

Transcription of 18TM813

Psalm 46 "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" April 15, 2018

Shall we open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 46.

You see in the superscription there that it was a Psalm given to the sons of Korah and it is a song for Alamoth. Alamoth means falsetto or soprano. It is used in the Bible usually to speak of female voices.

I thought about skipping this Psalm altogether. Someone asked me the other day why don't we do all of the Psalms, because we're kind of moving by some of them. And we can certainly do that. The Psalms tend to take subjects and drive them home, and so rather than doing every song or maybe repeating a lesson two or three weeks in a row, we've tried to find different subject matters, which is really why we're skipping some and sticking with others. And I thought about skipping this one because the background and the setting for this Psalm -- in fact, for this one and the next two -- are the very same as we looked at last week in Psalm 42 and 43. You might remember that we looked at Hezekiah, a young king, who was besieged in Jerusalem by the Assyrians, and this young king spiritually was kind of reeling back on his heels. He didn't know how to handle it. There was great depression. He was having a hard time with it. And so I

thought, well, that's the same background. We'll set that aside. Except as I went back to read these three Psalms -- and we're only going to look at this one this morning -- it is written after the fact.

I think looking back at what God has done, all of us can say amen. It is learning to say amen before you see His deliverance that's the issue. Right? It is living in the faith that you have in the Lord to get you through, but once you get through, looking back, you expect to find a much improved outlook, and you do certainly find that here with Hezekiah, even though he struggled for a while to hang on.

I think G. Campbell Morgan years ago wrote a commentary on the Psalms and he said that this Psalm really doesn't require any commentaries, because it is the perfect reflection of the experience of someone that will trust God in the worst of times. Luther said this was his favorite Psalm. He would say to his congregation, "Let's sing Psalm 46 again out loud together, and then let the devil do his worst." So he was confident, coming out the other side, that God could do great things.

What made it hard for Hezekiah, as we talked about last

week, was that as a young man he took over for his father, Ahaz, who was a horrible guy. He didn't walk with God. The people certainly weren't walking with the Lord. His policies were based on self and selfish motives and gain. And so he came to power and instead of looking for a reward and blessing, he came to seek to bring the people back in line with what God wanted. They were, after all, God's chosen people. The reward though was less than he expected. The people turned on him. He as a young man was sick with a sickness that very well could have taken his life. And if that wasn't bad enough, the enemy has come and surrounded the city, threatening to kill everyone inside. And they look like they could do it. So that was Hezekiah's background.

Here the deliverance has come. If you want to read the historical account of this, it's in II Samuel 18 and 19, and 2 Chronicles 32, and I think Isaiah, maybe chapter 36 as well. There's a lot there. But just as a background, in 722 the Assyrians came to power, overthrew the Babylonians, really became a world dominating power, and took out the north. The north of Israel had been there together for a couple hundred years defying the Lord's will, and systematically over 20 years or so they marched south. They took out every Samaritan city, everything

that breathed and seemed to stand in their way. In 701 BC they came and surrounded Jerusalem, and it looked like it might have been the end for them as well.

We mentioned to you last week that the Assyrians, they subdued the enemies by maiming a portion of the population, sending them back into town and saying, this is what will happen to anyone who stands against us, and it usually worked pretty quickly. Everyone surrendered. They were a brutal kind of enemy. What we didn't mention to you last week in that setting was Hezekiah, when he saw the inevitable, that the Assyrians were coming, that they weren't going to bypass Jerusalem and just head to Egypt where the big resistance lie, Hezekiah sent off a huge bribe to Sennacherib as a form of appeasement. He literally said, we'll give you all of this money if you'll just leave us alone. Just go conquer the world, but leave Jerusalem out of it.

And Sennacherib was happy enough to take his money, thank you very much, and then met with his guys and said, we're not going to turn away. Why should we let Jerusalem survive? Who's going to stop us? And so instead of keeping his agreement, he sent his people. He sent the army. He sent Rabshakeh, his emissary or his mouthpiece,

who really threatened the people. You want to avoid bloodshed and death, give up now, or we will do to you what we've done to everyone.

And Hezekiah found great strength in the Lord, in Isaiah's messages from the Lord. He realized he'd been really foolish in bargaining with this guy. He decided he was going to take a stand, and he did. He said, we will trust the Lord. But he was standing alone; he and the prophet. The people were just, you're out of your mind. Meanwhile that guy Rabshakeh at the gates was yelling out in Hebrew to the people that they should rebel against Hezekiah's leadership, and so -- even when the king of the Assyrians was pulled away to a battle, he sent letters to Hezekiah threatening the people. And if you remember the story, if you've read it, at the last minute, one morning as the king came back with a huge amount of people, God sent an angel who killed 185,000 Assyrians, so that by the dawn's light, Israel was fine. Israel was saved, and God had brought His mercy.

