

March 22, 2020  
Sunday Morning Service  
Coronavirus Sunday #1  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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**BE STILL**  
**Psalm 46**

Our current crisis, not just as a nation but as a world, seems to rank pretty high on the chart of bad stuff that has happened in history. Granted, the catastrophic results in terms of deaths so far are not as high as some previous and somewhat recent pandemic illnesses. For example, in 1968 influenza A virus (H3N2) caused an estimated one million deaths worldwide and about 100,000 in the United States. Most excess deaths were in people 65 years and older. In 2009 the world was hit with Swine Flu (H1N1). The CDC estimated that from April 2009 to April 2010, there were 60.8 million cases, 274,304 hospitalizations and 12,469 deaths in the United States alone.

Those numbers are staggering, but they do not begin to compare with the Bubonic Plague, or Black Death as it came to be known, that raged in Europe from 1347 to 1351. Estimated fatalities in that pandemic illness range as high 200 million people or about ½ of Europe's population. It is assumed that it took 200 hundred years for Europe's population to recover from the disaster.

More painful to us, because it effected our parents' and grandparents' generation, were the casualties experienced in World War I (40 million casualties and 20 million deaths) or World War II (56 million).

Those figures do not minimize the suffering experienced in our current chaotic circumstances. Any death from a virus is too many. And yet a world saturated with the greater effects of sin must experience sickness, disease and death by the same, or deaths through wars and accidents—not to mention natural disasters. Maybe the greater fear at the moment for some people is financial reversals.

How can our economy recover from losing 30% of its value in a few weeks' time?

The human tendency at such times is to fear or even to descend into panic. We understand how that can happen when life as you know it crumbles or your source of financial security disappears like vapor into air. But we who are in fellowship with our Creator are neither driven nor immobilized by such fears. Our God comforts us with this promise: *God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7)*. We do not fear the passing troubles of a passing life because we are kept secure by the Eternal God who happens to be in control of all things, including the tests that He allows in our lives.

The song writers, the sons of Korah, who were in charge of music in David's kingdom, wrote a beautiful song that reminds us of God's promised care in times of major upheaval. They challenge us to be still and know God. That is always a good response to any circumstances of life.

**Resolve (vv.1-3).**

The psalm begins with the wonderful promise that God is our refuge (vv.1-2a). Because He is our refuge, we conclude in the broader sense that God is our helper. The psalm writer wrote, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (v.1)*. I would like to emphasize that ultimately God alone is our helper.

Friends and family are so important in times of trouble and chaos. In fact, God intends for us to be helpful to those in need. Solomon concluded that *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)*. That is sensible. That is why God fully intends for us to find help, encouragement, strength to carry on especially from our family in the Body of Christ. Difficult times are prime times for us to pay attention to each other, build each other up. That is what "doing the work of ministry" is about (Ephesians 4:12).

This current situation creates a prime opportunity for us to exemplify Paul's attitude toward Christians in Thessalonica. He wrote them, *So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to*

share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Further, he wrote, *And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all*” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

God expects us to be helpful toward others and to receive help from the same. However, mere people cannot secure us like God does. Friends and family are as tenuous as all of us humans are. Any person can be gone tomorrow like each of us could be. Mere humans are fickle, and when the going gets tough and we really need help, people are often found faithless and missing.

But *God is our refuge and strength*. A refuge is the place the weak, troubled, vulnerable person runs to for safety. The very word implies danger and need. It is not only acceptable, but good for us to acknowledge that we are troubled, fearful. It is good for us to admit that we need a refuge. Here the word speaks of complete trust or confidence in God to provide protection from the danger or the enemy.

The word translated *strength* in this verse refers to might or power that can be used against the enemy or in favor of the needy. God’s strength is manifested in His voice, His actions, His arm or hand. It is an essential attribute of God. His people are confident, based on His promises and our experience, that God uses His strength in our behalf. The other day I read an article about a new canon our military has developed. It fires a guided missile that hits a target with pinpoint accuracy up to 40 miles away. Under normal circumstances, I would be impressed. But in light of thousands of people dying from a virtually invisible virus, a modern, very efficient weapon for defending against our enemy seemed rather insignificant.

