

WHEN WATERS ROAR

PSALM 46:1-11

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah.

There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

The innocent headwaters of the Chattooga River meander along for miles. But near the end, just before the river plunges into Lake Tallulah, the waters turn violent. In the words of Psalm 46, *“the waters roar!”*

If you're rafting this section, the river becomes a hairy ride full of violent sluices and keeper hydraulics.

Over the years dozens of boaters have died in the narrow, turbulent channels of the Chattooga, *but I never thought I'd be one*. Not until one particular trip...

It happened at *“Seven Foot Falls”* - a rapid named for obvious reasons. It's a steep seven foot drop. Our boat got twisted in the entrance to the falls, so that we hit the ledge sideways. The back of the raft flipped into the air and catapulted me over the guys in the bow. I landed in the swirling water at the bottom of the falls.

In retrospect I was only underwater for just a few seconds, but it felt like an eternity. At first the churning water held me stationary. Finally, the hydraulic sucked me under, and pushed me out the bottom of the hole.

I popped up twenty yards downstream gasping for breath, *but happy to be alive...* Prior to that day I had always thought when it came my turn to die I would face death full of faith and courage. But I got to admit, trapped in that whirling current I met a dangerous enemy... I was gripped by a villain called *“fear.”*

What about you... *have you ever been afraid?*

Several years ago USA Today ran an article entitled, “**Fear: What Americans Are Afraid of Today...**”

Here are the conclusions... 54% of Americans fear being in a car crash... 53% fear having cancer... 50% fear the survival of social security... 40% of Americans fear getting mugged in their own neighborhood... 36% fear getting food poisoning from tainted meat... 35% fear having Alzheimer's... 33% fear being the victim of a violent crime... 25% of Americans fear natural disasters... 20% fear a random shooting or bombing...

Folks today are surrounded by all kinds of fear. Consult the media and here's what you'll hear...

Food sprayed with pesticides will kill me. *Be afraid.*

Unfiltered water from my faucet will kill me. *Be afraid.*

Cholesterol will kill me. *Be afraid.*

A lack of cholesterol will kill me. *Be afraid.*

Fluorocarbons in the air will kill me. *Be afraid.*

Overexposure to the sun will kill me. *Be afraid.*

Cell phone transmissions will kill me. *Be afraid.*

Radon gas from my house will kill me. *Be afraid.*

Saccharin in my coffee will kill me. *Be afraid.*

Processed sugar in my coffee will kill me. *Be afraid.*

Coffee will kill me. *Be afraid.*

People today live in the midst of all sorts of fear. The late advice columnist, Ann Landers, would receive 10,000 letters a month from her readers - mostly from people with problems - and she said that by far the number one problem people faced... was **fear**.

The world we live in is full of fears, which was certainly true for the writer of Psalm 46. If anyone was rightfully fearful it was him. Scholars suggest the psalm was written in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah.

In the 8th century BC the Assyrian empire ruled the world. Assyria's king, Sennacherib, was ambitious, and ruthless, and bent on world domination. His mighty army had conquered Syria and Israel, and his sights were now set on the land of the pharaohs - on Egypt. Yet in between Sennacherib's army and the riches of the Nile was the Jewish capitol of Jerusalem.

Understand what King Hezekiah was up against. The Assyrian army was probably 200,000 troops strong. And its soldiers were brutal and blood-thirsty. The Assyrians would *impale their conquered foes on the point of a spear... skin them alive like freshly*

caught fish... cut off hands, feet, noses, and ears... plucked out eyes and even yanked out tongues... They would pile up skulls by a city's gates just to inspire terror.

Imagine trying to sleep knowing the baddest of all bad guys was camped in your front yard waiting for the light of day to attack your house and ravage your family. ***You can bet Hezekiah was scared spit-less!***

Yet the frightened king prayed! He asked God for help! And three times in Scripture - *three times no less.* Just so we don't miss it, God documents His deliverance - [2 Kings 19](#), [2 Chronicles 32](#), [Isaiah 37](#).

We're told in the middle of the night an Angel of the Lord came against Assyria. This angelic avenger drew his sword, and slew 185,000 troops. By morning light the remainder of the enemy army was in full retreat.

