was a great preacher. He was a godly man. And there was an occasion when he was, one Sunday morning, he started his sermon in prayer, much like I did now.

And as he was praying, a huge explosion from just a few hundred meters away just shattered the air. And a bomb, a German bomb had fallen and exploded.

And some plaster fell from the wall. The congregation stood up and looked out the window. You know what Martin Lloyd-Jones did? Nothing. Nothing. He kept on praying.

He finished his prayer. And as he was praying, people kind of looked at him, looked outside and shuffled back to their pew and sat down again. And then he finished his prayer.

Calmly, he looked up. He told the congregation that if those sitting near the windows want to move more inwards, if they're feeling unsafe, they may do so. And then he promptly continued with his sermon, unfazed.

[2 : 05] And that calmness helped his congregation to be calm. And it wasn't just that day. It was throughout the duration of the war that his confident calm in a world of chaos helped his congregation to be calm as well.

And that unfazed, calm confidence in the middle of chaos is actually something that should mark out all of God's people in this chaotic world.

And that's what Psalm 46 is about, actually. It tells us why God's people are people different from the world because they're people which, amongst other things, they're able to be calm in chaos.

And it's the Psalm that explains to us why that is. So let's look at it now. The Psalm actually describes a city under siege. That's the picture that's painted in the Psalm.

And the city are not just any city. It's the people of God. It's God's city, which would have been associated with Jerusalem in the Old Testament. And the picture that's painted in the Psalm is that the people are looking out over the walls of their city and they're seeing all the troubles that surround them.

[3 : 18] All the troubles that surround their city. Both the troubles in nature. Verse 3. Though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

So the natural world and all its chaotic undoing. As well as looking at troubles in society. Verse 6. Nations are in uproar. Kingdoms fall. And so these people were looking out over the walls, seeing this chaos. But because the city they dwelled in was God's city, they were told that they, of all the people in the world, are the ones who don't need to stress.

They don't need to fret. They don't need to worry. And this Psalm then goes on to give us two main reasons why these people in God's city don't need to fret about what's going on outside.

And the two main reasons the Psalm gives are something that they need to notice inside the city and something that they need to notice outside the city.

[4 : 22] And so let's look at those two things now. Firstly, what's going on inside the city? And the main thing that these people needed to realize about the city they were in is that God was in it as well.

And that's the repeated phrase, repeated truth in this Psalm that holds the whole Psalm together. Verse 1. He's an ever-present help. Verse 5.

God is within her. Verse 7. The Lord Almighty is with us. And verse 11. The Lord Almighty is with us.

And so that's the first thing people, the first truth about being in this city. These people needed to realize God was present. God is present with them against everything that can come against them. One of the troubles that these people would have been worrying about was the direct threat to God's people. People living in Jerusalem, people living in Israel in the Old Testament, were surrounded by stronger enemies.

[5 : 23] And so the constant threat to them was that their enemies would come in and take them over and assimilate them into their nations. And that the nation of Israel, God's people, the descendants of Abraham, would no longer exist.

And so that's kind of the trouble that's alluded to in the Psalm where the city is surrounded by enemies. And they were worried not just about the dangers of the general dangers of the world around them, but they were worried about enemies who specifically wanted to destroy God's people.

Back then, it's likely the Psalm was written during the time of the Assyrian threat, a vast and powerful nation, a vicious, horrible nation that would come and just overtake and destroy countries that are smaller than them.

And they, at that time, wanted to come and destroy Jerusalem. They wanted to annihilate God's people. And so that was the fear of God's people at the time as they looked over those walls.

They wondered whether their city could be strong enough. And I think in the same way today, one of the things that is troubling Christians quite a lot is not just the dangers of living in a fallen world, but the growing dangers of being a Christian and the growing dangers that are threatening the church of God in today's world.

[6 : 49] You look around and how society is going. If you know anything about history and you look at just the last few decades, you see how society is turning more and more against the idea of truth and against the idea of God and His authority and the idea of right and wrong.

There's the ongoing rise of the thought police in social media and in society, the suppression of truth. Now you can be even fired for just having the wrong views.

I've seen that recently, even in a so-called free country. There's this intolerance of an idea of right and wrong in today's world.

One writer says, Our politically correct world today has become paranoid about any actual claims, not only that we might have the truth, but that someone else might not.

And so there are serious threats to God's people that our whole call to represent the truth of God to the world is seriously under threat. And Satan, as he's always done throughout history, is launching a very direct and dangerous attack on God's church today.

