

## How Do We Stop Worrying?

### *Psalm 46*

Craig Groeschel has written a book called, *The Christian Atheist: Believing in God but Living as if He Doesn't Exist*. One of the chapters is entitled, "When You Believe in God but Still Worry All the Time." In it he writes this:

In the light of day, I'm constantly encouraging people to trust God, no matter what. I can quote Scripture from memory without taking a breath. But when the night sets in, I stare at the ceiling, feeling alone, afraid to trust God completely. If I can be truly honest, I am often overwhelmed with worry.

I know I'm not supposed to worry. I try not to worry, but sometimes it's hard. Worry is bad for our health. In fact, our word *worry* derives from the Old High German, *wurgen*, literally "to strangle, constrict, choke." That sounds like worry feels, doesn't it? Worry absolutely strangles the life out of me. But there are just so many things to worry about, how can I stop? .

Do you relate to Groeschel's struggle? Do you worry? Do you find it hard to stop?

How do we stop when there are so many things to worry about? Terror and instability in the world. Financial uncertainties. A health concern. Aging parents. Our kid's well-being. I could go on and on, but the reality is that there is no end to the things about which we can worry. And so how do we stop? How do we deal with fear?

I believe that the Scriptures speak to this question in many ways and in many places. This morning we are going to look at Psalm 46 to see what light it sheds on this question. And so I'd invite you to turn there is you have a Bible.

Some believe that this psalm was written to celebrate God's kingship at the fall festivals. Others believe it is a psalm that looks to the future and is primarily eschatological in nature. Another view is that this psalm speaks of a recent historical event in which God delivered His people. This last view is how I tend to take it.

This psalm helps us understand that the answer to our worry is found in God. This psalm is written in three stanzas and in the first one we see that:

### **I. God is our help in the face of physical dangers (vv. 1-3)**

*God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.*

This is a very personal affirmation. The psalmist says that God is this for us. He is our refuge and strength. A *refuge* is a place of safe haven; it is a place of rest into which

one can run. God is also our *strength*. He is the enabling strength for whatever challenges we face.

The second line says that God is *a very present help in trouble*. The NIV says an "ever-present" help. The help that God gives is that of being our refuge and our strength. But the added thought that this line gives is that this help is here . . . now. It is help that is near. God is a very present help.

At the heart of this verse, the psalmist is affirming that God is on our side. And because that is true, he goes on to say:

*<sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear,*

Dealing with fear is rooted in knowing who God is. Seventy-five times some version of the phrase, "do not fear" appears in the Old Testament. When it is used in the context of war, the exhortation is connected to the promise that Yahweh will be with them to deliver them (Num. 21:34; Jos. 10:8). And so for Israel to not fear meant that they trusted God and who He said He was for them.

Of course the nation often didn't trust God and their fear drove them to put their trust in other nations. They would make unholy alliances. They would disobey God. How they responded to threats mattered. Would it be faith or would it be fear? They needed to know God and to trust Him. And so do we.

In this situation, the psalmist affirms that it is the knowledge of God that drove out their fear. He says:

*<sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear,  
though the earth should change,  
And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea;  
<sup>3</sup> Though its waters roar and foam,  
Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.  
Selah.*

The psalmist is describing an earthquake; a violent earthquake.

We lived in southern California during the time that I attended seminary. In those three years we experienced a number of earthquakes. The strongest was the Hector Mine earthquake that happened in 1999. It registered as a 7.1 magnitude quake. Thankfully, it occurred about 50 miles from our home out in the desert and so it didn't cause much damage. But it was long enough and strong enough that we were woken from our sleep and had time to get the kids out of their beds and gather under a door frame to stand there while it continued not knowing how strong it was going to get. The ground kept moving back and forth and we could hear things falling in our house and transformers exploding outside. Afterwards, when we saw if we had any real damage, we discovered that our bathroom floors were all wet because the house had rocked enough that the

water in the toilets had sloshed out. And we were in an area that the US Geological Survey reported as only having moderate to strong shaking.