And it's then, that someone - perhaps King Hezekiah or maybe the Prophet Isaiah - but one of Jerusalem's survivors - looked over the wall at the carnage and death, and marveled at God's miraculous deliverance. *He took a pen and parchment, and wrote Psalm 46...*

Over the years this psalm has comforted many a fearful Christian in time of trouble. It's said, ["Psalm 46 assures us that God can handle - in His will, in His own good time and way, things which seem like total disasters to us."](#) Let's pay close attention to Psalm 46.

The psalm is divided into three stanzas... In [verses 1-3 God is seen as a refuge...](#) In [verses 4-7 God is a river...](#) And in [verses 8-11 God is seen as ruler...](#)

Each stanza ends with the term, **"Selah"** - a musical notation. It signaled an interlude - a bridge where the instruments played, while the previous thought was contemplated. It means, ["to pause and think it over."](#)

This evening we'll dispel our fears, and excite our faith - if we push pause on all our other thoughts - and think of God as [our refuge](#), and [our river](#), and [our ruler](#).

Verse 1, **"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."** The Hebrew word translated **"trouble"** means ["tight spot."](#) *Ever been in a tight spot?*

Options are limited - time is running out. You feel pressured or you're squeezed. You're under the gun - between a rock and a hard place. You're facing a no-win situation. *Perhaps you're in a tight spot today?*

Once, a dad came home to find his *usually* busy household *unusually* quiet. He walked in, and noticed all five kids on the floor in the center of the living room. When he saw the object of their attention he let out a shout... There, sat five cute, cuddly little *skunks*.

Of course, when dad *shouted* it scared the kids - so, each kid grabbed a skunk and ran into a different corner of the house... This upset dad even more, so he *shouted again* - which further frightened the kids...

So much so, that the scared kids squeezed their respective skunks, *and we all know what happens when you squeeze a skunk... life stinks!*

The psalmist had the same feelings this father did, *and I did when I was battling those raging rapids*. At times the circumstances of our lives swirl out of control.

He describes his struggling in verses 2-3, *“Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.”*

At times circumstances can overwhelm us. Life spins beyond our control. Our life becomes a real stinker!

It's been said, *“Life is like fighting a gorilla. You don't rest when you get tired. You rest when the gorilla gets tired.”* The waters of life don't always flow gently. At times they roar with trouble. All you can do is hang on!

In fact, when people tell me they don't want to go whitewater rafting because they can't swim I tell them it doesn't matter anyway. *Nobody* swims in a raging river.

Fall out of a boat into whitewater and all you can do is reach for a rope. Tumble into roaring waters, and you're definitely in an out-of-control situation.

This is also how it is for a flood victim. When the storm surge begins to invade your home and floodwaters start seeping under the door, you quickly try to stuff towels across the threshold, but it's useless.

You can't keep out the relentless intruder. Slowly you watch the rising waters cover your carpets - overtake your furniture. *It's a horrible and helpless situation...*

I have a friend who didn't know that his downstairs toilet was the lowest toilet in his neighborhood... until the day the subdivision sewer system backed up. His toilet just kept pouring, and pouring, and dumping awful sewage out into his house. There was nothing he could do to stop it... *That's when life really stinks!*

This is also the helpless sensation you sense in an earthquake - or as the psalmist puts it, *“the mountains shake with its swelling.”* There's nothing you can do when the ground shakes. You're at the earth's mercy...

There're times in everyone's life when we feel like *a whitewater swimmer*, or *a flood victim*, or *the earth is shaking* around us - *and our reaction is to panic*. At times life creates some terribly hopeless feelings.

Notice, the psalmist gives another illustration of an out-of-control circumstance, *“Even though the earth be removed...”* Here’s an alternative translation... *“Earth”* can mean *“land.”* *“Be removed”* can be rendered *“to change hands.”* Thus, some Bible scholars interpret the phrase, *“When the land changes hands.”*

Imagine an angry and vicious army - armed to the teeth - storming your town, controlling your streets. Invaders now dictate when you and your neighbors can come and go... *and there’s nothing you can do about it!* This was the scene facing the Jews in Jerusalem.

Of course we could add to the psalmist’s list of out-of-control situations: *when I lose a job... or get a traffic ticket... or my toddler pitches a fit... or a gossip spread lies about me... or when I’m raising a family and taking care of elderly parents... or when my teenager acts rebellious...* I don’t like to compare roaring waters, and earthquakes, and military invasions to parenting teenagers, but there are some definite similarities...

