

Psalm 46 (A Very Present Help in Trouble)

Intro

In recent days the Coronavirus has taken over our nation. Colleges have closed. A number of states have closed all k-12 schools. The NBA suspended its season. Then other sports organizations followed in droves. The NCAA's March Madness tournament was cancelled. DisneyWorld theme park is now closed. The U.S. has suspended all travel into our country from Europe for 30 days. This past Friday the World Health Organization officially announced that this is a global pandemic. A pandemic refers to a new virus that kills, with worldwide geographical spread, and with sustained person-to-person spread. Here are some of the details:

Coronavirus details

- 1) Nearly 5,000 dead
- 2) Over 130,000 confirmed cases
- 3) 3.4% mortality rate (common flu mortality rate is 0.1%)
- 4) 15% mortality rate for those 60 years or older (take existing health conditions into account here)
- 5) 22% mortality rate for those 80 years or older
- 6) 85-89% have minor conditions often unnoticed
- 7) High risk: those 60 and older or those suffering from chronic diseases
- 8) Virus enters through your mouth, nasal route, or eyes from droplets caused by coughs or sneezing
- 9) Six feet is safe distance
- 10) Incubation period is 2 to 14 days
- 11) Symptoms are same as the common flu for 85-89%
- 12) Severe and critical symptoms such as respiratory distress and pneumonia for 11-15%
- 13) Vaccine may take 12-18 months to develop

Safety measures

- 1) Frequent hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds
- 2) Don't touch your face
- 3) Minimize physical contact: shaking hands, hugging, kissing, etc.
- 4) Keep your distance from sneezing and coughing people
- 5) Stay home when you're sick for the safety of others
- 6) Don't travel where the virus is known to be
- 7) If you are elderly or chronically ill avoid crowds and close contact

Sources (both articles written by Christian medical doctors with sound theological convictions)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-we-know-coronavirus/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/neighbor-love-covid-19/>

What are the motives behind preventing large crowds from gathering?

- 1) Protecting at risk people
- 2) Stopping the spread of the Coronavirus
- 3) Preventing our hospitals and health care system from being overwhelmed and unable to care for the sick
- 4) For the church our motive is love for the vulnerable, not fear or panic or self-protection

What are we to make of all this?

BIG IDEA: Don't fear because God is with us in our distresses and sovereign over his creation

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Flow of thought/Setting/Context/Background

Exact historical circumstance for this Psalm is unknown. Assyrian invasion in 8th century B.C. is suggested as a probable setting for this Psalm.

Point 1: Don't fear because God protects his people during their distress (46:1-3)

Explanation

The Psalm starts out with an assertion meant to shape our reaction to distressing circumstances. This is the assertion: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (46:1)." In Hebrew poetry there is a device called parallelism. The second statement of a line restates the previous line in a different manner, or it provides a contrasting statement. Here the second statement in verse 1 restates the first statement in a different way saying the same thing.

God is our refuge

- used of shelter in a rainstorm or safe height in battle = protection from dangerous circumstances

God is our strength

- God strengthens his people = he is the source of their strength

God is our help

- he comes to our aid as a refuge and by providing strength when we face troubles

Trouble

- speaks generally of distress: used for pain of childbearing, inner turmoil, terror of an approaching army, and anguish of a besieged people = distressing circumstances that generally create fear (like a virus that is killing people worldwide)

Note the “therefore” in verse two. Because God helps his people during distressing times, by protecting them and strengthening them, believers should not fear distressing circumstances, like natural disasters (“though the earth gives way”). Note the troubling situations that should provoke fear because God “is a very present help in trouble”:

- “though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea” = erosion of mountainsides into the sea
- “though its waters roar and foam” = tidal waves or a tsunami
- “though the mountains tremble at its swelling” = earthquakes

One form of distress that can come upon God’s people is physical upheaval in the natural world. This depiction might be a metaphor for the threat of an invading army. Whatever the case, when disaster is upon us, whether natural disasters or invading armies or pandemics, the fact that God protects us and strengthens us should comfort us so that we don’t fear. We don’t fear because of what we know to be true about God.

Application

Knowledge of God, in this case the fact that he protects his people, is intended to comfort us in times of great distress. God reveals his character and activity to us so that we will be comforted when distress arises. Like right now with the Coronavirus.

Does God guarantee that every believer will be protected from the Coronavirus? No.

Jesus said that the Father “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt 5:45).” Sometimes believers suffer along with the world because of the fall. This is why we need wisdom and can’t presume on God’s protection. In his mercy, God has provided us with doctors and infectious disease experts to shine light on the Coronavirus. Being informed, we should make wise decisions, not presuming that God will bless our foolishness. But even if God allows us to suffer as a result of the Coronavirus through no fault of our own, this doesn’t separate us from God’s love.

