

# Psalm 46 - Protection and Presence

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Preacher: Darren Jackson

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     bold proclamation of faith in verse one where they said God is our refuge and strength and ever present help in trouble therefore I will not fear it's a very famous psalm which you may have even heard before that talks about not fearing even though the earth feels like it's falling apart round about you which for most people even the most stoic among us is a quite a hard thing to engage with well when life feels like it's falling apart round about you I recently went to see Oppenheimer I don't know how many of you have seen it but one of the things I love about Oppenheimer which is the story of Robert Oppenheimer the guy who invented the atomic bomb for the allies during world war ii is he explores these themes of like hubris and confidence and safety which then can suddenly become unwound and undermined very subtly and very quickly in the film that kind of works on two levels you see the scientists full of confidence and ambition and drivenness as they make this weapon yet when it dawns on the main character Oppenheimer or when he kind of finally admits to himself what is being created the reality of what is going to be the world is going to be like once nuclear weapons are around you see the confidence drain from him I don't know if you've seen the film there's this particularly nightmarish scene where the crowds are chanting his name but he is panicked yeah it works on a different level as well where not only is the world become a more scary place but he as a character goes through this arc where he's the hero of the war he's in front of time magazine and a few years later his reputation is in complete tatters because of something that's innocuous to him but to someone else it's quite a black and white case that's why some of the films in black and white and it is a personal thing his personal reality has suddenly gone from safe solid and secure to now he doesn't know what the future is going to hold this is the case for the people of

God in this psalm yet they have this real beautiful confidence in God and so tonight we're going to think about how can they say such a thing what do we see in this psalm that allows people to have this confidence in God and we're going to think about these two key factors protection and presence so I'm going to quickly pray and then we're going to look more in detail in this psalm father I pray as we read these ancient prayers of your people that you'd speak to us tonight of your truth and who you are would you say what you would like to say to each one of us ask that in Jesus name amen now we don't know the particular context of this situation of the psalm or why it was written but we don't really need to know in some of the psalms some of the psalms are very specific they'll tell you this was written for this reason and other ones are more general so we know there's something happening but allows us to think about the more general principles at the same time and we are looking at a psalm where there is a reality where the mountain it feels like the mountains are falling into the heart of the sea and waters are roaring with foam and mountains are quake with their surging it's a kind of powerful language about the scariness of what life is like and what we do know is that they are writing in a time where it was quite common to besiege a city you could just turn up with an army attack the city and everything you knew about your day-to-day life could be wiped out if there was a bigger stronger force at the gates the the reality of life back then was fragile at the best of times yet you could make an argument that for us today life is somehow even more fragile Oppenheimer in itself is a film that looks at the end of the film is not exactly a rousing confidence about the human race it portrays a very fragile reality whereas that or climate change whatever threat we may discover tomorrow you could have even a bigger case to suggest that we have even more reason for fear in our world than the writers of this psalm the threats of the psalm the threats to the psalmists are as real as they are to us today so the psalm is talking about real threats and he quite quickly the psalmist quite quickly contrasts the threats that are going to happen to their city with this idea of the heavenly city the city of god in verses four and five there is a river whose streams make glad the city of god the holy place where the most high dwells god is within her she will not fall so the psalmist talks about this different city which is a kind of it's a mixed mess as mixed image because he's talking about the city there in zion the city of god but it's also a picture of the eternal city the place where god dwells the city where all believers of god hold which is sometimes used to talk about heaven the new reality the new eternity that is to come and in this place the city of god is far different from the cities of the worlds we are in the imagery of verse two and three of earthquakes and landslides are contrasted with the stability of the city of god though the mountains are moved in verse two zion shall not be moved instead of roaring seas the city of god is described as having a river where the streams make glad the city of god which means it's a place of worship it's a place of joy in fact that phrase make merry in hebrew is like essentially to brighten the place up it's to have a place of joy so not only is this place unshakable it's a place of life it's a place of celebration it's a place of worship this is the place where the psalmist look to as a source of their strength and protection now obviously every single one of us is a citizen of some earthly city and i'm assuming for most of us unless you're a visitor that is glasgow and if you just moved here