Well, to commemorate that victory, this was written. Don't know if he wrote it or if Isaiah wrote it or they hired someone to write it, but it was delivered to be sung by a woman, in a way that would just bring honor to

the Lord. And it is a Psalm that literally said, God can handle the worst of things.

Now, everything depends on your understanding of verse 1. So we're going to take a look at this Psalm this morning, but it begins with these words: "God is our refuge and strength, and He is a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters would roar and be troubled, though the mountains would shake with their swelling." The focus is upon the Lord.

Notice verse 1, "God is our refuge and strength." Literally He is immovable, even if everything around us is not. Politics had not worked. Bribes had not accomplished anything. Their alliances had forsaken them. Others hadn't been able to protect them. They were exposed to great danger, but they found rest in the fact that God was their refuge and strength.

The word "refuge" is a great word. It literally means a place of shelter. It is a term coined in the Old Testament for cities among the Levites where if you were accused of a capital offense but you didn't do it, if you

could just get to one these cities, you could take refuge. You would be protected from he who would avenge you or seek to take vengeance upon you. And you'd get a fair trial. It was a place of hiding, a place of shelter. The word "strength" means just what you think it means. It is an internal kind of fortitude to face calamity. Hezekiah looking back says, God is a place that we can hide ourselves and a place where we can find our strength.

Sometimes the Lord delivers you from your trials. In Psalm 91, I think verse 7 and 8, and we'll get there eventually I hope, the Psalmist writes, "A thousand will fall at your side, and 10,000 will fall at your right hand; but these things will not come near to you at all. Just with your eyes you'll see the reward of the wicked." Sometimes God just delivers you from what's going on around you, but other times, like here, He delivers you through them.

So here's Hezekiah's outlook after the fact: God is our place of refuge. He has been our strength. And then he adds, "He is a very present help." It is interesting to me that when you are suffering, that so often the experience of people is that they feel God's very far

away; that as you pray, God's not listening, or your prayers get to the ceiling and then fall right back on your head. You pray and you hear echoes. But that's hardly the truth. Right? God is not a distant God. Rather, He is near and He is available. And Hezekiah wanted to know that as he was surrounded by the enemy and seeing no way out. I think one secret to confidence in the Lord is your conscious awareness of His nearness. To know that your security is not found in your strength, but in His presence, that'll change the equation. It'll change the way you go about looking at things in your life. Always so. And here's Hezekiah's declaration: When I am in trouble -- the word for trouble there is literally a tight strait, or if you will, it's almost the Biblical equivalent of between a rock and a hard place. There's no way out. At least I don't see one. But in that place of absolutely running out of ideas, He's my refuge and He's my strength.

And then he goes and he says in verse 2, Therefore, or because I know that, I'm not going to fear, even if the earth is moved and the mountains are carried away to the sea. Look, the Psalmist applies the logic of faith. If you really believe God is your refuge; if you are convinced that He is your strength; if you believe that

He is a present help; He knows exactly what's going on; He's hands-on, not hands-off, then there is no logical reason to fear, even in the greatest of crisis.

Now, from a prophetic or even a poetic kind of a declaration, these books have poetry. The Psalmist imagines cataclysmic times, things that couldn't be any worse; right? Phenomenas that are unimaginable to him. The earth moving under your feet, the mountains being moved to the sea. Where everything's stable in your life is rocked. Every footing that you've had, that you feel comfortable with, has been removed. In his case, the Assyrians ensured death that waited for him at the gate. If the very foundations of my life are being moved, I cannot fear, because I believe verse 1. I believe that God is greater than them all. I believe at this point that fear of anything would rob God of His glory, because He's my help. He's my present help, He's my refuge, and He's my strength.

Hezekiah's faith, if you read the historical account, fell under great duress. He was mocked by everyone. The people tried to overthrow him. He was challenged spiritually certainly by the devil. He's got an enemy outside that wants him dead. Nobody really stood with

Hezekiah except for the prophet. He struggled to hang on. But looking back he realized, this is the foundation of why I can stand. What I know about God will help me. He's my hiding place. He's my strong tower. I don't need to fear.

