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OUR SUFFICIENT GOD

Psalm 46

by

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July 11, 1993

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Psalms: Lesson 12

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As you probably know, one of the most heated debates in Christian circles right now concerns the role of psychology in the Christian life. At the heart of that debate is the question of whether the Bible and the resources it points us to--a personal relationship with God, forgiveness of sins, the promise of eternal life, our riches in Christ, the fellowship of the church, etc.--are sufficient to deal with the complicated problems people face, or whether we must supplement these things with the insights of modern psychology.

Pastor John MacArthur (interview in "Servant," 9/91) tells about being on a Christian talk show where he said to the host, "Don't you believe that the Holy Spirit, the Word of God and the living Christ are fully sufficient for our sanctification? Psychology is only a hundred years old, people have been being sanctified a lot longer than that." She said that some people can't get into the position to be sanctified until therapy helps them deal with some psychological issues. MacArthur comments, "That God can't do His work in you until a good therapist gets it started is a frightening concept."

In his book, *Our Sufficiency in Christ* [Word, 1991], MacArthur tells about his church being sued over a counseling case. During the trial, a number of "experts" were called on to give testimony. He says (p. 57), "Most surprising to me were the so-called Christian psychologists and psychiatrists who testified that the Bible alone does not contain sufficient help to meet people's deepest personal and emotional needs. These men were actually arguing before a secular court that God's Word is not an adequate resource for counseling people about their spiritual problems!"

In the same book, in referring to so-called "Christian" psychology, he states (p. 31), "The clear message is that simply pointing Christians to their spiritual sufficiency in Christ is inane and maybe

even dangerous. But on the contrary, it is inane and dangerous to believe that any problem is beyond the scope of Scripture or unmet by our spiritual riches in Christ." Please be clear: At issue is *not* whether Christians need counseling. The question is, do they need the counsel of the ungodly, or is Scripture sufficient?

I agree with MacArthur and so does the author of Psalm 46! Scholars are not unanimous, but I agree with John Calvin who relates this psalm to the time when King Hezekiah of Judah was surrounded by the army of Sennacherib, King of Assyria. Forty-six towns and villages in Judah had been sacked. Over 200,000 residents had been taken captive, along with much spoil. At least 185,000 troops surrounded Jerusalem, and it looked like only a matter of time before the city fell.

But proud Sennacherib did not reckon with the fact that Hezekiah's God is the living God who will not be mocked. Hezekiah prayed, God spoke, and in one night the angel of the Lord defeated Sennacherib by killing 185,000 of his soldiers (2 Kings 18-19; 2 Chronicles 32; Isaiah 36-37).

Whether out of that situation or some other, Psalm 46 was written out of the crucible of extreme adversity from which God had provided deliverance. It relates to anyone who is in a time of trouble, or to anyone who will face trouble, no matter how extreme, in the future. It tells us that

When trouble strikes, God is sufficient to get you through.

No problem, whether emotional, physical, or spiritual, is too big for our God. If we will learn to take refuge in Him and lean on Him alone for strength, then with the psalmist we can face the most extreme crises with quiet confidence, because God is with us and He is sufficient. But we would be in error if we thought that God insulates us from problems. The psalm makes it clear that ...

1. Trouble will strike the godly.

The fact that God is our refuge and strength does not mean that we are immune from troubles and problems. The abundant life is not a trouble-free life. We need to be clear on this because many false teachers today claim that it is God's will for every person to enjoy prosperity and perfect health. They teach that since Jesus has promised to answer the prayer of faith, all that stands between you and material prosperity and physical health is your lack of faith. Confess it as yours by faith, and it's yours, according to this heresy.

But the Bible teaches no such thing. It teaches that God is our help in trouble, not that He will exempt us from trouble. The psalm mentions catastrophic trouble: global changes (46:2), severe earthquakes and storms (46:2-3), and wars (46:6, 9). Hebrews 11:35-38 mentions all sorts of terrible trials which faithful believers have had to face: being homeless, without proper clothing and food, mockings, torture, beatings, imprisonment, and various forms of cruel execution.

God does not protect Christians from this sort of thing. When a plane goes down, God does not make sure that there are no Christians aboard. When war ravages a country, God does not preserve the believers from its effects. God does not allow cancer to strike only those who have lived a life of sin. No, trouble will strike the godly as well as the ungodly. The question is, when trouble strikes, do you want to face it with God as your refuge and strength or do you want to find help elsewhere? Psalm 46 shows that when trouble strikes,

2. God is sufficient to get you through.

Let's look first at the God who is sufficient and then at how we can lay hold of His sufficiency in our troubles.

A. The God who is sufficient.

The psalm falls into three sections:

46:1-3: God, the refuge against the raging of nature.

46:4-7: God, the resource against the raging of nations.

46:8-11: God, the ruler over the rebels of earth.