[8 : 00] There are serious threats to God's city today, more than we've seen in hundreds of years. And let me tell you, let me share with you, as a parent, as a Christian parent, that actually concerns me.

As I look into the future, the next few decades, and my children growing up and becoming adults, that concerns me more than my own safety. The threats to the church, the threats to Christians today.

But, we have Psalm 46. And so what Psalm 46 tells God's people in God's city is that despite all their enemies who are surrounding them and want to take them down, the people who are in God's city can be and must be calm.

And the reason is because God is here. This is God's city and He has taken up residence in it. We need to realize the reality of that.

Verse 5. God is within her. She will not fall. And what that means?

[9 : 03] It means that if this is God's home, He's going to defend it. If the church today, God's people, are God's city today, which they are. God's city is not a geographical location.

It covers the whole world and it's His church. And He is resident in it, just like the city of Jerusalem. They don't have to worry if this is God's home. And the reason why is because the Psalm tells us, firstly, God provides exactly what His people need, even when they're under siege.

Verse 4. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God. It's a great line. This peaceful river. In contrast to the waters roaring and foaming outside, you've got this just peaceful body of water in the city.

But there's more significance than just the fact that it's peaceful. You see, in a siege, when a city was under siege, especially in the Middle East, the most important thing they needed was a water supply.

If the enemy could cut off their water supply, they would surrender in two or three days. Otherwise, they would just die. And so for a city under siege, they need a source of water.

[10 : 20] And God's city has a source of water that the enemy can't touch. You know what? In the time that the Psalm was most likely written, Hezekiah's time, they literally had a source of water.

From the Gihon Spring, Hezekiah built a tunnel called Hezekiah's Tunnel. I've actually been there. You can go to Jerusalem. And the tunnel still exists today. It was a feat of engineering for the time. And what he did is he built this underground secret tunnel to a water supply just outside the city, so that even when they were under siege, they would have a constant flow of water.

And so this line could well refer to Hezekiah's tunnel. But that was really symbolic of God continually providing His people with all their needs, even if they're surrounded by troubles and enemies.

It's a wonderful picture. And so that's the first reason that these people need not fear if they are in God's city, because they have provision from Him. But the next reason why they need not fear is because God will defend them powerfully against their enemies.

[11 : 25] Look at verse 5. God is within her. She will not fall. God will help her at break of day. Now, they may have had to go through a very troublesome period of darkness, the night, when there's fearful enemies outside, and when they don't know what the next day will bring.

It was a situation when the armies came, and they would camp outside for the night, and then they would come and attack in the morning. You couldn't sleep.

And yet, here's the assurance that God will preserve His people, even if they're in a time of darkness now, even when they're in trouble, and they see the enemy, and the enemy is very much a threat to them.

And verse 1 of the psalm says, God is our refuge and strength, and ever-present help in trouble, not apart from trouble. So, this reminds us that, you know, God does allow His people to go through trouble.

This psalm, and the other psalms like it, are no guarantee against being in trouble, but it's a guarantee that God will powerfully preserve His people in trouble, and from trouble, and He will eventually rescue them out of trouble.

[12 : 39] And again, during the time of Hezekiah, the city was surrounded by an Assyrian army. But we read in 2 Kings 19 what happened.

God was in that city, and God powerfully preserved them in the morning. Listen to these words. That night, the angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning, there were all the dead bodies. So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.

And so there is an actual historical, literal understanding, example of God coming to His people's aid in the morning, even though they went through a night of trouble.

And in the same way, today, God protects His city in every age, in spite of all of Satan's attempts to destroy his people.

[13 : 42] Now, Satan was quite blatant in using Sennacherib and the Assyrians back then. Now he's a little bit more subtle. He doesn't as much use actual physical armies. But there are multitudes of ways that Satan will try to destroy God's people.

And the assurance here is that God will not fail to keep them safe from all of His attempts to take them out and to destroy them and to undermine them and to shut them up.

Now, when Jesus left His disciples with their mission here on earth, they were in a far more disadvantageous position than we are now against all the forces that were trying to stop them. And you think about it, there were 11 of them. That was the start of the church, 11 disciples. And they had the whole might of the Roman Empire wanting to keep them quiet. How could they possibly grow the church and continue God's kingdom work on earth?

Well, Jesus left them with these words in Matthew 28, which we read earlier. Then the 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

[14 : 49] But when they saw Him, they worshipped Him. But some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely, notice this, I am with you. Always. To the very end of the age. You see, just as God assures His people in Jerusalem, with the surrounding Assyrian army, that He is with them, and therefore He will defend them, even if they look totally overwhelmed, Jesus gives His disciples the exact same assurance.

that His presence in His church means that He will supply what they need. Always. Just as much as God supplied water for Jerusalem in the Assyrian siege.