Elisabeth Elliot lost her first husband, Jim Elliot, to the Auca Indians in Ecuador as he was seeking to take the gospel to a very much undisciplined people group. And they took him and they killed him. She got remarried a year later to a man named Addison Leitch, who died an extremely slow death of cancer. Elisabeth Elliot looking back over her life said, "I lost one husband quickly and without plan, and the other kind of agonizingly so." But she said, "This has become my favorite Psalm because I know God does everything well." And she said, "I particularly like verse 10, 'Be still and know that I am God.'" No natural disaster or otherwise can remove God from His place of strength. Your life can be shaken, your ways undermined. God stands fast. And that's his confidence.

I don't know what's tearing you up today or what's worrying you or making you lose sleep, or you just feel like the ground you're standing on is being pulled out

from under your feet. You know, and he describes the mountains shaking, the waters roaring, but he says this: Just commit verse 1 to memory.

Notice at the end of verse 3 that word "selah." You'll find it again at the end of the passage in verse 7 and 11, which are the two chorus verses. But the word "selah" was a musical rest. It's a word that means stop here before you move on, and it is used in the Bible to say to us, here's a great truth that is worthy of your careful consideration. Commit this to memory before you move on. Don't just read by this. Don't let this escape you, right? Instead of falling apart, consider what you know about who you trust. And Hezekiah looking back, and man, what a trial. I don't know how we would have done, but when the 185,000 are dead, he goes God, is our refuge and strength. Well, of course you know that now, but it's a good thing to learn.

He goes on to talk about the Lord having been with him in verse 4. He said, "There's a river which -- whose streams will make glad the city of God, it will make glad the holy place of tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, that's why she won't be moved. And God will help her, even at the breaking of the dawn. While

the nations rage and the kingdoms are moved; He utters His voice and the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

Knowing that the Assyrians were coming, and it was pretty clear for probably 10 years before that they were in their crosshairs, that they intended to lay siege to the city, not allowing anyone to go in and out. Hezekiah tried to plan for the inevitable and took some practical steps to make sure that the inhabitants of the city had fresh drinking water. Outside of the walls was a place called the Gihon Springs, natural springs still there to this day. It produces lots of water. He sent out a crew on both directions actually of a mountain, and they dug through solid rock 1,777 feet. Imagine. And they only missed each other by 2 inches. And he did that so that he could bring the spring water into town. He covered up the source of it so that the enemy wouldn't find it, and they did not. But it was his plan to just do all that he could to plan.

Today if you go with us to Israel, we -- if you want, you can walk through Hezekiah's tunnel. Sometimes the water's up to your waist. It's cold, it's cramped, you got to bend over. I don't fit well. It's winding. And

everyone I know that we take there goes through it.

But in any event, he had done all that he could to

provide drinking water, to plan ahead. In a prophetic standpoint, verse 4 finds its complete application when Jesus comes one day to rule and reign upon the earth. Then you will find, according to the scriptures, a river that flows from beneath His throne in Jerusalem, and it will flow towards the south. It will heal the desert. It will ultimately bring life to the Dead Sea again, which is dead because it has no outlet. But you can read in Ezekiel, I think, 47 about how the banks of the river are going to bring trees and fruit to bear, and even leaves for medicine and all. The kingdom age is certainly prophetically in view. In fact, today Jerusalem doesn't have a river running through it. The Jordan is miles outside of town. They have a couple of brooks and a couple of springs, but one day there's going to be this outpouring from the Lord that will bring life to everything that was lifeless.

But that's not the way Hezekiah or whoever wrote this song wrote it. They were speaking about how God was a present help, that He had made provision for them, that He was with us. Look, Hezekiah had dug the tunnel and it

was a miracle they got together and got through it that easily. However, he's the first one to admit, looking back, that had nothing to do with their deliverance. God had come to do this work. God had come to deliver them. He had been their help. He had been with them.

Notice verse 5, God in our midst. That's why we're not being moved. And I love verse 5 because verse 6 says the kingdoms of the world are moved, but verse 5 says God's people are not. Everything can shake around you, God is not moved. That's a good thing to know. You serve a God that can't be moved, at all. So the Psalmist in, I think, Psalm 2 had declared that when the nations rage and the people say vain things, that it has very little effect upon God. God is not moved by public opinion. He does not take stock of cable news networks. One word from Him at the proper time and the earth will melt away. Go read the last battle that the Lord will face against His enemy. It's not much of a battle. I think it goes like this: Ta-da, I'm here. That's it. You're done. It doesn't take much.

So in context, the threats from the Assyrians had been small potatoes because verse 5, the Lord has been in our midst. He's been with us. We'll not be moved. Verse 7,

and this is the chorus and you'll find it in verse 11 as well, "The Lord of hosts is with us; and the God of Jacob is our refuge." It's refrain or the chorus. The term "Lord of hosts" is Yahweh Sabaoth. And Sabaoth means commander of the armies in that context. Whenever you find that little phrase, Yahweh Sabaoth, it literally means the Lord is in command of the army, whether they're angelic or whether they're men on the march. The idea is, He runs the show. He sits at the top. He's the five star general. There's no one over Him. He decides what happens and it gets done. He's the Lord over all.