No weapon, no defense, no fort or castle designed by man can offer the security we have in God. To that end, God promised us that He is our *very present help in trouble*. This means that our refuge and strength is available all the time. He stands by ready to help when we cry out to Him. How ashamed we should be to think that the majority of the time we shun Him and neglect Him, but still He stands ready to hear our call for help. An honest assessment of our shallow fellowship with God should remind us of Paul’s argument, *What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness*

*of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar* (Romans 3:3-4a).

God has promised that He is our sufficient refuge and strength in all trouble. *Therefore, we will not fear* (v.2a). Because God is who He is, we will not fear. Oh, but in reality we do fear, don’t we? We are especially prone to fear because we understand the logical reasons for fear. We all experience the emotion of fear, which often overrides the reasons for fear. But in the face of that uprising emotion, God is still the unchanging refuge and strength. Therefore, when we are afraid of circumstances, people, natural disasters, we exhibit failure to trust who God says He is. And when we fear, we deny what we have already learned about God.

Maybe we fear circumstances because we do not fear God. It is interesting that the same Hebrew word that speaks of fearing stuff is also used to speak of awesome respect for God. It is true that the sinner who is at odds with God because of his rebellion ought to have a healthy fear of God’s retribution against sin. But when we confess our rebellion against God and He forgives us through Christ, we can rest confidently in His incredible love for us. When we are resting confident in our refuge and strength, we should have no reason to fear.

Yes, but still, those times of trouble can be pretty scary! The song writer addressed those times by reminding us that God is our help in times of trouble (vv.2b-3). He helps His people in times of natural calamity. The psalmist could say confidently that God is near, *though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling* (vv.2b-3). The examples of trouble the psalmist gave here are extreme. These are natural disasters of a cataclysmic proportion. He speaks of major earthquakes, as though the earth is moving from under your feet. What he pictured is like watching a major volcanic eruption as a mountain slides off into the sea, or like watching a hurricane stir up the oceans, or a tsunami coming toward the shore.

Is it really possible to trust God who is our refuge and strength in the face of such disasters? That is how much confidence Job had when he concluded in a level of trouble you and I are not likely to face: *“Though he slay me, I will hope in him”* (Job 13:15a).

Does God help in other calamities? Is God our refuge and strength when we face chronic illness, depression, or a pandemic virus? Do you find God to be the faithful refuge, strength in your behalf as friends and family forsake you? Is God able to secure you against all fear when you lose your job or incur bills beyond your ability to pay? Where do you place your hope when the bottom of life falls out from under you? To whom do you call first when you are in trouble, your friends, your family, government, or God?

### **Reality (vv.4-7).**

The right answer to all those proposed scenarios is “God.” We should be quick to call out to God in times of trouble because, God is present (vv.4-5). And because God is present, His people are glad in His habitation. *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High (v.4).* Here is an important contrast. Because God is our ever present refuge and strength, the waters of life are different. All waters are under God’s control all the time. Sometimes He stirs them up and they become the raging waters of God’s judgment or even discipline for His wayward people. Often God calms the waters and makes them pleasant resources to sustain us and make us glad.

In this part of his psalm, the song writer referred to God’s habitation as the city, the one God made holy. This is an obvious reference to Jerusalem. It was God’s special city. He did speak of His special presence in that city at times when His people were in fellowship with Him. Another psalm calls on God to, *Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage! Remember Mount Zion, where you have dwelt (Psalm 74:2).*

God has promised to make Jerusalem very special in the future. The good news from God’s messenger was to proclaim God’s future plan for His special city: *“To grant to those who mourn in Zion – to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified” (Isaiah 61:3).*

More incredible than that is the reality that God is with His people, in our very presence, today. Do we believe His promise? Do we act like the promise in Hebrews 13:5 is true? *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).* If God is in His dwelling, in us through the person of the Holy Spirit, should we know it? Do we not experience His Spirit communicating with our spirit through His Word? *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Romans 8:16-17).* People who are in fellowship with God through the sacrifice and work of Christ are to be the most secure of all people in the face of trouble.

God’s people are secure in God’s habitation. *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns (v.5).* Because God is with us, yea within us, we shall not be moved. The Hebrew word for ***moved*** is rich and picturesque. In this case it means to be shaken. Therefore, I can conclude that I will not be shaken in the face of uncertainty because my Refuge and Strength is right here with me.