In the book of Acts, He tells them that they are to go on this great mission He has given them. But before they do, He says to them that they must wait for His Spirit.

They must wait for His Spirit to be poured out, which happened, of course, at Pentecost. Which, in His Spirit, was the supply of His own power, and His own life in them, working in them, and giving them power to do their work, and to overcome their sin, and to be empowered to go about God's mission.

[16 : 23] Without the Spirit, no Christian can be effective, and no church can survive. We need to realize that. You know, we're in an age of growth models, and leadership philosophies, and ideas of how to grow the church, and how to reach out.

The thing is, if we're relying only on our own skills and abilities, churches will fail. Because Satan will just have a field day with them, and he will chew them up and spit them out.

But if they have God's Spirit, that gives them power to be preserved. If they have God supplying them with the river, the water of His Spirit, this life-giving power, even the church with the fewest resources will be able to survive and flourish, and do the work that it's called to do.

Because Jesus will supply what they need, by His Spirit. And He will give them by His Spirit, as He does in the church, the means of grace, His Word, and prayer, and the things that He does in the church to continue to provide us with what we need against the siege of the enemy.

And He will deliver His church from all of their enemies, just as effectively as His Father did for the people of God in Jerusalem.

[17 : 41] And if you think about it, if you just look in history, Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world. Of all the religious movements, or groups of people, it shouldn't have survived the last 2,000 years, and yet, it did.

Against all of the attempts to take it down, of the forces of evil, God has often miraculously preserved His church. Jesus was with them, just like He said He would be to His disciples.

God will always defend the place that He is present, that He dwells. That's the first point here. So as God's people, back then, originally reading this psalm, and today, look inside at the city of God, the people of God, no matter what threats, at any age, come against them, if God is there, by His Spirit, if God is dwelling there, He will defend the place He lives.

He will defend His own home. And if we are in His home, we can be assured of that. But that's not the only assurance that God's people had from Psalm 46.

Not only did they have to look inside and realize the reality of God's presence with them and what that meant, they also had to look outside and realize that beyond the walls of God's city, beyond His own people, He is busy doing things in this world, and that He will always fulfill all of His plans.

[19 : 06] Look at verse 10. Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.

Now, verse 10 is often used as a kind of fridge magnet verse to make Christians feel comfortable and happy. But actually, verse 10 is not speaking primarily to God's people at all.

It's speaking to those outside. It's speaking to the nations. Christians and it's reminding the nations and the people out there who are ignoring God that He is actually the one in charge of this world. The same thing happens in Matthew 28, really, that Jesus tells His disciples, He reminds them of His authority over the world and that is meant to give them confidence.

Just as in Psalm 46, God reminds His people who read it that He is the one in authority over the nations and He will tell them sooner or later, so Jesus says the same thing in Matthew 28 and that is the other basis for His disciples' assurance.

[20 : 14] His authority over what's going on out there and that is something that I think it's easy for us to forget. When the church seems weak and Christ seems small and He doesn't seem to be doing much on the world stage and in the news headlines and He's largely ignored by most of the world, it's then that we need to realize more than ever the truth of this Psalm.

Verse 10, Know that I am God. I will be exalted in the nations. And verse 8 and 9 is actually a prophetic looking forward, a fast forwarding to when Jesus comes back one day to the age that God will bring and it says this, 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. This is a reminder that God is creating a new world to come.

He is going to bring about a new age and that's the one that He's always planned to bring about from the beginning. A new age where He will come and forcibly disarm all those who think that they're in charge of this world.

And He will bring judgment to all who resist Him. Which is actually alluded to in verse 6. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms full, He lifts His voice, the earth melts.

[21 : 46] This is, you know, God is holding back right now. But when He does come and when He speaks there's going to be an upheaval of this world that no one can resist.

His voice and His voice of judgment when it comes is going to be that powerful. And He will, the psalm reminds us, He will fulfill His promises and His plans which He told Abraham right at the beginning of the Bible.

Verse 10, He will be exalted in the nations. His new world will come about when He comes here to rule once and for all and His kingdom covers this world. And all of His enemies are defeated and sin and death is defeated and He rules with blessing.

That is going to come around and He is working on that right now even if it doesn't seem that way. And that's really what the psalm is here to convince His people as they look over the walls, as they look out on the chaos of this world that it might not look like it but God is there.