When kids become teenagers so much is now out of their parent’s control! You lie in bed, while the kids are out. Your mind races... *where are they? What are they doing? What if there’s trouble?* And you’re powerless to help. At that moment, there’s not a thing you can do...

This coming week I personally am facing an out-of-control situation. *If you haven’t heard I’ve been diagnosed with prostate cancer.* My doctors tell me they caught it early, and I have a good prognosis. But you know the definition of *“minor surgery?”* It’s *surgery on somebody else.* Surgery on you is always **major!**

This week, I’m having a surgeon cut it out and I’d appreciate it if you prayed and asked God to give him a special anointing of skill, and wisdom, and endurance.

Yet this morning, I’m actually praying about two *“ectomies”* - the *prostatectomy* on my body, *but I’m also asking the Great Physician to do a fear-ectomy on my heart.* For lingering fear can create major, negative side-effects. *Fear clouds your perspective, and saps your energy, and paralyzes your initiative, and stymies your vision, and guts your hope, and steals your joy.*

It’s faith in God that shelters us from those negative side-effects. And God is the refuge to which I run!... *Where do you run when the waters roar?*

Psalms 46 provides us the answer, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”* No matter how deep the waters rise around you, God’s feet still touch bottom. Even in raging water His legs are strong enough to stand in the current and anchor my life...

No matter how severe the storm, God can shelter me through it... *If I hold His hand... if I lean on Him...*

God is a refuge.

My daughter use to be a cheerleader - *the best there ever was, in fact*. I heard thousands of cheers and chants as she was growing up. *But here's my favorite!* Actually, a few years ago I recruited the help of a cheerleader-in-training, my granddaughter... **(clip)**

Listen again to the words of the cheer, "Rain can't rock this house, thunder can't rock this house, lightning can't rock this house, and you can't rock this house."

And this is what the psalmist is saying about God in verses 2-3. It doesn't matter how out-of-control life gets. *Bring on the rain, the thunder, the lightning. It doesn't matter.* God is our refuge and strength. God is what we need, where and when we need Him.

But here's a vital point... **God is our refuge in the storm, not from the storm.** Notice again verses 2-3, it's not "If the earth is removed..." or "If its waters roar..." - it's "**though the earth is removed... though the waters roar... though the mountains shake...**" Hey, there're two kinds of faith: *though faith* and *if faith*.

If faith says, "God, I'll trust You if You bless me... I'll live for You if You solve my problems... I'll obey God if He makes my life easy..." That's not real faith. That kind of faith gets washed away in the storm.

Real faith is **though faith**. "God, I'll love You though the earth is removed. I'll serve You though my life is turned topsy-turvy. I'll trust You though I feel forsaken..." The psalmist knows being a child of God doesn't insulate him from *tight spots*, but it makes him eligible for God's help and comfort in the midst of them.

Christianity is not *immunity from trouble*, but *community with God*. Give your life to Jesus, and He comes on board with all His sustaining resources.

God is *our refuge* from the storm, but He is also **our river** of refreshment... I've learned when waters roar you have a choice - you can focus **inside** or **outside**.

Verse 4 says, "**There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved...**" There was danger *outside the city*, but the psalmist focused on Who it was who abides *inside the city*... "**God is in the midst of her...**"

I love what one author says about Jesus, "We see Him... in the midst of the upper room after His resurrection - in the midst of the lamp-stands walking among the churches in Revelation... He is always "*in the midst*." He says, "**Where two or three are gathered together in My name there I am in the midst of them.**"

Jesus doesn't take us out of the mire of this life. He rolls up his sleeves, and jumps into the mess with us. He gets *in the midst* of what we're *in the middle of*...

This was Jesus' approach in saving the world. God became a man. He got down on the human level - tackled the same issues we face everyday.

Recall the name the Angel gave to Joseph. Mary's baby would be called "Immanuel" which means, "*God with us*." As the psalmist might say, "*God in our midst!*"

Notice the contrast in verse 4, "*There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God...*" In verse 3, the psalmist talked of roaring waters. There was a *rising flood of troubled waters* threatening to drown the city of Jerusalem, but He doesn't forget there was also a *stream of encouragement and rejoicing* flowing into the city to refresh its inhabitants.