(1) God, the refuge against the raging of nature (46:1-3). The psalmist pictures one of the most frightening and catastrophic natural disasters imaginable: an earthquake so severe that the mountains slip into the heart of the sea. In California, we who lived in the mountains used to joke about how, after "the Big One" hit, we would have beachfront property. But the psalmist is picturing a quake so big that the mountains get swallowed up by the sea! He is saying that in the worst disaster we can imagine, God is sufficient as our refuge and strength so that we need not be terrified.

As our refuge, we can flee to God and find relief and comfort. As our strength, we discover that His strength is made perfect in our weakness as we trust in Him (2 Cor. 12:9). And, God's protection and strength are immediately available ("a very present help") the instant we turn to Him. While He may delay delivering us to show us our absolute need for Him or for reasons we can't understand, we can always have immediate comfort and calm when we flee to God for refuge and strength.

During an earthquake a few years ago, the inhabitants of a small village were alarmed by the quake, but also surprised at the calmness and apparent joy of an old woman whom they all knew. At length one of them asked her, "Are you not afraid?" "No," she replied, "I rejoice to know that I have a God who can shake the world."

Whatever personal catastrophe you face--a major health problem, the death of a loved one, the loss of your job, emotional problems, relational conflicts, or whatever--God is bigger than your problems. He is readily available

to help if you will take refuge in Him and trust in His strength.

(2) God, the resource against the raging of nations (46:4-7). "There is a river" Jerusalem is one of the few ancient cities not built on a river. Ancient cities needed water close at hand, especially during a siege. When Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem, he was sure that their lack of water would ultimately drive them to surrender. But unknown to Sennacherib, Jerusalem had a source of water. Wise King Hezekiah had built an underground tunnel which secretly brought water 1,777 feet through solid rock from the spring of Gihon to the pool of Siloam. That little stream supplied all of their needs during the siege.

That river is a picture of the greater spiritual resource of the Lord Himself: "God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved" (46:5). He is the living water who alone can quench our spiritual thirst. He is the God who is powerful enough to quell the uproar of the nations by simply raising His voice (46:6).

Jesus told the woman at the well: "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14). Jesus also said, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37-38). He was referring to the Holy Spirit, who is given to every believer.

Whatever problems rage against us, God's Spirit is the ever-flowing river who sustains us and gives us gladness even while we're under siege (Ps. 46:4)! If Christians would learn to drink from the abundant river of God's Spirit, why would they ever turn to the supposed wisdom

of godless men like Freud, Jung, Rogers, and company?
God is our refuge and resource in times of trouble.

(3) God, the ruler over the rebels of earth (46:8-11). Nations may rage and proud men may rebel, but God's sovereign purpose will be fulfilled. He sets up kings and removes them as He wills. He is God; He alone will be exalted in the earth (46:10). When Christ returns, He will crush all opposition to His reign. The mightiest armies on earth are no match for His sovereign power.

Do you think that this God, who rules over His creation, who speaks the word and an entire army drops dead, is sufficient for your problems? When trouble strikes, we need to focus on our God who is sufficient: He is our refuge, He is our resource, He is our ruler. We need to lay hold of His sufficiency. But how?

B. How to avail yourself of His sufficiency:

(1) Depend on Him as your refuge. On *Him!* It is God Himself who is our refuge and strength--not our armies, not our fortresses, but God. It's so easy to build up our own defenses against trouble and to put our trust in them instead of in God. We trust in our bank accounts, our insurance policies, our schemes and plans for the future. There is nothing wrong with these things--the Bible, in fact, urges us to be prudent in planning for the future. But those things can become wrong if we allow them to shift our trust from God alone.

How can you learn to depend on Him alone? Get to know who He is as revealed in His Word. Trust springs out of knowledge. A person who has little knowledge of flying will be greatly afraid in flying through rough weather. An experienced pilot, who knows flying and knows his aircraft will not be afraid. Because he has greater knowledge, he has greater trust.

The refrain (46:7, 11) suggests two areas in which you need to know God:

(a) Know Him as the Lord of hosts. "Hosts" refers both to the heavenly bodies (the universe) and to the angels. Our God spoke this vast universe into existence and rules over the billions of stars and planets. He is the Lord of all of the armies of heaven. With short, crashing phrases that hit like hammer blows, the psalmist shows us the might of our God: "The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered; He raised His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us" (46:6). God is not some feeble, senile old man with a long white beard, sitting in heaven worried about the rebellion of man. He is mighty! If such a God is for us, who can be against us (see 2 Kings 6:8-23)? If you know God as the Lord of hosts, you will depend on Him.

(b) Know Him as the God of Jacob. Why not refer to Him as the God of Abraham, the great man of faith? Or why not at least refer to Him as the God of Israel, the name given to Jacob after he strived with God and prevailed? Jacob means "supplanter" or "deceiver." Jacob was a conniving schemer. Why refer to the God of Jacob as our stronghold?

