

# Psalms 46

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[0:00] I've gone round and round since Thursday afternoon. Have I carried on the series that started last week or whether we need to look at something related to death.

! So, half-six this morning I thought, no, I need to do a draft night. So, I want us to look at Psalm 46 this evening, maybe next week too.

I know what he read, there was an article by Sebastian Milbank, he's a really excellent writer, great words. He read an article Thursday afternoon, before the Queen died, that God saved the Queen, Britain will now be saved again.

Let me read a bit of that to you. In one sense, we know what is about to happen with more precision than all of our few societies on earth. We know who will succeed her, William Charles George, old familiar names, prepared to flow out to eternity.

We know the rituals and ceremonies that attend the death, succession and coronation of the monarch. And there will be swarming clouds of commentators and tonies, lying to have to explain every salute, parade, gesture and symbol of it.

[1:19] But in another sense, we are cast into radical uncertainty. On the one hand, there is the avalanche of social change that has accelerated into unforeseen areas in the past 20 years.

On the other, the unprecedented economic, environmental and geopolitical uncertainty are put from phases going into the middle of the 21st century. The Queen goes on to speak about the Queen and says, Far more than an empty signifier or an ordained symbol of unity, some sort of collective granny, the Queen fully embraced a mode of life and a set of values utterly alien to wrong of the race.

Duty, religious, piety, humility, and service to her father, man, and woman. Like the Israelites bearing the Ark of the Covenant across the desert, our Queen has carried the hidden heart of British life within her through a secular and disenchanting age.

In a country even more secular than France or America, that has its recent history, in its recent history, not spatulate history and traditions, the Queen is her last point of continuity.

Public trust is drained away from politicians and priests, from the army and the police force. A coherent national story is no longer told in British schools, and Christianity has faded from national life to a faint echo, diffused by a variety of beliefs that challenge and compete with it, but are unable to take its place.

[2:50] I have a feeling, a superstitious feeling, of the life of our Queen, so devoted and service, so pleasingly forebroad, so strangely intense and quiet, somehow shields our country from death. I cannot help but look at the disasters rumbling on the horizon, and feel that history, so well encountered, is returning to England.

It's a brilliant article. It's a brilliant article. It's a brilliant article that I think summarizes for so many of us, some of the unease we feel, that we can't really understand.

Someone who has always been there. We expected that it would go on forever, but we knew that was impossible. Let's go on. When Queen Elizabeth began her reign, Christianity was one of the good guys. In our culture, Christianity, when the Queen began her reign, was affirmed, even in some ways celebrated, thought to be a good thing.

One of the good guys during her reign, Christianity became one of her guys, one of the options. A viable option, yes, but one amongst many other religious or secular options.

At the end of her reign, Christianity is seen as one of the bad guys. But to hold such a biblical, faithful Christianity is seen to be alchemic. It is seen to be dangerous, as many of you face today by day.

[ 4 : 19 ] So where do we go when we realise how uncertain the times are? Some of you struggle with anxiety. Some of you today might be feeling on edge, panic attacks, unfamiliar, uncertainty.

Trouble times. Trouble times. Where do you go from trouble times? What do you do? You look with anxiety about the future. Your job, your finances, your family.

You look at the bar, your fridge, your sex, your social media, what's God. Look with me at the first verse of 746. God is our refuge and strength, a very impressive heart and trouble.

And that verse speaks to you of security and confidence in the midst of chaos. And it may have been written centuries ago, but it's as relevant today as it was then.

It's part of a collection by the sons of Korah, the greatest heaths of Korah. And so, Psalms 42 to 49.

[ 5 : 35 ] Psalms 46 to 49. You'll see the word Seder. If you don't really know what it means, at the end of verse 3, verse 7, verse 11, it really means pause. What do you think about that?

It's a second point break. And so we're going to look at some of those three sections. Well, we'll look at the first three verses and we'll see whether we look at the next two sections for that.

It depends on Elsa and the world. So I want you to see verses 2 and 3. I want you to see a chaos. God is our refuge and set in the very present and in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, 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 and swelling.

So just look with me there. The earth creaking, the mountains moving, the sea roar. What you thought was immovable and permanent is suddenly movable.

It's a description of cosmic upheaval. What could be more stable in the earth than the mountains? Psalm 105 describes how God set creation on its foundation so that it would never be moved.

[ 7 : 03 ] And in verse 8 of that, Psalm 104, creation, the mountains rise out of the valleys, sink down to the place where God is put up. Creation is in the right place. But what Psalm 46 is talking about is the undoing of creation.

It's a process of de-creation. It's the earth giving way. The mountains which rose out of the sea on the third day of creation are sinking down back into the sea.

It's a bit like watching a video of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 on the rewip button. Order is returning to chaos.

On March 8th, 1750, John Wesley was preaching in Hyde Park on the occasion of an earthquake. It seems unbelievable, isn't it? And it was felt in London. And he quoted the words of the star as he was preaching, Though the earth give way, we will not fear. Though the mountains be moved into the hard sea, we will not fear.