There was an actual, physical parallel to this imagery. Before the reign of Hezekiah, Jerusalem's water supply was outside the city walls. The Gihon Spring bubbled up in the Kidron Valley, east of the city.

In anticipation of this Assyrian invasion, King Hezekiah carved a tunnel, 1,777' long - cut through solid rock. The tunnel channeled water into the city. Even today the spring still flows through the cut-out rock channel. On our tours to Israel one of the activities we like to do is to hike through Hezekiah's tunnel.

The psalmist compares this river reservoir to God. He's saying, in the midst of the storm that's brewing on the *outside* of his life - on the *inside* - *in his spirit* - a stream of vitality was flowing under the walls of his life.

And **God is that river!** God is the artesian spring that bubbles up from the deepest part of my heart.

I have an old friend named Kenny, who is an expert fisherman. He has trophies of huge bass he plucked out of the lakes at Stone Mountain Park. I marvel when I see his catches because I could fish Stone Mountain from now until eternity and never get a nibble. *I figured the fish were all state employees - always on vacation.*

But let me tell you Kenny's secret... He has maps of the lake bottoms. Years ago a river flowed around the mountain. Today's lakes were made by flooding out the riverbeds. But Kenny knows where those subsurface rivers ran, and the underwater banks that draw the big bass. He sends his lures to school along those banks, and catches his limit every time. He's a smart guy.

And this is what the psalmist does when the floods come, and the troubles overwhelm him. He remembers the river that runs under the surface of his life. The Holy Spirit lives within him - *and within us* - to bring us God's joy, and love, and peace, and strength.

In his book “[Reaching for the Invisible God](#),” author Philip Yancey suggests that it would help our faith if we viewed God’s intervention in our lives not so much as coming down from above, but as rising up from below.

Yancey writes, “[We tend to view God’s interactions...like light rays, or hailstones, or lightning bolts falling to the ground... Perhaps we would do better to picture God’s interaction as an underground aquifer or river that rises to the surface in springs and fountainheads.](#)”

The last stanza of Psalm 46 will describe how God “*comes down*” to intervene on behalf of His people, and defend Jerusalem from her enemies... But never forget, prior to God’s deliverance *from trouble*, God rises among His people *in the midst of that trouble*.

God is a river of refreshment. As Jesus promised in John 7:38, “[He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.](#)”

Once, a man was wandering through the desert in search of water. The guy was dying of thirst when he encountered a merchant selling neckties. The weary hiker is thinking, “[What do I need with a silly necktie?](#)”

He continues to push on - crawling through hot sands - desperate and dehydrated. He tops a hill and sees a restaurant below. *Wow, he’s saved!* He musters all his remaining energy, and races down the hill. But when he reaches the front door of the restaurant there’s a huge sign that reads, “[Neckties required.](#)”

Likewise, when circumstances are good, and you’re riding high you might not see the need for Jesus. But when the waters roar (*and they will*) and you’re about to go under, you’ll need a spiritual river to slake your thirst, and provide you a supernatural surge.

Well, the rest of Psalm 46 describes God’s outward deliverance of Jerusalem, and God is **our ruler** over every situation. At the end of verse 5 the psalmist writes, “[God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah](#)”

Like Indians in the old Westerns, ancient armies never attacked at night. It was always *at first light* - “[at the break of dawn.](#)” But God was ready. The nations raged... *But God uttered His voice. The earth melted.*

Before the Assyrian troops could launch their attack - *at daybreak* - the Angel of the Lord took the offensive.

It’s another example of God appearing in the nick-of-time. *If you’re like me that happens often!* God stretches my faith - makes me wait - teaches me the lessons He

wants me to learn; then when I think the door has closed, *it's too late*, He comes to my rescue.

The psalmist invites us in verse 8, **"Come, behold the works of the LORD, who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire."** And verse 10 is vitally important. If you mark in your Bible, here's a verse to underline, **"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"**

When the Assyrians attacked Jerusalem *there was never a question in heaven as to what God would do!* God is God! He loves and protects His people!

What made it an issue in the mind of King Hezekiah, and the Jews in Jerusalem, **was fear...** This is why God tells them, **"Be still, and know that I am God..."**

Fear grows in the noise of conflicting voices. Listen to the noises of this world and you're destined for confusion... *skeptical friends, a sensationalistic media, a doubting society* - all give sanction to our fears.