it will become glasgow and i guess you probably take for granted the idea of what it means to be a citizen but we obviously know for a lot of people as a complicated and stress-inducing thing that something is not stable and not secure and next week i'm actually going to the city chambers a guy called louis who's been in my growth group for many years is becoming a citizen and i've i've been a tiny part of that process i don't overplay it but watching the loops he's had to go through as somebody who moved here studied here got his doctorate here met his wife here had a kid here is being quite it's helped me reflect and there's a lot of stuff i just take for granted about what it means to just be a citizen in a city and regardless of what your political leanings are i don't think you need to look at the news much to see the humanitarian crisis to know that for a lot of people in the world this idea of a safe and stable home is not a reality for many people and so while it's something we may in our day-to-day reality have for granted for a lot of people in the world it is not a common thing and in most places in the world unless you're born there you have to earn your citizenship usually you have to prove to a country you are going to be a good citizen whether that's you've got enough money or you have the right type of character you have to show that you are going to contribute to be a good citizen this is not the case with the city of god you do not earn citizenship to the city of god it's something that cannot be taken away for you because it is given as a gift by god to his people it's a free act and supposed to something that we earn is earned for us by god i think this is perfectly embodied in the history of the people who actually wrote this psalm so sam is attributed to the sons of korah if you're unfamiliar with them which is fine the sons of korah appear earlier in the scriptures so in the stories in the book of numbers where god has rescued his people of israel he's moving them to make a new people for a new place to be a light to the nations it's fair to say they have a number of bumps along the road in the journey and one of them is korah who's mooses's cousin who gets fed up with mooses's leadership so he leads a rebellion and god acts quickly to shut down the rebellion but the rebellion is shut down in a very total and complete sense it says in number 16 that god so korah his household and everybody is associated with him went down alive into the realm of the dead and everything they owned the earth closed over them and they perished and were gone from the community it's a total wiping out of the sons of korah and everything associated with him they're entirely removed from the community that is until we read later in 10 chapters later in the same book the line of korah however did not die out some of them it would seem survived and if you look further into the bible the sons of korah actually go on to be like temple bodyguards they become people who live in the temple and serve there and prepare things to be offered as worship to god they are they become central to the way worship even happens in the community so the songs of the sons of korah and there's 11 of them in this in the book of psalms are the psalms of a saved people there are psalms of a people who were destined to die but instead were saved despite the actions of their forefathers so when we read some of psalm 46 in this light you hear a song of a people who are singing it because they know the character of god they know about his power and his justice to deal with rebellion but they also know about his grace and his mercy to restore a group of people and to give them a new identity they're not defined by their past or their present and this affects how they view their soul and how they view and handle the trouble they're experiencing they know what this god is life

like the sons of korah in the midst of their reality they don't deny what is happening yet they don't let it define them instead instead they look to god their savior who they've known god to be their savior in the history of their people but also in the history of the sons of korah themselves this is who they look to they look to their god they've known their god to be their savior they are free to speak to him this is what an element of what grace looks like is an ability to look to the person of god as opposed to the reality of our life as the primary thing that defines how we talk to god and where we look to for confidence and this is who they do they go straight to who they know god to be and lean in to that and for christians for all of us who would identify as a christian jesus is often referred to as a savior and a refuge in the new testament it's central to our faith as robbie was saying earlier that belief and our faith in jesus that is where we find our ultimate protection and our ultimate salvation is core to the understanding of what it means to be a christian uh peter says in acts chapter four salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given by mankind by which we must be saved and the early christians understood that not just to do with their sins in the present but also where they were headed and where who they were becoming paul later in philippians three says our citizenship is now in heaven and we eagerly await a savior from there lord jesus christ who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so they will be like his glorious body the scriptures talk of us also being part of citizens of somewhere else citizens of the city of god but something is earned for us by jesus himself jesus operates exactly like god in this psalm he's a protector and a savior he's the one who guarantees this new citizenship is both a present and a future reality and the benefits and perceived safety of any earthly citizenship can disappear at a moment can't they whether that be due to physical danger or even what the city might represent to you financial success access to certain social groups particular areas of the city that you think are the right ones to live in they can all change instantly but nothing can take away the benefits of being a heavenly citizen of being a citizen of the city of god because it's not held in ourselves it's held in someone else it is held in jesus and these benefits include everything from a citizenship not just to live somewhere but to now be called sons and daughters brothers and sisters to identify with god not as a boss or a king but also as a father it gives us a spirit which dwells within us and it's called a comforter draws alongside us it also means the best is yet to come the worst thing it can happen to a christian is obviously death and i don't want to downplay the horror this of death and the scriptures neither do that too but all death does is puts us right into the father's arms right alongside the glory and beauty of jesus among a new community of brothers and sisters and held there in a new citizenship in a new creation which leads us on to our second point it's not just that they're protected the reason they're protected and i can have this relationship with god in this city is because god is actually in the city all of this is possible because of god's presence verse five and four say that as well god is within her she will not fall god doesn't simply own the city he lives there it's the place of his sanctuary it says in verse four which is the term used to describe the place where the people met to worship and to experience and know god this is when you think about it is kind of beautifully powerful and intimate language that god doesn't just create a city and put his people inside it he is in there with them

