
The God Who Helps

Psalm 46¹

There are two kinds of Psalms. There are those that are written as prayers. These allow us to enter into the reflective devotion of the man after God's own heart. There are those that are written as songs. They were composed in the presence of God to be sung in the presence of God's people.

Now Biblical singing has several purposes.

Exaltation – Worshiping God through the power of praise.

Edification – Instructing one another through the power of truth.

Examination – Bringing our wills and affections into line with God's by singing.

And we find all three in this Psalm. This is not a prayer, as such. It is a song written to exalt God, edify God's people and cause God's people to align the inner compass of their souls with true heaven.

Stanza One – Security

(v.1-3)

The words of this song inspired Martin Luther to write his great hymn, *A Mighty Fortress*. The text of that hymn rings with Luther's affirming response to these words.

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

² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

Truth in our Trouble

(v.1)

Affirms truths about God. God is our refuge. God is our place of safety and security. He is a mighty fortress. We need to think about that some because most of us have only a distant acquaintance with massive stone castles and walled cities. For David and most of the people of his day, Jerusalem was a place of safety and security for it was a fastness not often broken.

God is our strength. God is our sustaining provision for daily strength. The point here is that we will not rely on human resources, but upon Divine enablement.

God is our present help. He is abundantly available for help. It is no good having help that is far away and distant and unavailable. It is like having a life guard way down the beach when you are drowning here. No, God's nearness and presence is itself His help to us.

Places this truth in life. God is these things to us in a time of trouble. The word here literally means, "a tight place." The image is that of a road climbing its way up into a mountain pass. There it narrows and becomes an ideal place for ambush or to be crushed under falling rock.

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We all know what this means. Most of us have been in a tight place. We have had times of difficulty and trouble. This is when we must affirm God as our refuge and strength.

Truth Directing our Affections

(v.2a)

Since we have this kind of God in these kinds of circumstances, we will not fear. We will not be afraid. We will not be paralyzed into disobedience. This is what the New Testament calls faith. Faith is when we believe God (v.1) in an obeying way (v.2a). It is how Israel failed to enter the land. They had the promise of God and the God of their promises and yet *they were afraid*. The truths they had were not believed in such a way that their affections were changed.

This is always the Biblical order. Truth in the mind directs the will and informs the affections so that all we do magnifies God.

Truth Tested in Calamity

(v.2b-3)

What interests me here is that these are not the circumstances they face. What they faced must have been less. But in this song, God's people are challenged to *stretch* themselves. We have this kind of God in these circumstances therefore we will not be afraid *no matter how bad it gets*.

What is described here is cataclysmic and destructive upheaval. It is earthquakes and massive storms on the seas and crumbling shorelines. So even in the face of terrible peril and disastrous upheaval, we will embrace all that God has disclosed Himself to be. We will believe Him and trust Him and we will not fear.

So God is near to us as our strong and safe and secure basement when the storm tracker radar initiates sirens and the lightening crackles, the thunders clomps its way across the heavens and tornadoes roar like freight trains across the fragile structures of our lives.

Stanza Two – Satisfaction

(v.4-7)

- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- ⁵ God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
- ⁶ The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

What beautiful words these are, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God."

Our Delight in God

(v.4)

This was a wonderfully familiar idea to the Old Testament saints. David had already informed us what this joy giving river was in Psalm 36:7-9. It is God Himself. It is reveling in His mercy and loving-kindness, His righteousness and His justice. It is plunging into the fountain of life flowing from the very being of God. It is drinking of the streams flowing down from the mountains of God's delights and pleasures. It is plunging in and finding it brisk and clear and clear and breathtaking and life-giving. Do we delight in God?

Do you think of God this way? Is your relationship with God merely a matter of duty? If your theology only keeps you from fear in the midst of cataclysmic change, then you are still in the foothills of grace. We need to recapture the joy of knowing that our God is both holy and happy and there is no tension between those ideas. May we have the grace of God to savor God so that we are made glad.

God's Dwelling in Us

(v.4b-5)

Now David writes this in an age when God manifested Himself as dwelling in a tabernacle or later, in Solomon's Temple. The glorious light of His Presence gave an assurance that all would be well.