When something that we think of as solid and immovable, moves, that can be a very fearful experience. That's the picture the psalmist paints here in poetic language. A quake that causes the earth to change. It causes something as firm and fixed as the mountains to slide into the sea. A quake that causes the waters to *roar and foam* - like the tsunami that hit Japan.

Where do you feel the earth shaking under your feet these days? What is it that seems unstable in your life and so is causing fear? Some of you right now feel that the poetic language of these verses describes your life situation. You're there. You're living this upheaval. The psalmist says that your answer to fear is God. God is your refuge and strength. He is your very present help in whatever trouble you are facing so that you don't have to fear.

Well, let's move on to the second stanza where the psalmist says that:

## II. **God is our help in the face of the dangers of war** (vv. 4-7)

In these verses the psalmist describes a place that is secure because of God's presence. He talks about the city of God.

*<sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
The holy dwelling places of the Most High.  
<sup>5</sup> God is in the midst of her,  
she will not be moved;  
God will help her when morning dawns.*

The *city of God* refers to Jerusalem or to Zion, but also figuratively to the people of God themselves. This *city of God* is where God dwelt among His people because His temple was there. It was *the holy dwelling [place] of the Most High*.

And in this city *there is a river*, which is a metaphor of blessing and restoration that exists because of God's presence. It makes the people glad. All of this is because God dwells there. The psalmist couldn't be any clearer; he says that *God is in the midst of her*. God is near. God is present. And because God dwells there the city, the people of God, *will not be moved*. The city is unassailable. It is protected. The mountains may move; they may fall into the sea, but the city of God will not be moved because God is there.

And then he makes this statement, *God will help her when morning dawns*. Some believe that the setting for this psalm was when the king of Assyria came and threatened Jerusalem around 701 BC. When this mighty nation came and threatened Jerusalem with destruction, God gave help. We read this in 2 Kings 19:34-36.

God says:

*<sup>34</sup> 'For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'" <sup>35</sup> Then it happened that night that the angel of the LORD went out, and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead. <sup>36</sup> So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home, and lived at Nineveh.*

At the first light; at the dawn of the day the city saw that God had protected them by striking down the Assyrians. God's help was effective and immediate help because He dwelt with His people in the city of God.

The psalmist then goes on and says:

*<sup>6</sup> The nations made an uproar,  
the kingdoms tottered;  
He raised His voice, the earth melted.*

The point is that nations may threaten, but God controls the situation. He simply speaks into the situation and men and nations collapse before Him. They *totter*.

The word, *totter*, (or "fall" in the NIV) is the same Hebrew word that we find in verse 2 where it says the mountains *slip*. As well, the word, *moved*, in verse 5 is the same word. Just like the mountains may slip into the ocean, so too do the kingdoms totter and fall. But not God's people. Because of God's presence, they will not be moved.

And then we find the first of two identical refrains:

*<sup>7</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our stronghold.  
Selah.*

The *LORD of hosts*, the God of the heavenly armies, is with us. This God who is *with us* is the *God of Jacob*, which is a name for God that has in view His protective, covenantal relationship with Israel. He *is our stronghold*; our "fortress" (NIV). A *stronghold* was an elevated place of protection from an enemy. That is who God is.

Where do you sense the threats in your life? Where do you feel that the "armies" are gathering around you? As you look at these threats, know that God is with you. He is near. He dwells with you. He is a very present help in times of trouble. The answer to your fear is in knowing who God is.

