

God is Our Refuge, Strength and Help

Psalm 46 (text); Ezekiel 47:1-12; Matthew 6:25-34; Revelation 21:1-4; 22:1-3

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The world today is a big mess of wars and financial crisis. In these troubled times, the most powerful nations depend on their military and economic power to bail them out. But all empires, including Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome, have come and gone.

The world's richest people take refuge in their money. We hear of Forbes' 400 richest people in the world, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett being the top two. In the Philippines, the three richest are Henry Sy, Lucio Tan and the Ayala Family. But we have seen in the past that in a worldwide crisis, today's rich people can easily become tomorrow's poor.

The refuge of the rich and famous entertainment and sports celebrities is their youth, beauty, and physical power. But time flies, and soon their youth, beauty and athletic ability are things only for reminiscing.

Military power, earthly riches, beauty, youth and physical strength—all of these are but temporal and earthly, and they are soon gone.

What is your refuge in this life? Is it your earthly riches, beauty, youth and physical strength? Is it your job, your family, your friends, your possessions, or your intellect?

The psalmist says that his strength, refuge, and help is God. When all around him, fallen creation is being shaken, God's enemies surround him from all sides, and Judgment Day is looming, our assurance and comfort is God's sovereign rule over all.

God is our refuge, strength and help:

- **When Creation is in Upheaval**
- **When Enemies Surround God's People**
- **When Christ Returns in Judgment**

When Creation is in Upheaval (verses 1-3)

The picture in verses 1-3 is creation in upheaval with great storms, earthquakes and tsunamis. They destroy homes and buildings. Whole cities have no power, water and basic services for days or even weeks. Everything grounds to a halt. Whenever these natural disasters strike, they terrify people so much that they start asking, "Is this the end of the world?"

What do you do when natural disasters strike? Who do you turn to? We turn to God who is our refuge, strength and help.

God doesn't just give us refuge, strength and help. *He himself* is our refuge, strength and help. Our own refuge, strength and help will fail, even if they are from God. But God doesn't fail. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as our refuge, strength and help is constant, ever-present, and never-failing.

We trust God because he is our refuge, our shelter from rain, storm and danger. Unlike our homes and emergency shelters which cannot stand against huge storms, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and other natural disasters, God as our refuge cannot be shaken.

God is also our strength, a stronghold and fortress in which we are safe and secure. With his high walls and lofty towers, God as our fortress cannot be overrun by attacking enemies.

God as our ever-present help is one who can always be found whenever we need help in time of trouble. We have confidence to *“draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* ([Heb. 4:16](#)).

We can also trust God for his sovereign control of the universe. At creation, God separated land from sea, so man and land animals may live and multiply in their habitation. God not only set, but enforced the boundaries of the sea.

But the picture in verses 2-3 is of the creation in reverse. Instead of order, there is chaos. Separation and boundaries are violated by the sea roaring and foaming into the land, and the mountains falling into the sea. When God caused the Great Flood in Noah’s day, the boundaries of the seas were erased and land disappeared. But the ark of God was Noah’s refuge, strength and help.

Today, we can be sure that the Great Flood will not happen again. God promised as much to all creation, giving us the rainbow as a sign that the world will never be destroyed by flood again. But floods caused by typhoons and tsunamis still happen, because God brings desolations upon the earth. This is a hard saying, for it is easy to believe that God brings good things, but not disasters. [Isaiah 45:7](#) makes it clear that God is in sovereign control of all things, whether good or evil, *“I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.”*

The last few weeks have also been terrifying for the whole world. Not because of natural disasters, but by a man-made economic disaster. The world seems to be in an economic tailspin as the world’s biggest banks and corporations are failing, so that the world’s most powerful nations are in great fear. Why is there so much fear and anxiety? Because their refuge, strength and help are in their military and economic power. These can all disappear, like the mountains in Noah’s day, in a few days, or even in a single day.