This points to God's sovereign grace. God chose conniving Jacob over nice guy Esau so that everyone could see that He saves us on the basis of His choice, not because of our good works (Rom. 9:11). One of the errors psychology has brought into the church is to try to build people's self-esteem by telling them, "Christ died for you because you were worthy." Not so! He died for you while you were an unworthy sinner (Rom. 5:8). But the good news is, if He chose you apart from your worthiness, He will keep you and enable you to persevere unto the day of Christ because He is the God

of Jacob.

So you can depend on Him, even if you've failed, if you know Him as the God of Jacob. His help in a time of trouble is not conditioned on your great strength, but on His great grace. When you are insufficient (which is always), depend on the Lord of Hosts and the God of Jacob as your refuge.

(2) Draw on Him as your resource. If you know Christ as your Savior, then you have His life within you. His Holy Spirit is that river of life, sufficient for your every need. He is that "river whose streams make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:4). Draw on Him. How?

(a) Drink from Him daily. You have the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in you! You are "a holy dwelling place of the Most High" God (46:4)! You are privileged to be able to draw upon His strength daily. He refreshes. He brings gladness and joy. Do you drink from Him daily? Do you have a time when you meet alone with Him in the Word and in prayer? Do you walk each day in conscious dependence upon Him, confessing your sin and yielding to His way? The river is there, but you've got to drink daily or you'll dry up spiritually.

(b) Meet with His people regularly. Jerusalem was the "city of God" where God dwelled with His people in a special sense (46:4-5). The temple was there; it was the center for worship. Today God lives in every believer individually, but there is a special sense in which He dwells with His people corporately. God never intended of us to live the Christian life or to face trials in isolation.

We need one another in the Body of Christ: to encourage one another, to bear one another's burdens, to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. For this to happen, you've got to be involved with the Lord's people beyond

our Sunday worship service. The Lord is the river, but believers are the streams. To drink fully from the river, you've got to be in connection with the streams. You drink of the Lord through His people.

Thus to lay hold of His sufficiency: Depend on Him as your refuge; draw on Him as your resource.

(3) Defer to Him as your ruler. God desires that you submit to Him voluntarily. If you do not do it voluntarily now, a day is coming when you will do it under force: Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11).

There are two things to be said with reference to deferring to Him as your ruler:

(a) Behold His works (46:8). In the context the psalmist is referring to God's miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem in destroying the Assyrian army. But we can apply it as an invitation to review God's works down through the centuries. See how He has delivered His people time after time, both in the Scripture and in church history. The God of Abraham, Moses, David, Hezekiah, Peter, and Paul; the God of Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and Spurgeon, is your God. Behold His works and you will submit to Him as your ruler when you face a crisis.

(b) Bow to His ways (46:10). He is God. The command to cease striving is God speaking to the nations who are fighting against His people and His purpose. "You won't win, so quit while you can!" But we can also apply it to ourselves. When trouble hits, don't strive against God. Know that He is the sovereign God, even over your crisis. As God, He will be exalted and glorified in the earth. He wants you to exalt Him by submitting joyfully to Him through your trouble. The chief end of man is

not to live a happy, trouble-free life. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We glorify Him when we defer to Him as our ruler in times of trouble.

Conclusion

Psalm 46 inspired the great reformer, Martin Luther, to write his triumphant hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God." Luther faced numerous dangers and threats on his life from the pope and his forces. At one point he spent 11 months in hiding in Wartburg Castle. In the face of opposition, excommunication, and pressure from every side to back down, he stood firmly for the truth of salvation by grace through faith alone. When he had occasion to fear or grow discouraged, he would say to his friend and co-worker, Philip Melancthon, "Come Philip, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm," and they would lift their voices:

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.
Our helper He, amid the flood, Of mortal ills prevailing.

Luther wrote, "We sing this Psalm to the praise of God, because God is with us, and powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends His church and His word, against all fanatical spirits, against the gates of hell, against the implacable hatred of the devil, and against all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and sin" (in *The Treasury of David* [Baker], by C. H. Spurgeon, II:384).

For you to experience God's sufficiency in a crisis, you must be learning to experience it each day. If you aren't learning to depend on Him as your refuge, to draw on Him as your resource, and to defer to Him as your ruler when things are going smoothly, you won't know how when trouble strikes. A crisis does not make a person; a crisis *reveals* a person. In a time of trial, you turn to what you trust. An alcoholic turns to the bottle. An addict turns to drugs. A worldly person turns to the world's wisdom. A Christian should turn to the Lord. When trouble strikes, He is sufficient to get you through.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Some say, "All truth is God's truth; thus we can use the truth of psychology." Why is this fallacious?
2. Some argue, "We use modern medicine; why not modern psychology." Why is this fallacious?
3. How do we find the balance between "raw" trust in God and the proper use of means or methods?

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