

Place: Lurgan Baptist 26:3:2006

Reading: Psalm 46:1-11

## OUR MIGHTY FORTRESS

### 1. OUR MIGHTY GOD OF SECURITY

Martin Luther is one of the key figures in church history, a man mightily used by God to bring about the Protestant Reformation. Luther, a natural born German, and the son of a renowned lawyer, devoted himself, from an early age, to a thorough study of the scriptures. He, then, graduated college, went to an Augustinian monastery, and, in 1507, was ordained a priest. *On a mission to Rome, in 1510, Luther was appalled by the corruption of the papacy. He became a professor of theology, and began to preach salvation by faith rather than works.* On October 31, 1517, noted as probably the most important date in Protestant history, Luther posted his 95 theses on the doors of the Cathedral of Wittenberg, Germany, condemning the teaching and practices of the Roman church. In a day when everyone practically bowed to the Roman church, and its rule, Luther refused to, and as a result, faced such opposition as was never before seen.

The year 1527 was the most difficult of his life. After ten demanding years of leading the Reformation, a dizzy spell overcame him in the middle of his sermon on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, of that year forcing him to stop preaching. Luther

feared for his life. On 6<sup>th</sup> July while eating dinner with friends, he felt an acute buzzing in his ear and lay down, again convinced he was at the end of his life. He partially regained strength but a debilitating discouragement set in as a result. In addition, heart problems and severe intestinal complications escalated the pangs of death. *What was worse, the dreaded black plague had entered Germany, and spread into Wittenberg.* Many people fled, fearing for their lives. Yet Luther and his wife Katy remained, believing it was their duty to care for sick and dying. Although Katy was pregnant with their second child, Luther's house was transformed into a hospital where he watched many friends die. Then without warning, Luther's one year old son Hans became desperately ill. *With death surrounding him on every side, Luther was driven to seek refuge in God as never before. Psalm 46 became the strength of his soul.*

As a result, of these experiences, Luther, wrote the hymn which became the anthem of the Protestant Reformation. ***“ A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.”*** Like Martin Luther, the author of this Psalm found solace and refuge in God during difficult times. The year is 701 B.C. The King of Assyria is a man whose name strikes terror in the hearts of those in the Mediterranean world .... Sennacherib. He is intent on expanding his kingdom. He has already taken Israel to the north and now his Assyrian troops surround the walls of Jerusalem. They hurl their abuse, *“ we've heard about the God you serve,”* they taunt. *“ We're here to find out special He is. Why don't you send Him out to defend you ? We've destroyed many nations and none of their gods*

*put up a fight.*” Then they send a menacing letter which Hezekiah spreads before the Lord. The King leaves it all with God. And he waits. The ominous moments tick by. Then God intervenes ! One angel in one night and 185,000 Assyrian soldiers are slain.

( 2 Kings Ch’s 18 & 19 ) When the break of day comes the men of Judah can hardly believe their eyes. It’s a landscape of death. The Bible says, “ *behold they were all dead corpses,*” ( 2 Kings 19:35 ) It’s a red letter day in the nation of Judah and a red letter Psalm is penned to commemorate it. It is a beautiful, as well as an interesting Psalm, for it is divided into 3 parts.

The first part ( 46:1-3 ) denote to us *the presence of God*. The next part, ( 46:4-7 ) describe *the protection of God*. Then, the final part, ( 46:8-11 ) remind us *of the power of God*. Thus, the writer wonderfully comforts us, by informing us, that *God is on our side, God is by our side, with God there is none beside, and, because of that, thank God, we have peace inside.* Yes, bless His name, what ***A Mighty Fortress Is Our God !*** I want to talk to you this .... about “ ***Our Mighty God of Security,***”

### **(1) THE EXISTENCE OF GOD IS ESTABLISHED**

What a remarkable way to begin the Psalm. “ *God is.*” There it stands in all its naked force, the opening statement of the Psalm. No attempt is made to water it down, to apologise to a sceptical age, even to prove that God is. The Holy Spirit simply deems certain truths to be self-evident, the first and foremost, that God is. My .... do you believe in the existence of God ? Do you believe

in the reality of God ? Here is one of the things that separates the Christian from the humanist and agnostic. The humanist insists that there is no God, indeed many humanists are quite anti-God. The agnostic shrugs his shoulders and says, “ *I just don’t know.*” What a contrast to the Christian believer who comes with an emphatic, “ *Yes, God is.*” (1) It is established,