The same cannot be said for everyone. In this psalm is the contrast between the people in God’s chosen city versus nature or nations. At the Lord’s command mountains are ***moved*** into the sea (v.2). At the Lord’s command kingdoms are moved (the English word *totter* is the same Hebrew word as *moved*) (v.6).

Isaiah promised that when God wills and God speaks, *The earth is utterly broken, the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunken man; it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again. On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished (Isaiah 24:19-22).* The prophet pictured the earth reeling to and fro like a drunkard or a little vineyard hut in a violent storm. It convulses, reels, and shakes violently as God’s hand moves in judgment just prior to the “many days” (millennium?) of Isaiah 24:22.

David also spoke poetically of the earth being split and trembling in need of God's healing when it was shaking (Psalm 60:2). "As these passages and Psalm 82:5 show, the verb refers to the sudden, unexpected and disastrous shaking of the solid earth. Since this inconstancy is against the order of creation, it is associated with God's wrath. The power of his wrath is evident in such cosmic disorder." (Bruce Waltke, TWOT)

The earth reeling under God's judgment will be and ought to be a frightening reality. But in the midst of all that, *God will help us in the morning*. Morning follows darkness of night. Morning is when we see the carnage the storm caused. This is like people in Nashville recently who looked out on their neighborhoods after the tornado swept through at night. All around them lay devastation. Be assured that as we take stock in a few weeks of the residual damage Covid-19 caused, God will help us.

God is able to help us, secure us, comfort us, because God is mighty (vv.6-7). By His word He silences kingdoms. *The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts (v.6)*. Nations and kingdoms appear to be very powerful. The voice of God, merely His words, are more powerful. Maintain awesome respect for God and you will not fear the power of mere humans.

Because God is so mighty, His people find comfort and security in Him as our fortress. *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress (v.7)*. Seriously contemplate for a few minutes the LORD's majesty as He is the authority over all the spiritual hosts of the universe. We cannot even see the spiritual hosts in the world. And those spiritual hosts that are invisible to our eyes are more powerful than we can imagine. It is true that the powers of sin and spiritual darkness are unimaginatively powerful. Yes. But Almighty God is OUR Lord and is with us.

And more than being present, God is our fortress. There is a big difference between God on the offense like the originator of nine plagues against Egypt or the Death Angel passing over, and God being our defense against the attacks of sin, sinners, and Satan. He who has power to destroy with simply a thought is our fortress to protect us from all harm.

What is the worst that can befall the child of God? Sickness, trouble, difficulty? Yes. But of all those things does not God intend

to use them for His glory? Remember that Paul asked God to remove his sickness (if that is what the "thorn" was). God's reply to Paul's request was, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" And Paul concluded, *Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Corinthians 12:9)*.

But what if we die? Even death cannot separate us from God's love. In fact, death is the door through which we will pass (other than the rapture) into heaven, the perfect, eternal presence of God. And so we can rest in the right view of our own lives: *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39)*.

### **Rest (vv.8-11).**

We can rest securely in God knowing that He controls the good and the bad (vv.8-9). The bad is called desolations in this psalm. But God controls those. *Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth (v.8)*. Nothing happens apart from God. Though He never authors anything that tempts toward sin, He allows sin, sinners, and Satan to have their ways. Therefore, Job could trust God even though he did not understand the work of Satan that God allowed. Also, the prophet Amos said, *Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it? (Amos 3:6)*.

God even controls wars, which we generally view as being out of anyone's control. *He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire (v.9)*. After God draws the world's armies to the final great conflict, God will establish peace. We long for that day of redemption along with all creation.

What then should be the response for God's people as we run head-on into these very distressing events? Be still (vv.10-11). Be still and know God. God's word to us is, "*Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!*" (v.10). That means, very practically, get control of your mind

and think on the good and right things. Get control of your emotions and bring them under the authority of God's Word.

We get control by coming to know God's presence. *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress (v.11)*. We know God by learning about Him in His Word. We know Him by knowing His promises. We know Him by watching how His truths and promises work out in real life. We know God by observing how He brings peace to our souls in a chaotic world.

No one should minimize that trouble we face in this day. It is true that our forefathers have faced and generally survived worse chaos. It is true that so far, this pandemic virus is not the worst the world has faced. But it is also true that this tragedy is going to have serious ramifications for all of us. Our faith in God will be tested. God will always pass the test. Read His promises. Believe His promises. Experience His promises working out in your life.