But also notice in verse 7 the words, "The God of Jacob is with us. He's our refuge." Whenever you read the term "God of Jacob" in the Bible, it almost always refers to God's grace. And the reason is Jacob was not known for his holiness. In fact, if you read Jacob's life, you'll know that he was a conniver. He was a hustler. He lived by the seat of his pants and by his charm and his wit and his plotting and his planning, and it worked for a while until he got to a place where he no longer could fight on his own. He was fighting a losing battle. He wrestled with God one night. God touched the hollow of his thigh. He would now have to limp for the rest of his life. He couldn't even run away. But the Lord that

day changed his name to Israel, which means "governed by God." So God's grace to a faltering man, Jacob, was found in the work that He did in his life. But when you hear the words "God of Jacob," Jacob refers to the old life of Jacob, to his conniving way, and yet God brought mercy. Those two terms together, He's the Lord of hosts, He's the Lord over all, but He's also the Savior of the individual, if you will. Right? The term "God of Jacob" is usually personal in application. It's the grace of God given to you. The Lord of hosts is a much broader term that means, He's in charge. Who's going to stop Him? He saves the world and He saves you, all at the same time.

So here's the cry from Hezekiah. God has delivered us. He's the Lord of all. He goes on to explain some of the works of the Lord. He says in verse 8, "Come and behold the works of the Lord, which has made desolation upon the earth. He's caused the war to cease to the ends of the earth; He breaks the bow and spear in two; burning the chariots in the fire." Again, in a prophetic standpoint, that's a cry from the Bible to say when the Lord comes, war stops. It's over. He's going to rule. From Hezekiah's standpoint, all of the threats outside, which were military, and they were powerful, they were broken

in one night. In fact, notice at the end of verse 5, "God will help us at the breaking of the dawn." If you go back and read the story, at dawn the threat was gone. It was like the Lord waited till the last minute, but He came through, and He always does.

So the invitation in verse 8 from Hezekiah to the people is, come and see what God has done. Come and see how the Lord has spared us. Look what we were facing and yet look what God did. It's kind of like your life. You get saved and you go right -- and people see you and they've known you before, and you go hey, look at me. Look what God did with my life. Look how I used to be. Look what God has done now. So one day the Lord will gather the nations of the earth and read the book of Revelation. When the Lord comes back, just one word out of His mouth and the Excellency of His coming will cause everyone to hit the deck, and the antichrist will be tossed into the abyssou, and he'll be put out of business.

Well, having declared that, then we get to verse 10, which is interesting, because it goes from third person to second person, to God speaking in the first person. The Lord saying to the people, "Be still, and know that I am the God; that I will be exalted among the nations,

that I will be exalted in the earth!" In other words, let no doubt or fear or argument stand. Let them all be silenced by you coming to know verse 1, that I'm the Lord; that I'm great; that I'm going to get honor and glory and be exalted. One day everyone's going to recognize who I am.

Look, God wants your submission based on the understanding of reasonable people. When you see all that God has done, what He's promised to do, it's reasonable for you to trust Him. Now, this is like I said after the fact, and I don't think any of us fail the test after the fact. Has God been good? Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. But in the midst of it, in the midst. "Be still and know that I'm God." Silence the critics, know that I'm God.

How often Hezekiah had been chided by the people, chided by the Assyrians, chided by the circumstances, closing in, looked like it was lights out, and now the Lord afterwards says look around. Who did this? Lord, you did this. So verse 11 kind of ends as verse 7 did. It says the exact same thing. The Lord who heads up the host of heaven, including one angel who killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers overnight, and the God who took Jacob,

now took the failures and faithlessness of those who were living in Jerusalem and that was most of them. And He delivers them by His grace.

It all comes down to what you think about verse 1. If you believe what you read there, then verse 2 therefore makes perfect sense, and verse 3's explanation with verse 2 of how hard life can get, it is perfectly applied to the confidence that you have in God. He's with you. He's not going to be moved. Everything around you can move; He cannot. He's not moved. He's not moved. So you just be still and know He's God. That's the way you respond.

Well, verse 47 and verse 48 continue that thought, so I'm going to challenge you to just today, find time to read 23 verses. Because you already know the background anyway, so it will save you some time. And then know I'm not going to be doing those. I think we're going to Psalm 51 next week.