God is working. He is actively working in the events of this world. And as you look through the psalm, the progression of the psalm, in fact if you took it afterwards and studied it a little bit more in detail, what you'll realize is every time His people look out of the city, they see a little bit more of God working in it.

[23 : 12] So the first time they look out there's no mention of God doing anything. It's just chaos. Then they look in. They're reminded of His presence. The second time they look out they hear His voice in the chaos.

God's voice does things. Then they look inside again. And the third time they look out God is actively at work bringing about His kingdom, bringing about His plans.

And so there's this slow realization every time as people look out at the world that He is there and He is working and that is really a picture of Christian maturity, I think. as a Christian grows in their understanding of God's will and God's word, every time from looking inside, every time we look outside, we see more of God in the world out there.

We see that He is actually not far, that He is not far removed, that He is actually actively working on His plans. That is the slow growth of realization. In fact, that's what the book of Revelation, amongst other things, is there to do.

And we're going to be looking at the book of Revelation from February and what the book of Revelation does, the word revelation actually comes from the Greek apocalypso where we get apocalypse and apocalypse doesn't mean what we think it means, it means an uncovering, it means a revelation, literally, and what revelation does is that it removes the curtains, it pulls back the curtains for us to see what God is doing behind the scenes in this world today, for us to realize that He is actively working.

[24 : 41] And therefore, verse 10, what is the response to knowing that God is working? Be still and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations. Be still and know that I am God. Because of the reality that God is working outside of just the church, He's working in the world today, people need to stop what they're doing and concentrate on what God is doing.

That's the best thing for them. Whether you call yourself a Christian or not, no matter what religious background you come from, if God is working out there and He's revealed what He's doing in His Word, you need to stop what you're concentrating on and you need to start looking at what God is concentrating on.

Because let me tell you, the ultimate catastrophe in this world, the ultimate catastrophe this world will ever see will be the return of Jesus Christ.

You know the word catastrophe? It comes from the Greek word kata and strophe. It means a sudden turning around. And when Jesus comes, God will declare, verse 10, Be still and know that I am God.

[25 : 53] I will be exalted among the nations. And Jesus appears in all His power and His glory. Everybody on this earth will turn around from what they're doing.

They will not be able to ignore Jesus. They will see Him. No one will be able to turn away from Him. And I just want to tell you this morning, don't be one of the ones who still have to turn around when that happens.

Be one of the ones found facing Him already, waiting for His return and living in light of it. And so the message of the psalm in closing is that no matter what chaos or danger is in this world, no matter what we see when we look over the walls outside, the city will be safe where God is present and God's plans will always be fulfilled in the world.

Therefore, the most secure place in this world of chaos, the most secure place to be, is in God's city involved in God's plans. Being in the covenant people of God, in His church, being supplied by His means of grace in the Holy Spirit and doing His work as the focus of your life.

Being involved in His plans rather than your own. And I think there are many, even Christians today, who are still more involved in their plans than in God's plans.

[27 : 18] And the reason, I think, is because they don't have this big view when they look outside. They think God is something to do with their own religion and their own personal life, but when they look outside in the world and the opportunities and the threats, their focus is taken up by that.

And they're not seeing God in it. They're not seeing that God is involved out there in what's going on in the world. The more that Christians learn to see that and to have that worldview, that this psalm encourages God's people to have, the more we will turn away from carrying out our own plans and we will get in line with God's plans.

Be involved in God's work. If you're a Christian, more and more, as you have a bigger vision, a bigger, more truthful worldview of what's going on.

And like Martin Lloyd-Jones, do that with a quiet, focused confidence, no matter what chaos is breaking in the world around us, because there always will be chaos.

Even after coronavirus is gone, there will be more chaos. There will be more things going wrong, more things to distract us and trouble us. Don't let them distract you. Learn to live by this truth that God's plans are unfolding, that God is present here, that God is working out there in the world.

[28 : 38] Be still and know that He is God. He is here and He will be exalted in the earth. Well, let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this bigger perspective that you give us in this psalm.

Help us, Lord, as we look out over the walls into this world and we see the chaos and we see the confusion. Help us to realize what you call your people to realize in this psalm, that you are present in your city, you dwell amongst your people, amongst your church, and that you are busy carrying out your plans in the world.

Help us to get that bigger view of this world and our lives and our places in it. Help us, Lord, as we go into 2021 to develop this understanding of what you are doing here.

As we study the book of Revelation over the next few months, help us, Lord, to grasp the reality of your work in this world and then help us, Lord, to make sure we are people in your city where you dwell and that we are people involved in your work and your plans above our own.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.