In the noise fear takes root. It's only when we come to the quiet, and let God speak to us, that faith grows. One author writes, **"The more we train ourselves to spend time with God and alone, the more we discover that God is with us at all times and in all places."**

The Greek philosopher, Sophocles, once said, **"To him who is in fear, everything rustles."** In other words, *our sense of God's presence gets lost - faith gets quenched - fear fills our hearts - doubts prevail* - when we get caught up in this life's confusion and chaos.

God is always in control - in the good times and in the bad times - but the noises of this world drown out that realization. *We're reminded only when we're still.*

Here's the irony... as I mentioned earlier, **fear becomes a threat when my life spins out of control.**

Fears try to climb on board when the waters roar, and I can no longer navigate. In a storm or a flood, *I'm prone to fear because I lose control.* But verse 10 implies that **faith also grows when I lose control...**

Understand, losing control is inevitable for us all. The reality of life is that none of us are in control. At some point we all face forces greater than ourselves.

Here's the difference though between fear and faith, **faith grows when control slips from hands that desperately want to maintain it; whereas, fear grows when control is**

voluntarily given over to God. Ironically, fear and faith are nurtured by how we respond to out-of-control situations - *do we hold on or give it to God?*

When life goes haywire, faith knows that God is still in charge. **He is our ruler** over every situation. Verse 6 reads, **“He uttered His voice, the earth melted.”**

Engineers that design the long, tall, suspension bridges realize these bridges conjure up fear in drivers. This is why some State DOTs offer a driving service to get *bridge-a-phobic* drivers safely to the other side.

For example, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in Maryland is 4 miles long and stands 200 feet above the surface of the water. Every year state workers take the wheel of 1000 cars - to drive scared motorists across the span of the bay, to the other end of the bridge.

And this is the key to getting over our fears. **Voluntarily taking our hands off the steering wheel of our life, and letting Jesus drive.** Faith relaxes. It chills out. It stops fretting, plotting, conniving, manipulating. Carrie Underwood is right, we should let Jesus take the wheel... Just be still, and know that God is God.

Before **Moses** parted the Red Sea he told the Hebrews to **“Stand still...”** Before Ruth was adopted into God’s family **Boaz** told her, **“Sit still my daughter...”** And before God defeated the nations that had risen against **King Jehoshaphat**, he told the nation, **“Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD.”**

I hope we get it? Before God acts - often before God does a thing - He first asks us to **be still** before Him.

Psalm 46 closes with verse 11, **“The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”** We read earlier the name Joseph gave to Jesus at His birth. It was **“Immanuel.”** And the word is translated, **“God with us.”** Here in verse 11 the psalmist reaches the end of His praise, and he shouts out his exclamation, **“the LORD of hosts is with us”** - or in essence, **“Immanuel.”**

He has looked over the walls of Jerusalem, and seen the defeated Assyrian troops - *their corpses scattered across the valley* - and he credits this **Immanuel!**

I believe long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem He had already been to battle! The pre-incarnate Jesus, the eternal Son of God, came as the Messenger of the Lord, the Angel who delivered Jerusalem.

And if the Assyrian army was no match for our Lord; then neither are the troubles that plague us today...

Last Sunday after the second service, my friend, Idy, came up front, and asked me, *“Pastor Sandy, are you scared?”* Idy’s question caught me off guard. She told me God prompted her to ask me. *It got me thinking...*

Over the week the Holy Spirit led me to Mark 9 where a man asked Jesus to deliver his son from a demon. Jesus encouraged him, *“If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.”* Yet *“the father...cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”* And Idy, if you’re listening, here’s my answer to your question, *“I believe; help my unbelief!”* I need the Lord to work His healing through the surgery, **and** to build up in me a strong and courageous faith.

This is why I turned to Psalm 46 today. For when I *“Selah”* - or *pause all my conflicting thoughts* - and think of our Lord Jesus as *a refuge in times of trouble*, as *a river of refreshment running under the surface of my life*, and as *a Ruler who governs every situation I face...* then my faith does grow stronger and stronger!

When the waters roar in your life... be still and know that ***God is your refuge, your river, and your ruler.***