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Sometimes, for reasons unknown to us, God wills for his people to suffer. But he is with us when he permits us to suffer.

Psalms 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

This is a time to trust in God’s protection and seek his help, not a time to fear. This is a time to pray, not a time to fear. This is a time to seek God’s wisdom and act wisely. This is not a time to fear. Should God permit any of us to suffer, this is a time to draw upon God’s strength. In the context of persecution, Peter said this:

1 Peter 4:19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Point 2: Don't fear because God dwells in his people during their distress (46:4-7)

Explanation

The city of God was Jerusalem. God provided the city with a river and he dwelt there spiritually. While God dwelt in Jerusalem, chaos was going on all around her. Another form of distress that plagues the people of this world is political upheaval:

“The nations rage, the kingdoms totter (46:6)”

But Jerusalem is glad despite the political chaos around her. Why? Because...

“God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns (46:5).”

In the middle of political upheaval, the people of God will be glad because God is present with her. Because God is present she won't be moved. Because God will help her.

Another reason Jerusalem won't be moved is because she knows that God rules over the nations:

“he utters his voice, the earth melts (46:6).”

God says the word and all is calm. Jerusalem knew God held rule over the nations. Nothing could thwart him.

Application

So it is with us. In distressing times of societal upheaval, we can still be glad. We can remain unmoved. Why? Because God rules over the nations. And because God is present. Because...

Psalms 46:7 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

God is our fortress

- a fortified height, an inaccessible high place = a place of safety = synonym for refuge

While God previously dwelled in the midst of Jerusalem, God dwells inside his people today:

Matthew 28:20 And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Colossians 1:27-29 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with **all his energy that he powerfully works within me**.

John 7:37-39 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, '**Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.**'" ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those

who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

When political upheaval is all around us, when our society is experiencing a fluid situation where we don't know where this all will end up, God is present within us in the form of his Spirit to make us glad. If we fill our hearts with truth rather than fearful messages of doom, the Spirit will strengthen us with gladness. The Spirit uses truth to transform us and renew our minds. So fill your hearts with truth in these days of fear and upheaval:

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Point 3: Don't fear because God will put an end to his people's distress (46:8-11)

Explanation

Now the Psalmist reasons with the people:

"Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth (46:8)."

In times of natural disasters or political upheaval or military dangers, one proper response is to meditate on the prior works of God. For example, the events of Exodus where God sent plagues on Egypt culminating with the death of Egypt's firstborns and Pharaoh and his armies being destroyed in the Red Sea.

The Psalmist continues by declaring the works of God:

"He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire (46:9)."

God brings wars to an end. And God thwarts the efforts of military invaders. Instead of become fearful and panicking, how should the people respond when faced with natural disasters, political upheaval, and military threats? They should...

"Be still, and know that I am God (46:10)."

They should remember the fact that one day God would put an end to the international upheaval around them:

"I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth (46:10)!"

Application

Knowing the fact that God is the ruler of the universe, that he simply says a word and it is done, that one day Christ will return in glory, sit on his throne, and gather the nations before him for judgment is a comfort in fearful times. Just like the fact that all natural disasters and political upheaval and international threats and all sickness (like the Coronavirus) will cease is a comfort in fearful times. Given the fact that we know that one day Christ will return and eliminate all

effects of the fall, whether natural disasters or political turmoil or military threats or sickness or death or sin, how should we respond in times of distress?

We should pause and acknowledge God's authority over all things (be still and ponder who God is!). God is sovereign over all that takes place:

God is the one "who works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph 1:11)"

God is the one who works all things together for good (Rom 8:28)

Knowing that God rules over all things is a comfort. This is why Jesus could say this to his disciples who would face persecution in the future:

Matthew 10:28-31 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

What is Jesus saying? Fear hell but don't fear what people can do to you. After all, a sparrow can't fall to the ground unless I will it. But don't fear what people can do to you because you are precious to me. Nothing can happen to you unless I will it.

Conclusion

How should we respond to the Coronavirus? If Psalm 46 tells us anything, it tells us to turn to God rather than fear and panic. Psalm 46 tells us, **Don't fear because God is with us in our distresses and sovereign over his creation.** We shouldn't fear for a number of reasons. **Don't fear because God protects his people during their distress.** Trust in God's protection during these days. **Don't fear because God dwells in his people during their distress.** Be comforted by God's indwelling Spirit and fill your heart with truth rather than fear. **Don't fear because God will put an end to his people's distress.** The present distress is temporary. One day all effects of the curse, like the Coronavirus, will be done away with.

Instead of fear, we should turn to God for help. Seek his protection, comfort, and wisdom. He is "a very present help in trouble." Instead of fear, we should embrace God's rule over all things. After all, God controls every microbe, atom, and molecule. Instead of fear, let trust in God and love for others guide you in these unstable times. God calls out to us: "Be still, and know that I am God."