But God does not dwell in buildings now. He has chosen to dwell in man. One of the great mysteries of the New Covenant is, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." So the morning has dawned and Son has come and God is dwelling in His people by the Holy Spirit.

God's Defense for Us

(v.6-7)

So, here is the second set of circumstances. Here is social upheaval and political instability. In other words, God's people are surrounded by enemies. In their day, it was at the level of political and military might. In ours, it may be that for some Christians, but for us it is the degenerating spiral of our culture that threatens us. We see, as they did, the judgement of God falling all around us.

But the Almighty God is with us and Jacob's God is our stronghold. Now why does God call Himself, "the God of Jacob?" In one Psalm we read, "Jacob have I loved" and yet just a few Psalms later, "Jacob, you worm." Here is what I learn from the God of Jacob. When my delighting in God and God's dwelling in me and His defense for me tempts me to pride, I must remember that God loves a worm, like me.

So, in the midst of cultural collapse and political upheaval, we will delight in God. We will exult in His Presence in us and His Protection for us. And we will never forget that the Almighty God is the God of Jacobs.

Stanza Three – Supremacy

(v.8-11)

The final stanza is designed to impress upon God's people the utter supremacy of God. In the midst of all that would cause us to question God, we must be gripped by the greatness and the supremacy of God.

- ⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"
¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

In His Power

(v.8-9)

Note that we are invited to come see the works of God? What works of God?

The ones that have been **described** in verses 1-7. We are to learn to see the powerful working of God in the natural world, and in particular its calamities and disasters. And we are to see the mighty voice and powerful word of God moving to shake nations.

The ones that have been **designed** to accomplish verse 8-10. God's powerful works are designed to bring about His purposes in the world. Satan may move in what often appears to an unstoppable and insurmountable array. But know this, God speaks—the earth melts.

Now there is an eschatological aspect to this. We now live in the age of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. Since the cross, God, through the church is commanding all the people groups to acknowledge Him and bow to Him and find their gladness in Him. We go with the good news of the glory of the blessed or happy God. And we know that history is marching toward a determined end. So natural disaster and national upheaval and social change are only marks that we are moving toward the glorious day of the Parousia or appearing of Christ.

In His Purpose

(v.10)

What is God's purpose? Have you ever thought about that? We think of the answer to the first question from the Westminster Catechism: What is the chief end of man? To glorify and enjoy God forever. Well, there is an even more important and basic question: What is the chief end of God? To glorify and enjoy HIMSELF forever. That great insight rings out from this verse.

We must be still and stop striving. Now he is not commending passivity to the Christian. The stillness here is a command to *stop striving*. Stop being in a sense of inner turmoil that leads to worry and ill-advised actions and Christian radicalism. It is also a command to have a sense of inner calm and peace in the midst of unsettling change and devastating attacks that is resting in the promises and person of God. In other words, we are to believe God in an obeying way that looks like rest.

God will be exalted, period. He will be magnified. He will be seen to be supreme and sovereign and utterly satisfying. And all this not just to Jews, or Americans, or Westerners, but to all the people groups.

This leads me to a very practical question. Does your response to the turmoils and troubles and trials and temptations and testings of life *make God look big in your life*? Your calm, your joy and your stillness all are lenses through which God is magnified.

In His Provision

(v.11)

This God who is moving in power towards His purpose of self-exaltation and glory—this God Almighty, this Lord of Hosts, this one who is a mighty warrior—He is with us. So we have, even us Jacobs, the mighty help of God's nearness.

Reflect and Respond

Why are the mountains falling into the seas (v.1-3) and nations in an uproar (v.4-7)? Because God is working (v.8-9) and will be exalted (v.10).

The emphasis here is *God is not distant*. God is near and present and working in natural calamity and social upheaval. We need this word because in our times of trouble it is easy to think that God is distant. No, He is a present help (v.1). He is in our midst (v.5). And He is with us (v.7,11).

The consequences for us?

We will not fear (v.1-3).

We will be glad (v.4-7).

We will be still (v.8-11).

God's primary concern is that *He will be exalted*. In everything in every way for everyone everywhere from the depths of eternity past to the brightness of eternity future, God will be magnified.