in their experience he is alongside his people as he is protecting them he is with them and understands their struggles something that jesus modeled and lived beautifully but he isn't just there standing alongside comforting us with some sort of like their their attitude he's there as a steady force with an unshakable force it says in the psalm verse six goes on to say the nations are in uproar the kingdoms for but he lifts his voice and the earth melts his voice which in genesis speaks things into being speaks things into creation it's exact same force that has the power to speak things out of creation as a god of power in his presence who's with his people god lives in the city he lives there he is alongside us but verse seven uh goes on to say this the lord almighty is with us the god of jacob is our fortress which is kind of like a uh took my we've got my head around he's not just saying god is in the city with us he's saying that god is also the city at the same time so god is in the city but he also is the city god is both the comforter and protector in the city and he is also the place itself which is a picture of the new creation the new city in revelation that there is no need for light because god is the light he is kind of embodies the whole place so he's present with his people but he's also the fortress itself at the same time and this kind of like uh being present and like he is in the city and you're in the city and god is with you is reminiscent of some of the ways jesus talks in john 15 when he uses this i and you and you and me language to describe his relationship with god and god's relationship with us this is kind of interconnectedness of the people of god wrapped up in the personhood of god and the power of god and the protection of god they're inseparable they're bound together and jesus himself is a fulfillment of this jesus is called emmanuel god with us his presence wasn't just that he came into the world and lived died and resurrected of course it was about that then that god makes his home with his people and is making something new this presence of god wasn't a one-time thing or a future thing it is both those things but something is happening today church is supposed to be an expression of that in the coming together of believers we're experiencing something of what it means to be built up in the image of god as a people of god as the body as the temple all this rich language that the scriptures use to talk about what it means for god to be present with us so the people of god are secure even in times of upheaval because god is their strength with them in the city and he is the protector because god is also the city as well but it goes on again god doesn't just stay in the city verses eight and nine say come and see what the lord has done the desolation has brought he has brought on the earth he makes wars cease to the ends of the earth he breaks the bow and shatters the spear he burns the shields with fire as i said like when we were talking about numbers part of the reason god chooses a people was they were to be a light to the nations they were to demonstrate and show this is what god is like this is who he is like god doesn't just stay in the city he advances out and brings peace he ends wars it was the mission of god's people not to just sit in some sort of little isolated community but to be an outward looking group of people who demonstrated and lived the principles of who god was and what he was like god's city expands to end war and bring peace so god's city is not only a strong place in which he dwells but he goes beyond the city into the whole world bringing peace and justice again this is ultimately seen in the person of jesus when god comes into the world not to uh what does it say to give away his life for love for love of the whole world the city is

