

"The Weight of the Word"

Our sermon series on Psalm 46 began earlier this month with Pastor Wayne reminding us that this Psalm tells it like it really is. Trouble, for all of us, is real. But so is our refuge and strength. As Christians we trust that this is absolutely true, because God has such great love for us, that he entered our world of troubles in the person of Christ, so we could have refuge in him forever. Then last week, Vicar Zach continued to tell it like it really is, preaching on verses 4 and 5, reminding us that the church is the place where God calls us out of the chaos of our troubled world—the place where he promises to be and where the river of his gifts freely flows.

And this brings us to today. Now, no doubt verses 6-8 of Psalm 46 continue to tell it like it really is. But when we hear a lot of these words, they certainly create this picture in our minds of a God who is a little more untamed, and honestly, a little more frightening, than we want. Give us words from the past two weeks like refuge and strength, rivers and help, and we can create a picture of God that suits us. Maybe like that of a really nice grandfather type but who has a body like Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson. But the nations *rage*? The kingdom *totters*? He utters his voice, the earth *melts*? He has brought *desolations* on the earth? Any picture that these words create is the opposite of the really nice grandfather, right? The first thing that comes to my mind is this Ebenezer Scrooge type of guy, who is cold and heartless, but who still has the Dwayne “Rock” Johnson body.

But in all seriousness, what does God want us to hear in these verses? The Psalm in its entirety is certainly one of complete trust in God, especially in the face of crisis. I read it frequently to people who are going through difficult times. Many of you hopefully read it as well. And like many of the Psalms, I also quote portions of it, either in conversations or in emails or texts, because certain verses on their own remind us that the people of God are secure. The first verse is one of them: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help

in trouble.” So is verse 10, which we’ll hear about next week, “Be still and know that I am God.”

But I have yet to talk with someone who is experiencing serious trouble in their lives and going straight to “Behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.” Neither have I brought a word from God to someone in the face of tragedy that begins with “God utters his voice and the earth melts.” Because these are words of judgement. And even more, they’re words that demonstrate God’s true power. We yearn for those comforting words from God that assure us that everything is going to be Ok, especially when it’s not. But what we get here are God’s words that affirm his terrifying work over his creation. It’s easy to want to skip them or act like they don’t really mean what they sound like they mean. But remember that this Psalm tells it like it really is. God *is* all powerful. If he wanted, all he has to do is speak and things happen— including things like melting the entire earth.

And while I would never suggest isolating these verses from the rest of the Psalm, especially in times of trouble, they do serve as a reminder of something really important. And it’s the fact that when people in the Bible encounter the presence of God and the weight of his word, we see two sides. And this could either be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on their relationship with him.

Think about Noah and the flood. People had completely rejected God in their lives. Violence and sin was rampant. Genesis 6 says that “every intention of the thoughts of everyone’s heart was only evil— continually.” But there was this one family. They honored God and wanted nothing more than to serve him. This family, of course, was Noah’s. And God told him that because of the horrible sin in the world, he was going to destroy it. But he would save them. We know the story. God tells Noah to build the ark and put 2 of every kind of animal in it. He and his family do what God says. The rains come, the earth is flooded, and when it was all over Noah, his family, and the animals made it through alive.

But have you ever thought about everyone else? I mean, there were a lot of people on the earth at that point, but they weren't the ones in the ark. And this was really bad. Because when God spoke and the rain fell for 40 days, every single one of them were killed.

“Wow pastor, I thought you were going to give us comfort through the words of Psalm 46, but you're making us feel really uncomfortable,” you might be thinking. But that's the point. God uttering a word that changes everything is something only he can do. And he does it for us. From the very beginning God spoke and his word created the heavens and the earth. His word created every living creature. And finally his word created the crown of his creation, man and woman.

But he didn't just speak everything into existence and leave. As we've already heard, he spoke to Noah. After he restored creation again, he spoke his word of promise to Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. He spoke as Jesus emerged from the waters of his baptism where he announced to the world, “This is my beloved Son, and with him I am well pleased.” And words that are so important to us all, he spoke as he claimed us as his children in our own baptisms, burying us with Christ, so that we could be raised to new life with him. He continues to speak the same for all who are brought to the font.

But all of this is from the same voice my friends. The voice that can destroy is the same voice that gives life and says “You are mine. Out of my great love, I made things right through the sacrificial death of my Son, Jesus. I did it for you.”

I know it can be difficult to live in the tension that God's Word creates. We hear that God is love, and we also hear his words of judgement, like in the Noah account, or in these verses from Psalm 46 we are talking about today. Sadly, a lot of people only hear this word and end up leaving the faith, because who needs a God like that? The answer is, we all do. Because in the case of Noah, the reality is that he and his family deserved what everyone else got. Even though they honored God, they were still far from perfect. Yet

in his mercy, God saved them, which ultimately led to Jesus who saved all of us, even though none of us deserve it.

And in the case of these verses from Psalm 46 today, I hope you have noticed that I have yet to say anything about the verse in the middle. But I am now, because for those with faith in Jesus, this verse brings all of this together and turns this encounter with God from a bad thing to the very best thing. “The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our fortress.”

This is God’s word of love in which we live and find our true identity. Yes, at the same time we continue to live in his words from verses 6 and 8 that speak of his almighty power. Because they set us straight, especially when we start to believe our word is more powerful than his. But now when we hear them, we don’t fear them, or get ticked off at God for saying them. We honor them and respect them. And when we don’t, we repent. Because with this same all powerful voice that speaks and makes things happen, God claimed us and continues to speak to us his promise of eternal love—love he won for us at cost of his own son.

The God of all creation has made it known that he is on our side, my friends. May the weight of his word, both spoken and in the flesh, be the source of our comfort and strength through all of our troubles, heartaches, misfortunes, and yes, even through the good times.

“The Lord is with us. He is our fortress.” **Amen.**