Who is the only one we can trust during these events? God alone, and not our riches, might, youth, beauty and wisdom. These all will certainly wither like grass and disappear. But God as our refuge, strength and help cannot change or disappear.

When Enemies Surround God’s People (verses 4-7)

From the chaos and uproar in verses 1-3, there is a big change of mood and scenery in verses 4-7, in which we see a picture of order and stillness. From the roar of big waves and wind and the shaking and erupting of mountains, we now see a Thomas Kinkade-like painting of an idyllic, serene and well-watered city, *“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.”*

The City of God

This city of God is peaceful and not in upheaval, rejoicing because of its peace, security and prosperity. This river, like an irrigation system, flows through the city and provides for its needs. The people of God enjoy its fresh water for themselves, their animals and trees.

God is the fortress of his city, well-protected and secure with its high walls and watchtowers. God is not only their fortress, but he himself dwells with them in the city. *“God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.”* When dawn comes and their enemies start their attack, God fights for his people, and the city will not fail.

In the Old Testament, the “city of God,” “the holy mountain” and “Mount Zion” all refer to Jerusalem and its Temple. These words are used in [Psalm 48:1-2](#), *“Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King.”*

Although Jerusalem itself had no river but only a small stream to nourish its people, the Old Testament alluded to a symbolic river that nourished its people. This description of the city of God with a river in its midst takes us back to creation, to the Garden of Eden. A river flows from there and divides into four great rivers to water the whole earth ([Gen. 2:8-14](#)). This is a description of the garden as God’s temple, where God himself dwelt with Adam and Eve. Our first parents had all things provided for their enjoyment of Paradise, including God himself.

The city of God – it is peaceful, well-provided, secure and where God himself dwells with his people.

The City of Man

In contrast to the safe, secure and well-provided city of God, the city of man is in upheaval, *“The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.”* Mankind is in rebellion against God and Christ; they plot against the people of God. The kings of the earth say Christians cannot preach against homosexuals. In Canada, a preacher who does so can be charged with a “hate” crime. Even America is now very close to that situation.

In India and Iraq, Christians are persecuted and killed. In many parts of Asia and the Middle East, the gospel of Christ is forbidden to be preached. They don’t want to do anything with God. They want to worship their idol-gods.

[Psalm 2:1-3](#) rings true for us as it has in the past: *“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’”*

But what is God’s response to the city of man? [Psalm 2:4-6](#) says, *“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ‘As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.’”*

God laughs in derision at the kings of the earth who imagine a vain thing—rebellion against the God of the universe. All throughout man’s history – from Adam to Moses to David to Christ to the early church to the Reformation up to the present time – God’s enemies have plotted to destroy his people. But the city of God is still here, protected by God throughout the ages.

And in the end, he will destroy the rebellious nations of the earth and their idol-gods of military and economic power, riches, youth, beauty, wisdom, and false worship.

When Christ Returns in Judgment (verses 8-11)

How does God defeat the kings of the earth? By setting his King in Zion, his holy hill, his Temple! Christ defeated Satan, sin and death on the cross. In the end, *“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”* ([Phil. 2:10-11](#)). He reigns now and forever as King of Kings. All the kings of the earth, both believer and unbeliever, will bow their knees and kiss the Son of God in obeisance to him.

Rebellious nations have always assembled together and *“surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city”* ([Rev. 20:9](#)) as they rage against God’s people. God allows the kings of the earth to make war against his people. But Christ promised that the *“gates of hell will not prevail”* against the church. Because of Christ’s victory over Satan, it is the church who now assaults the kingdom of Satan. And Satan’s walls and gates will be broken down. Unbelievers will be plundered from Satan’s house as they are saved by the preaching of the gospel ([Matt. 12:29](#)).

In his wrath, God will speak against rebellious unbelievers through his Anointed Son, Christ, and destroy the nations with the sharp sword of his Word. Christ *“will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty”* ([Rev. 19:15-16](#)). The wrath of God’s fire will come down from heaven and consume them.

