

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 2:4:2006

Reading: Psalm 46:1-11

OUR MIGHTY FORTRESS

2. OUR MIGHTY GOD OF STABILITY

Years ago, after a church service, a young boy was waiting for his family outside the door. The pastor noticed him standing around, and thus walked over to him, and began to speak with him. Since the boy had just come from Sunday School, the pastor decided to ask him some questions to determine how much the children were learning. The pastor asked, “*Young man, if you can tell me something that God can do, I'll give you a big, shiny apple.*” Thoughtfully, the boy replied, “*Pastor, if you can tell me something that God can't do, I'll give you a whole box of apples.*” Are you not glad that outside of the realm of transgression, and sin, there is nothing that our God cannot do ? But, while we could spend hour upon hour, week upon week, and, even year upon year to discuss the splendour of our great God, I believe that one of His main attributes is His consistency, His reliability, and His stability.

As a matter of fact, we're informed of this, in the book of Malachi when God spoke and said, “*I am the Lord, I change not.*” (3:6) The writer of the book of Hebrews spoke of this divine characteristic, and referred to it as being “*the immutability of His counsel.*” Again,

to borrow from the same writer, he, in (13:8) wonderfully reminds us that He is “*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever.*” Therefore, though we live in troublesome days, we have not a troubled God. Though we face unsettled times, we have not an unsettled God, and, though our world, and everything around it be unstable, bless His name, we have not an unstable God. For, He is the Supreme One, He is the Sovereign One, He is the Sufficient One. He is “*Our Mighty God Of Stability.*” Now let's not forget the setting, the scene, and the situation behind these verses.

Around 701 BC, the dreaded Assyrian army had come marching out of the north pushing southward through Syria, into Israel, and on into Judah. Judah's king, at this time, was a man by the name of Hezekiah. The Assyrian king was a man by the name of Sennacherib. The Assyrian army had surrounded, and besieged the city of Jerusalem, and were planning on taking the city. However, buoyed by the wise counsel of Isaiah, Hezekiah refused to open the gate of the city, and submit to the Assyrian forces. As a result, God intervened, and sent down one angel, and in one night killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. (2 Kings 19:35) My this army had perished where it stood, and Jerusalem was saved !

It is from this event that we have been given this Psalm. The writer is unknown, however many believe that either Hezekiah, Isaiah, or an unknown poet of Judah wrote it. Nonetheless, it is a precious psalm, and the writer, whoever he may be, attempts to encourage our hearts to realize that regardless of the problems,

persecutions, or perils that we face, He is “ ***Our Mighty God Of Stability.***” Now as we look at (46:2-5) the psalmist gives us three things that I trust will encourage your heart.

(1) DON'T FEAR: WE DELIGHT IN THE SUPREMACY OF GOD

Do you see what the psalmist says ? “ *God is our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble, therefore will not we fear.*” Is there some fear gripping your heart this ? Will you look by faith at God, your God ? Will you get a glimpse of His greatness ? His faithfulness ? His tenderness ? Will you realise that He is supreme ? My there is no problem too great for God to solve, no burden too heavy for God to carry, no battle too overwhelming for God to fight and win. *How easily it is for us to become fearful when circumstances and troubles rise up. The storm of life seem so imposing that our hearts faint within us. Greater and greater a problem can grow, causing us to be discouraged and dismayed.* That is why it is important to keep our eyes fixed on God. Focusing on our problems breeds fear, but looking to God increases faith. Now, will you please attention to the first word of the verse “ *Therefore.*” I have always been told that “ *when you see the word therefore, you must see what it is therefore.*” Keep in mind what has already been stated in (46:1) “ *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*” Now, because of that, the writer can now say,

“ *Therefore will not we fear,*” Thus, by observing this wonderful statement, we see that we are free from

fear. For there is,

(a) A HOPE BY WHICH WE CAN LIVE:

“ *Therefore will not we fear.*” In that statement, the writer is speaking of a hope by which we can live. Now remember, again, the historical background. Here is a man depicted, who seems to have lost all hope. Here is a scene described, of a beloved city, Jerusalem, that is surrounded by a dreaded enemy, and it appears as if their freedom, their liberty, and their well-being is at stake. Yet this man can now look back on the situation, and boldly say, “ *Therefore will not we fear,*” Why? Because there was a hope by which he could live. I heard about an experiment that was conducted some years ago. The purpose of the experiment was to see the effect hope, had on those undergoing hardship. Two sets of laboratory rats were placed in separate tubs of water. The researchers, then, left one set of rats in the water, and found that within an hour, all had drowned. The other rats were periodically lifted out of the water, and then returned. When that happened, the second set of rats swam for over twenty four hours. They concluded that the reason that the last set of rats had survived, was simply because of one thing. **Hope !** These animals somehow hoped that if they could stay afloat just a little longer, someone would reach down and rescue them. My have there been times for you when it appeared that there was no more reason to go on. But, then you thought about the hope by which you can live ! “ *Therefore will not we fear,*” why because God is our refuge and strength. It is said that during the infamous

Thirty Years' War, of the 17th century, a German pastor, by the name of Paul Gerhardt, and his family, were forced to flee from their home. One night as they stayed in a small village inn, homeless and afraid, his wife broke down and cried openly in despair. To comfort her, Gerhardt reminded her of the Bible's promises about God's protection and keeping.