[18:10] supposed to expand the city is supposed to grow and grow and grow bringing peace and justice to the world around it so we're not supposed to if you're a christian we're not supposed to just hide away in the city we have a protection there but the mission of the city was to be a light to the nations and as the psalm kind of draws to a close in verse 10 it says be still and know that i am god i will be exalted in the nations and i will be exalted in all the earth so you've gone from the raging seas and falling apart of mountains at the start of this psalm and it heads to this conclusion of an invitation to be present to be still and know to be still and know that i am god this psalm encourages the reader to seek god's presence and be still before him now obviously there's been many many many things written about how we are the least attentive generation ever with one of the lowest attention spans constantly thinking we're busy we never think we have time there's an invitation here to stop and be still and understand and dwell and know these aspects of who god is now i don't know about you but when i go anywhere i constantly feel uh rushed and or i'm distracting myself i was reading uh recently um about uh jonathan edwards the old preacher and whenever he went to visit a parishioner it would take him over an hour to get there uh so he would like sow prayer requests and bible verses to himself and he would use that time to reflect and to think and to dwell and actually when you look at a lot of the interactions with jesus and the disciples when they are learning from him they're usually on their way somewhere as they go about life they use these opportunities to engage with god and with one another and a lot of the ways that we seek to be still are usually if it's unlike me are often more just forms of distraction because there's a difference between like a kind of passive stillness and an engaged stillness one is like a kind of simple break um from what we're experiencing and the one is engaging in what we're experiencing in order to find and experience peace one is about turning our minds off and one's about turning them on in order to find stillness to to be still it's not a passive thing it's an active thing you have to choose to be still to know that he is god sometimes you'll know the difference uh because when you return to the thing that was causing your world to feel like it was falling apart is it will still feel like your world is falling apart or you might feel a bit more steadiness in the presence of that reality and actually that's part of what the psalms are about the psalms aren't just theory there's things that are to be put into practice another theme that runs through the film of oppenheimer is theory will only take you so far it's a quote it said often in the film these scientists sit in a room and just think about things but always challenge your theory will only take you so far you have to put this into practice the psalms are prayer and truth but we're to live the psalms to be still and known is something that needs to be cultivated it's a discipline and actually there's something in the structure of the psalms that help us do this now i should have checked this but unfortunately it's not in the bibles you'll have in front of you but many bibles uh in the psalms uh the break they'll break up the stanzas with this little word in italics to the bottom right it says *selah* and then this psalm happens three times after verse three after verse seven and at the end of the psalm now we don't really know what that word means it's not got a direct english term but we know it's like a musical term uh liturgical term to say pause to stop to reflect to take in what you've just read to think about it to dwell about it even within the psalm it encourages you to be still and stop and reflect it's to pause to consider the significance and weight of what we've just done

and in the busyness of life it's obviously important that we take time for reflection for prayer for meditation and god's character and promises to put into theory to put into sorry put into practice what we know to be true of who god is and in the midst of like a challenging and busy life i know for me sometimes that can feel tiring in the short term and fruitless in the middle term but in those places of seller that's where we get perspective because it stops and forces us and asks us and invites us to consider who god is in what we're experiencing in life perspective is a bit like having a it's like in the eye of the storm it's like you suddenly get a bit of calm and it allows you to know who god is and to have a bit of a clearer sight perspective never solves a situation but it directs our eyes towards a god who is full of power and full of love and full of compassion and i thought as a way to end this uh this look at this psalm given we are talking about being still and knowing god i thought we would uh practice cella together um don't worry this will not be too weird a thing uh i've just condensed each of the three stanzas into one phrase which will come up on the screen i was going to invite you once this is the first one to read it and sit with it for a minute by yourself to be still and to know and just dwell on the the sentence of the truth of what we're looking at tonight and just see where it where it moves your heart and your mind so personalize it own it make it your own and if you find your mind drifting to what you're going to do next or when's this guy going to shut up uh you just return to the phrase and then i'll read the next one there's three of them and that's what we're going to do so it's a time of reflective prayer that this psalm encourages to do i thought it'd be quite hypocritical if we didn't actually do it together so god is my refuge and my strength you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you

you you you you you now you you nail you you you you you you you not because of what we bring, but because of who Jesus is and who he invites us to know in the Father.

And the psalm actually ends with God saying, I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. So we're going to stand and exalt God together in singing together.

So if you'd like to stand, the band will lead us.