

October 27, 2019

Reformation
46:19 Series

Psalm 46:8-10

“What God Can Do”

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When my work day ends, when I'm about to head home, when everyone else has left and I'm the last one out of the building, once in a while I'll stop in this room. Sometimes I just stand in the back for a moment. Sometimes I sit down in a pew. And don't tell anyone, but a couple times I've laid down on a pew for a few minutes.

It's peaceful. I love coming in here. I talk to God here. I listen to God here. I find sanctuary here. I receive here God's gifts of grace and mercy through his Son Jesus. I feel his peace.

And then I get in my car, and try to turn onto Rogers Road during rush hour. Then I check the disturbing news headlines on my phone. Then I pray through the church prayerlist, and think about all the real-life problems our sisters and brothers face. Then I visit church members in hospitals, and talk to grieving families. Like you, with my own eyes, I see so many tragedies, so many hardships and conflicts.

In here? Peace! Out there? I don't see much peace. Do you? What do you see out there? Oh, we see beauty, joy, and goodness in the world sometimes. But we also see, so often, a world at war, a world in turmoil, a world full of division and conflict. Division and conflict that we can't fix.

Turks and Kurds. Hong Kong and China. Iran and Israel. ISIS and everybody. Republicans and Democrats. We can't resolve these conflicts. We can't fix them.

Truthfully, we can't even fix the conflicts within ourselves. We want to do good, act right, and be happy all the time. But we let others down. We let God down. We let ourselves down. We mess up. We fail. We sin. We're broken inside, and we can't fix it.

In this room, there is peace. But out there? And in here? We can't resolve the conflicts. We can't make peace.

Let's read from the psalm again, verse 8. "*Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.*" Remember the verses we talked about last week, and the weeks before? The earth shaking, mountains falling into the sea, nations raging, kingdoms tottering, the earth melting. The Lord God carries out his mighty works of judgment; and, sometimes, yes, God brings desolations on the earth.

But read on, verse 9. "*He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.*" God does what none of us can do. God brings peace, heals divisions, resolves conflicts. I can't do that. You can't. Only God, not people, can do this.

The psalm writer makes this powerful statement of his trust in almighty God. These words express brilliantly his deep trust in what God, and God alone, can do. "*He makes wars cease ... he breaks the bow ... shatters the spear ... burns the chariots.*"

I can't fix the divisions out there in the world. I can't even resolve the spiritual conflicts in my sin-ridden soul. But I can learn to trust the God who can.

And, friends, that's what this beloved psalm, ultimately, is all about. Learning to put your faith and belief in God. Learning to find your refuge, every day, in your powerful God. Humbly receiving the gifts of God, and learning that his grace is sufficient for you. Believing that God is dwelling with you, constantly at work in your life and your world.

Learning to trust what God can do, in all those ways, doesn't come easily. I think about the disciples of Jesus. Do you remember the story in Mark 4? The disciples and Jesus go for a quick sail across the Sea of Galilee, when a storm erupts, and the sea rages. And Jesus is laying down on a pew, fast asleep. The disciples, who've seen Jesus do miracle after miracle, wake him up and complain. "How come you're not taking care of us?" Jesus immediately gets up and commands, "Peace! Be still!" With a word, he stops the storm. And then he turns to the disciples, and asks, "Why are you so afraid? Have you so little faith?"

Jesus knows it's a matter of faith. It's all about trust. Whether the storm is raging or the sea is calm, they are actually safe and secure because Jesus is with them. But they are still learning to trust him. They're still learning to trust what God can do.

And so are we all. Still learning. When we're in the storm, when we're feeling afraid, we can learn to trust. Trust Jesus. Trust he's with you. Trust in what he can do. And when we're struggling on the inside, lost in guilt and shame over our sins, learn to trust Jesus there, too. Especially there! God's Son paid for your sin. He died on the cross for you. Not because you're special and exceptional, but because you're not. He forgives sinners, and he saves sinners, solely out of love, pure grace. Learn to trust that love, that grace, what God has done for you in Christ.

Our friend, Martin Luther, back in the day, had to learn to trust in what God can do. He was trying hard to live the Christian life. Doing his best to please God. Striving to follow the rules, and stay away from sin. But, like you and me, like all of us, he couldn't do it. He couldn't fix the brokenness, the sin, in his heart. And it took him a long time, but Martin Luther eventually learned to trust what God can do. He learned that Jesus Christ was his only hope. But that Jesus Christ is a real hope, a living hope. He's an unshakable, unbreakable, unmistakable hope.

And he's your hope. We've spent a month delving into this wonderful psalm together. Now spend a lifetime learning to trust what this powerful, loving God of ours can do.

Let's close with the final verses of Psalm 46. They give us one last call to trust, and they give us the reason we can trust. Verses 10-11: *"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 fortress."*

Let the people of God say, with trust, "Amen."