Then, going out to the garden alone, he too broke down and wept, for he felt that he had come to his darkest hour. Gerhardt fell on his face, and began to cry aloud, and pour his heart to God. Soon afterward, he felt the burden lifted and sensed anew the Lord's presence.

Then, taking his pen, he wrote a hymn that has brought comfort to many through the years,

***“ Give to the winds thy fears, hope, and be undismayed.
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears,
God shall lift thy head.
Through waves and clouds and storms
He gently leads the way, wait thou His time,
So shall the night end in joyous day.”***

My are you facing what appears to be a hopeless situation ? Has the walls of your heart become surrounded by despair, doubt, fear, and fret ? Then, lift up your heart and sing, “ *God is our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble, therefore will not we fear.*”

(a) But then, there is

(b) A HELP ON WHICH WE CAN LEAN:

You see, here is Hezekiah, the king of Judah, facing the, invasion of his beloved city. He, then receives a letter from Sennacherib, advising him, not “ *to let thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.*” (2 Kings 19:10) Hezekiah, no doubt, sought the counsel of his advisors, his generals, and his staff, yet, no one could give him the comfort, and the help that he was in need of. Who could the king turn to in an a hour of crisis ? **God !** For, Hezekiah took Sennacherib's letter, and “ *went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.*”

(2 Kings 19:14, 19:19) You see, Hezekiah couldn't find help in the soothsayers, nor the fortune tellers. Nor, could he find the help he needed in his closest confidant, or his closest companion. But there was One who could help him, and, therefore he could say, in the midst of invasion, “ *Therefore will not we fear.*” A copy of a letter from William Sherman to Ulysses S. Grant, written in 1865, at the end of the Civil War, reads like this, “ *I knew wherever I was, you thought of me, and if I got in a tight place, you would come, if alive.*” My there is One today who hears your cry, feels your pain, sees your plight, and knows your situation. He is well aware, and well able to do what no other can do. Do you need help today ? Have you found it in God ? The God who is supreme, and therefore you

need nor fear. (1)

(2) DON'T FRET: WE DEPEND ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

You see, when we realise that God is in control, we're overjoyed and immensely comforted. My its when we take our eyes off God, that we fret, and worry. So here is the psalmist is saying, don't fret as you face,

(a) THE IMPOSSIBILITIES OF LIFE:

Trouble is a word that needs no introduction. As used here, the more precise meaning would be “ *in tight places.*” To be backed into a corner where escape seems impossible. Is there were you are this ? Are you in a tight place, where're you're being pressed on every side ? Where your options are limited, your freedom is restricted, and your progress is arrested ? (a)

(b) THE INNOVATIONS OF LIFE:

Often we become anxious as we face change. The word for “ *earth,*” in (46:2) can also be translated “ *land,*” and the word for “ *removed,*” can be translated “ *change or change hands,*” so that verse could read, “ *therefore will not we fear though the land change hands.*” Is this not exactly what was happening Judah ? Sennacherib was threatening Jerusalem and Judah was fearful. You see, most of us do not like change because we feel threatened by it. The psalmist is referring here to ***national*** disasters. Those things that happen, in our world, and country, that are constantly changing.

Those things that happen to produce chaos, confusion, and change. Now, I need hardly remind you, that we are living in uncertain days, because everything around us is constantly changing. The government changes, the economy changes, the weather changes, the season changes, and the time changes. We are surrounded by it, and we are suppressed by it, for we are constantly faced with change.

But the psalmist says, “ *though the land change hands,*” we need not fear the changes that life brings. You see, though earthly things change, there is an Eternal One who never changes ! Though secular things change, the Sovereign One never changes ! Though the government changes, the Godhead never changes! Though kingdoms change, thank God, the King never changes ! For He is the immutable, unchanging God who is “ *the same yesterday, today, and forever.*”

(c) THE INSECURITIES OF LIFE:

Most people consider mountains to be one of the strongest and most dependable, lasting things on earth, they are secure surely ! But my if the mountains were to sink into the ocean and the sea was to respond by sending up massive tides and angry waves, we can still depend on the Lord. *You see, the psalmist is not speaking here not only of national disasters, but natural disasters.* He is saying, we need not fear the unsettledness, the instability, nor the insecurities of life. H.G. Spafford, was a well-known Chicago businessman. He was also a dedicated Christian, as well as a loyal friend and supporter of D.L. Moody, and other