#### **(a) BY HIS NAME:**

Look at ( 46:1 ) if you will ! Observe, the name “ *God,*”. The name of God that is used here, is known as the Hebrew name “ *Elohim.*” The name “ *Elohim,*” is a powerful name, and it denotes, “ *One who is strong and mighty, and One who keepeth covenants.*” The name “ *Elohim,*” is used over 2,570 times in the Old Testament. It is “ *Elohim,*” who is mentioned in Genesis ( 1:1 ) and who is the creator of all that is. Therefore, we see the God, the Psalmist is referring to, is the mighty one, the strong one, and, His existence is established by His name. The 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1953, is an important date in our calendar. For that was the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. It is said that she was placed in the royal chair of King Henry, and as the entourage came before her, one would bow, and then place, in one of her hands, a golden sceptre. Another bowed, and placed in her other hand a golden rod. Then, a crown was placed on her hand, and as so, all shouted, including her husband, “***All Hail The Queen ! All Hail The Queen !***” My .... we greatly respect our Queen, but there's One who is far greater, and far more superior than our Queen. He is “ *Elohim,*” the Mighty God. My .... Do you need to be

reminded of Him this .... ? Are you facing a problem that is complex, a situation that is demanding, a crisis that is discouraging ? Tell me, is it anything to the God who has set the galaxies in space ? Is it anything to the God who created and continues to sustain the earth ?

My .... the Greeks, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Romans all seemed invincible for a brief time. They are now no more than colourful characters from ancient history and God's power is still the same. Yes, He is the Mighty One, and He is the Strong One. He is " *Elohim*," and He is the Creator, the Controller, and the Conqueror of all things ! (a)

**(b) BY HIS NATURE:**

For, when we consider the name of God, we must also consider the nature of God, because the two are inseparable. My .... by looking at His nature, we see His mercy, His mystery, and His majesty. We see that His is a Supreme Nature, a Superb Nature, and a Sovereign Nature. We see His nature as not merely distinct, but Divine. I heard the story of a man named Morris Davis, who was put in jail for praying. It all began when he was picked up, arrested, and charged with arson. He then was taken to take a lie detector test. Thinking he was all alone, he prayed that old familiar prayer, " *Lord, let me get away with it just once.*" But, a policeman overheard his prayer, and submitted it as evidence against him. The lower court ruled that it was a private conversation, and could not be submitted as evidence. The Canadian government, however, appealed this ruling, and the Court of Appeals decided that it was admissible evidence

because prayer is not a private conversation since God is not a person.

I've got news for the appeals court, as well as any other court who makes this kind of a ruling. He is the invisible, and invincible God of Heaven and earth, and His nature is revealed by His person. Now God is obviously not a " *person*," in the sense that we as humans are defined by the term. Still, He has characteristics which are clearly " *personal*," that is, He lives, thinks, feels, speaks, loves, cares, is angry, grieved, pleased. Moreover, in the person of Christ, the nature of God best demonstrated. It is in Christ that the " *Infinite becomes the Intimate. The Sovereign becomes the Saviour, and, the Awful becomes the Approachable.*" Blessed be God, for the splendour of His being, and the wonder of who He is. (1)

**(2) THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS EXPRESSED**

Louis Berkhof defines providence " *as that work of God in which He preserves all His creatures, is active in all that happens in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end.*" We see God's providential care in this opening verse for the Psalmist says, " *God is our refuge and strength.*" He is simply emphasising God's watchcare over His people. And he tells us that God's care for us His people is,

**(a) PERSONAL:**

Don't forget the personal possessive word. " *God is our*

*refuge and strength.*” He is my refuge and strength ! Is this not what Hezekiah discovered ? Have you ever received a poison pen letter ? Hezekiah did. It was a letter filled with threats and details about how the people of Judah would soon be destroyed. And the King of Judah does something very interesting. He carries the letter with him to the temple and he spreads the letter out before God. “ *Read this, Lord,*” he is saying. Is that what you need to do ? Is your problem great, is it terrifying ? My .... run to the Lord, lay it out before Him, and say, “ *Look ! Just look what I am facing.*” For God’s care of us is personal.

**(b) PROTECTIVE:**

The Hebrew word for “ *refuge,*” invokes a quite place to go for protection. Hezekiah finds refuge in the temple. And its not a place for leaving his problems outside .... The king brings them in to spread before the Lord, revealing every detail. Is this idea not sprinkled throughout the Old Testament ? Listen to these glorious words in Deuteronomy “ *The eternal God is Thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.*” ( 33:27 ) The Psalmist says, “ *I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in Him will I trust.*” ( 91:2 ) In another Psalm he says, “ *The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will trust.*” ( 18:2 ) My .... have you learned through experience that God is your guaranteed refuge ?

Sure, we try other alternatives. At the first sign of trouble we rely on our own resources. Then, we fail to solve the

problem, perhaps we’ll call on family or a close friend. But the ultimate answer is not to be found in any of these options. My .... the answer is in the midst of us. Our Lord is our refuge, a very present help in trouble.