This is how God will end the nations’ ages-long war against the saints, *“He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.”* All the destruction, persecution and martyrdom of the saints by the nations will end because God will break their bows, spears, chariots, and all their weapons of war.

Today, the kings of the earth trust in their riches and military might, not in God. They have not learned from King David, who numbered his people so he could say with pride how great and powerful Israel was under his reign. They have not learned from Israel in Jeremiah’s day, who thought that since God is in the Temple in Jerusalem, no army in the world could destroy their city and temple. Jeremiah warned them about their false assurance, *“Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place.”* But the Jews answered in their blind rebellion, *“This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord”* ([Jer 7:3-4](#)). And so Babylon overthrew the city and the Temple.

Just like Israel – and Egypt, Babylon and Rome – today’s rebellious, rich and powerful nations will suffer a crushing defeat at the hands of a wrathful God when Christ returns.

But in the midst of all of these disasters and wars, God tells his people, *“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”* He warned Israel to be quiet and trust in God, not in their armies: *“In repentance and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”* But the people answered in defiance, *“We will ride upon swift horses”* ([Isa. 30:15-16](#)).

Knowing God, his sovereignty and his power, gives us assurance, peace and stillness. He tells us to stop from all of our busy work and anxiety and reflect on God’s sovereign control over all things. Be still and reflect on his glory and power. Be still and make God our refuge, strength and help. Then our hearts will be quiet. Then we will sing with the psalmist, *“In God will I trust. Even if foundations are shaken, yet God will I seek.”*

In quiet reflection amidst the turmoil around us, we will know that God is not only our strong and sure fortress, but He himself dwells with us in our fortress! *“The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”* What are we to fear when Immanuel, God with us, dwells among us? Nothing! Not even wars and the worst economic crisis in history are to shake our foundations. Paul gives us this assurance in [Romans 8:35-39](#):

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul could not think of anything else in this catalog of everything that is found in the universe that would be able to separate us from the love of Christ. Because God himself is with us in this sin-cursed world, we are not to be shaken and fearful of anything.

Conclusion

Beloved friends in Christ, God reminds you in these very uncertain, unstable days of wars and economic crisis to make him your Refuge, Strength and Help.

Do you worry about what will happen tomorrow, the next month, the next year? Jesus also reminds us in his Sermon on the Mount, *“Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”*

Do not worry – this is an almost impossible task. You might be thinking, *“Easy to say, when you’re not poor like me. We survive from day to day.”* Yet God is not telling you to forget about your jobs, or your plans for tomorrow, or your plans for your children, or making wise investments. No, what he is saying is that all these earthly things are not to be your highest priority in life. You are not to be worrying about these things the whole day, every day. This body will soon pass, and all these material things will also disappear.

Life is more than this body and these things. Your soul is eternal, and what happens to your soul is more important than tomorrow's food, drink and clothing. Christ did not die for you so that you can have food, drink, clothing, and homes. He died so that you will rejoice and be glad in the heavenly city of God. He died to restore Paradise lost, the Garden of Eden.

Yet, in the end, when Christ returns, Paradise lost will be restored. In that restored city of God, there will be a *"river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb."* Back in [Ezekiel 47:1-12](#), there is a picture of a river flowing out of the Temple of God. And wherever that river flows, life comes in abundant, teeming fish.

Jesus himself is that Temple and that river of life, inviting all who hear the gospel, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'"* ([John 7:37-38](#)). Whoever drinks this Living Water will never thirst again, because he will have eternal life.

In that heavenly city of God, there will be no more wars and no more economic crises. Beauty, youth and strength will never fade, because in eternity *"the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* ([Matt. 13:43](#)). But most of all, there will be no more mourning, crying or pain. But most of all, there will be no more mourning, crying or pain because Christ, the Tree of Life and River of Life will dwell with us in the new heaven and new earth ([Rev 21:1-4; 22:1-3](#)). Then we can sing with the psalmist,

"The Lord of hosts is on our side, our safety to secure; The God of Jacob is for us a refuge strong and sure."