evangelists of that day. He had suffered some serious financial reversals, all starting with the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, in which he lost his home. Spafford decided to lift the spirits of his family by taking them on a vacation to England, where he also planned to assist with Moody's crusade there. On the 9th November 1873, Spafford was detained by urgent business, but sent his wife and 4 daughters, as scheduled, on the S.S. Ville du Harve, planning to join them as soon as he got free. However, halfway across the Atlantic, the ship was struck by an English vessel, and within 12 minutes, 226 people lost their lives in the icy Atlantic waters, including his 4 daughters. Mrs. Spafford was among the few who were miraculously saved. She sent back a wire telegram, to her husband, that consisted of two words, "***Saved Alone.***" Mr. Spafford immediately boarded a ship to meet his wife in Cardiff, Wales. As he stood, hour after hour, on the deck of that ship, he came to the approximate place where his precious daughters had drowned. It was at that moment, he said, "that all of the pain, grief, and hurt that he felt, was replaced with the peace, and the comfort of God. He then began to cry out, "*It is well with my soul, It is well with my soul.*" A short time later, Horatio G. Spafford, penned the words of that immortal hymn,

***"When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll.
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul."***

My are you seeking solace, and comfort for a trial, a

trouble, or a tribulation you're facing ? Then, remember God is still in control. Trust Him ! (1) (2)

(3) DON'T FAINT: WE DRAW FROM THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD

You see, when trouble comes we need to rediscover our strength ! The psalmist tells us,

(a) WE HAVE A SECRET POWER WITHIN:

He says, "*There is a river,*" (46:4) What do you think a city's greatest fear was when they heard that invaders were coming ? Well, it was wasn't catapults or rock or flaming spears. What the people feared most was being cut off from supplies of food and water ! You see, the invaders may not have been able to come inside, but they could stop you from getting the things you needed from the outside. In the Kidron Valley outside of Jerusalem bubbled a deep spring called Gihon. It provided the water supply for the city, so it was of vital importance. Hezekiah knew it must be protected, so he redirected the spring through a conduit that was 1,777 feet long, hewn out of solid rock. He brought the spring waters beneath the walls of Jerusalem into a reservoir in the middle of the city. Then he covered up all traces of the spring in such a way that the enemy would have no idea where the supply was. (2 Kings 20:20 2 Chron 32:20) You see, it didn't matter how long the siege was, Jerusalem had an unfailing water supply.

The symbolism and meaning of water in the Bible is

instructive. The Father is set before us as a **Fountain** of Living Water. (Jer 2:13) The Son is set before us as a **Well** of Living Water. (Jn 4:13-14) The Spirit is set before us as a **River** of Living Water. “ *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood, and cried, saying, If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on Me as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*”

(Jn 7:37-38) My the Holy Spirit has come down from the throne of God to fill our hearts and provide us with an unfailing reservoir of spiritual supply. We have a secret power within. Do you realise that ? Through the Holy Spirit, God has come to live inside you. Why should we look outside for help when trouble comes ? The Holy Spirit indwells us to refresh us, to cleanse us, to strengthen us for the journey ! (a)

(b) WE HAVE A SOVEREIGN PERSON WITHIN:

“ *God is in the midst of her*” (46:5) God certainly did help her. That’s when the Angel of the Lord dealt with the Assyrians ! The Lord stepped into time and space like that mysterious person in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace. My Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were marched into the furnace to await the flames. But who was this fourth person in the fire ? “ *And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*” (Dan 3:25) The Lord occupied the fire with His children. Are you in the fire this ? Well, the Lord is with you to give you stability. “ *She shall not be moved.*” I heard about a monastery in Portugal that is perched high on a 3,000 foot cliff, and is accessible only by a terrifying ride in a swaying basket.

The basket is pulled with a single rope, by several strong men, perspiring under the strain of the fully loaded basket. One American tourist who visited the site, got nervous half way up the cliff, when he noticed that the rope was old and frayed. Hoping to relieve his fears he asked, “ *how often do you change the rope ?*” The man, in charge replied, “ *we change it whenever it breaks.*” My as far we are concerned the rope will never break. “ *We shall not be moved.*” Sure, the road gets bumpy and rocky. Sure, there are times of peril, persecution, problems, but we have a secret power within, we have a sovereign person within, we can draw from the sufficiency of God !

The early American Indians had an unusual practice to train young braves. On the night of a boy’s 13th birthday after learning hunting, scouting, and fishing, he was put to the final test. He was placed in a dense forest to spend the night alone. Until that moment he had never been away from the security of his family. *But on that night, he was blindfolded and taken several miles away.* When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of thick woods, and he was terrified. Every time a twig snapped, he visualised a wild beast ready to devour him. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity dawn broke, and the first rays of sunlight entered in the interior of the forest. Looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path. Then, to his amazement, he saw the figure of a man standing a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. ***It was his Father and he had been there all the night long.*** Do you feel that you are in the darkened shadows of despair this ? Well, He is there.

Do you feel you are all alone ? Well, He is there. Do you feel no-one understands ? Well, He is there. Do you feel vulnerable ? Well, He is there. Our Mighty God of Stability. (1) (2) (3) “ *God is in the midst of her.*”

He's in the midst of our storm

He's in the valley we walk through

Where two or three are gathered in His name

He'll be there too

When you feel so all alone

He is standing next to you

He is with us, now our Lord

He's in the midst, He will see you through.”