As we come to the final stanza, the psalmist gets to the heart of the question that we are asking - How do we deal with fear? How do we stop worrying? He says:

**III. Knowing who God is and what He has done is the answer to our fear**

<sup>8</sup> *Come, behold the works of the LORD,  
Who has wrought desolations in the earth.*  
<sup>9</sup> *He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth;  
He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;  
He burns the chariots with fire.*

If this psalm is indeed prompted by a specific historical event like the threat of the Assyrian armies, the psalmist is saying "look at what God has done." *Come, behold the works of the LORD.* If it was that event, then the people of the city when they arose that morning could look out and see the corpses of the thousands that God had struck down. They could see the *desolations* that God had brought upon the Assyrians. They could see that He had made that war *to cease*. It was if God had gone out into the camp of the Assyrians and broken their bows and cut their spears in two and burned their chariots with fire. The field was littered with the destroyed implements of war. Come see His protection. Look at who God is and what He has done.

Now, this passage is written in general enough terms that it is an invitation to all of God's people in every age to look at who God is and what He has done. It is an invitation to remember God's acts of salvation. History is full of God's interventions for His people. If we could remember those acts, it would address our fears.

Then as we come to verse 10, God Himself speaks to His people and He says:

<sup>10</sup> *"Cease striving and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth."*  
<sup>11</sup> *The LORD of hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our stronghold.  
Selah.*

The temptation of the nation of Israel in times when they were threatened by invading armies was to strive; they would exert all sorts of effort to secure their own safety. They would appeal to other nations. They would often abandon God and work to secure their safety through political alliances and military might. Fear drove them to such pursuits. But God says "stop." *Cease striving and know that I am God.* The NIV says, "be still." It literally can mean "relax." Relax in the confidence of who God is. *Know that I am God.* I will be exalted among the nations and in the earth.

**Application:** The answer to our worries is God. The psalmist says that, first, we need to know God. Remember the psalmist said that it was because of what he knew about God that he could say "therefore we will not fear." If you want to deal with your worries, you must get to know God. A fear-filled life very well may be an indication of a lack of knowledge of who God is.

And so let's say that your major fear is your children's safety. How might it really help to know and believe that God is absolutely the Sovereign One? He is. There is no situa-

tion that your kids will be in that will be out of His control. How might it help to be convinced that it is God's character to care about children? He really loves them; even more than you do.

Knowing God can help you deal with this fear or any fear. I firmly believe that whatever your worry is that there is an aspect of God's character, something that is true about Him, that if you knew it and believed it would really help. And so get to know God.

And secondly, the psalmist says that we need to remember what God has done. We are urged to come and see the works of God. As I've mentioned in the past one of the main things I tend to worry about is money. But you know what? If I would only remember what God has done in the past, I would see a track record of faithfulness; of provision. He has always taken care of me in the past. My need is to remember what God has done. But for me to do that, I need to slow down. I need to be still. I need to pray and reflect on these things.

Whatever that thing is that you are worrying about, let me encourage you to get some time with God about it this week. Pray about it. Think about what is true of God and how that applies to your worry. Remember what He has done in the past. Cease striving and know that He is God.

Now, I want to say a word about those times when bad things really do happen to us. Sometimes our worries do come true. Does that mean that we can't really trust God? That is only goes so far? Here's a couple of thoughts. First, there is a sense where the promises of this psalm are only fully realized eschatologically. It will only be at the end of time where we truly see that we are safe in God. In eternity, we are safe.

Second, what we think is right and good is not always what God thinks. And so we might think that having something turn out a certain way is right, but God might not see it that way. And so maybe we find ourselves "lacking" from our perspective. We don't feel protected. But the reality is that God might have another agenda. He is working deep in our lives. He is causing growth through our struggle.

Third, though at times God does not protect us in ways that we think He should, we can still know that He is in control. He loves us and He is in control. He was in control when evil men killed Jesus. And He loved His son. But because He had a greater plan, He allowed that. Sometimes He has a greater plan that we simply don't understand and He lets things happen in our lives that we don't understand and we don't really want. But we can trust that in these situation, that as the psalmist says, He will be exalted.

Hear God's word to you, in whatever thing you fear, "Cease striving and know that I am God."

Amen.