**“ *How oft in the conflict  
When pressed by the foe  
Have I fled to my refuge  
And breathed out my woe.*”**

My .... do you realise that you have a place in which you can hide, a person to whom you can hold, and a protection that you can have in the dangerous times of your life. When difficulty or danger came upon Martin Luther and his friend Philip Melanchthon, the two architects of the Reformation, sometimes Luther would say, “ *Philip, come, let us sing the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm.*” The two of them would bring out the metric version Luther had written, and they would sing the words together. My .... a mighty and awesome refuge is our God .... for our time, for Luther’s time, for any time. (a) (b)

**(c) PRACTICAL:**

The Psalmist not only informs us that He is “ *our refuge,*” but He is also our “ *strength.*” This word ( Heb. oz ) is used throughout the Psalms to describe the attribute of God’s omnipotence. ( Ps 62:11, 63:2 ) It is used to speak of God’s might voice that rules over all ( Ps 68:33 ) and His powerful arm that overcomes all opposition. ( Ps 89:10 ) This strength was

demonstrated by God in the exodus when He overcame all obstacles to lead Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness unto the Promised Land. ( Exod 15:13 )

This word “ *strength*,” conveys the meaning of “ *might, force, and power*.” The word pictures one who has grown weary, weak, and worn, and is in great need of help, and strength. It is the same word, used by Isaiah, in ( 40:31 ) when he said that, “ *they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength*.” The implication is that though we may grow tired, and though we may grow weary, He is there, and He is not only our refuge, but He is our strength. *God is our refuge, He hides us, God is our strength, He helps us*. My .... does life seem to be tumbling in around you ? Is the battle raging ? Is the storm blowing ? Do you need to hide in the shelter of the rock ? Well, don't forget that the Lord hides you, that He might help you ! I don't know about you, but there have been many times that I've found my fuel tank on empty. I had grown tired, weary, and weighted down beneath the load. But, then, He would demonstrate His strength to my weary heart, and I would find a second spiritual wind, and go on. My .... do you realise that in times of danger He is your refuge, and in times of demand He is your strength ? (1) (2)

### **(3) THE RELEVANCE OF GOD IS EXHIBITED**

Do you recall the words of the song ?

*“ Where can I go ? Or where can I go  
Seeking a refuge for my soul  
Needing a friend who'll love me to the end*

### ***Where can I go but to the Lord ?”***

The word “ *help*,” here ( Heb ezra ) means support or assistance for one who is weak, vulnerable, and helpless. It is widely used in the Psalms to denote the assurance of God's all sufficient help for the righteous. ( 22:19 27:9 ) And the Psalmist tells us here that God's help is,

#### **(a) *POWERFUL*:**

Its more than a match for any trouble we encounter. Do you see that word “ *trouble*,” ? It means to be in a tight place. To be backed into a corner where escape seems impossible. *The Psalmist was between a rock and a hard place with no way out*. Yet God was with him, an ever present help in trouble, immediately present, and instantly available to His people. Did you know that the Hebrew language contains at least thirty words that describe various kinds of trouble ? What kind of trouble are you in this .... ? Could it be that you're facing financial trouble ? Perhaps its trouble to do with your family ? Domestic trouble ? Trouble at work. Is it some kind of personal trouble that's keeping you away at night ? Well, listen to what the Psalmist says, “ *God is our refuge and strength, an abundantly available, help in trouble*.” He is saying that His help is more than enough to handle the job.

I heard of a postman who was telling someone of the sense of security he felt in his work of delivering the mail. He described it, and said, “ *Why, all the resources of the government are pledged to support me in carrying*

*out my work. If there is but only one postcard in my bag of mail, no one dare hinder it's delivery. For, all the federal powers of the United States would be thrown into action if necessary to secure the safe delivery of that postcard."* My .... there is one far greater than the government of the U.S.A. or the government of the United Kingdom, we have the help of the God of the universe, and His help is powerful.

**(b) PERPETUAL:**

Its continuous ! " *A very present help in trouble.*" The word " *present,*" denotes exactly what it says, a current and a present state. You see, the Psalmist is not making any mention of the future, nor of the past. Rather, he is focused upon the present state of whatever we find ourselves in. Therefore, if He is a " *present help,*" then that speaks of a help that will be present ! Thus, since we find ourselves always living in the present, we see that His help will always, and continuously be there for us. Yes, God's help is (a) (b)

**(c) PRESENT:**

For these words " *very present,*" also convey the idea that God is easy to find. He is real and as much there with you as He could possibly be. Do you know something ? Some of our friends run out, when trouble rolls in, but God isn't like that. My .... He moves in closer, putting His great arms around us. A missionary of a by gone day, by the name of John G. Paton, sought to evangelise the New Hebrides Islands. It is said that

one night hostile natives surrounded the mission station, intent on burning out the Paton's and killing them. Paton and his wife were praying, all during that terror filled night, that God would deliver them. When daylight came, to their amazement, and surprise, they awoke to find that their attackers had left. *A year later, to the day, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ.* Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing him. The chief replied, " *Why, who were all those men with you there ?*" Paton knew that no men were present, but the chief said that he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments, with drawn swords, circling the mission station.

I don't know about you, but I thank God for His " *unseen hand, that guides me through this weary land.*" Regardless of where we go, what we face, or what we do, " *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*" Would we not have to agree this .... with Luther and say, " *A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing,*" for, He is " *Our Mighty God Of Security.*"