They seem to describe, don't they, the effects of an earthquake. The mother of all earthquakes. But the description is a picture. It's a picture of the living in troubled times.

[ 8 : 27 ] And you see, this psalm was written on the occasion of the land of Judah being invaded by a foreign army. So this picture of de-creation is not actually describing a literal earthquake, but it's a picture of how the world of God's people seem to be collapsing around them.

They face the loss of everything, their properties, their very lives. And so this picture is really helpful. There is a theory, isn't it, that our country has become addicted to a kind of catastrophe. That from 2008, and the financial crisis, and then into Brexit, and then into Covid, and now into the kind of financial crisis, we loom from one kind of crisis to another.

The earth giving way. The earth giving way. What's happened economically, isn't it? The bomb falling out of your world, the world you turn on. A mountain falling into the sea.

It isn't just economic. The instability and the insecurity of the picture is very much like the life we face in love. Fear.

[ 9 : 43 ] Fear. Fear, fear, fear. What do you say when you face crisis in your own life?

What do people say when difficulties come upon them? They say, it feels like my world is falling apart. It feels like my world is coming down around me. You lose your job, you face a bereavement, a relationship breaks down.

The familiar support is taking away. When you receive the diagnosis of the doctor. When there's a knock on the door from the policeman. It can feel, can't it, as if the earth is quaking.

And the mountains are shaking and your world is falling apart. How do you cope with times like that? Where do you turn to the bar to the fridge? God. Or maybe just maybe you are someone that manages to sail miraculously through life untouched by any such crisis.





[ 21 : 14 ] The storm of God's final judgment, When the thunder of lightning strikes, When the day counts, There will be no refuge in the bar, There will be no refuge in the fridge, In the gym, in the screen, in the person, in the gola.

So what difference does it make, For you and I, If we will put God as our refuge? And this is my final point, Can you see it in verse 1?

God is our strength, And our refuge, A very present hell control, And so here is the result of it, Therefore, We will not fear.

Therefore, We will not fear. Therefore, We will not fear. If God is your refuge, Then whatever happens, You know that you are safe in God's hands.

And that is true to fear, For worry. When the world is coming up around us, Whether it is in a verbal sense, Or a very personal level, Press is a very real problem, When the pressure is really on, We are at home, And we find ourselves at breaking point, We really struggle with sleep, Maybe we lose weight, We put weight on, Or we get depressed, And it can affect everything, How do you deal with it?

[ 22 : 46 ] Well, here is God's answer, It is, Make God your refuge. Therefore, It says, We will not fear. And that is, Escapism. The psalmist is fully aware of what is going on around you.

But I need to say to you, If you have taken your refuge in God, You have got nothing to fear. But I need to say to you there, Crystal Snow, if you have taken your refuge in God, you've got nothing to figure out. You can take your worries to God, you can cast your cares upon him, knowing that God cares for you.

Do you remember the incident in the Gospels, when the disciples are out on a fishing boat, on the Sea of Galilee, they're in a boat, there's a great storm, it comes out of nowhere, a water is in a boat, and the disciples are in a complete panic, and Jesus is asleep in the stern of a boat.

He's asleep. Because he's got confidence in God, he has made God his refuge. He's calm in the storm.

Martin Luther, the great German reformer, he posted his 95th thesis on the door of the Word of Newcastle in 1517. He started a kind of domino effect that changed the world. He faced years of trial and persecution, he was excommunicated, kicked out of the church.

[ 24 : 08 ] He continually faced threats against his life. Many of his friends, other reformers were burnt at the stake. How did he cope with the pressure? And in 1529 he wrote his famous hymn based on this subtle mighty fortress of our God.

His confidence was in God. And when the pressure was on, he found strength and peace in the midst of the storm. And at times when he would feel overwhelmed, and yet his friend Malak thought, and they sought to stand for the truth, he would say to his friend, come on Philip, let's sing before yourself.

The first line of that hymn is inscribed to Luther's tomb in a building book. And so that is how to remain calm with the story. Sing the 46th.

Make God your refuge. By contrast, in 1997, a man called Paul Wilson, he's a meditation teacher, he published a book called The Little Book of Car.

It was a professor. It was something that he wrote during a Zen seminar. In Japan, it was a publishing sensation. Two million copies translated into 24 languages.

[ 25 : 23 ] It's got 160 bits of advice. Bits of advice to deal with stress. So for example, here's his advice. Have calm thoughts. Picture calm scenes.

Recall calm sounds. That's one bit of advice. And my favourite one is this. Pretend it's Saturday. Or imagine this. Every day is a holiday.

He says, do one little thing that stimulates this holiday room every day, and watch your worries throw your way. I don't want to preach that. But this is for me, this guy is really serious. Imagine this. Let's say, I don't say this like, imagine you go to the doctor and see your children, you have terminal throat cancer. Maybe you're losing sleep because one of your children is being bullied at school. And the best that the world can offer is pretending Saturday. Imagine every day is a holiday. Is that going to make your worries fade away?

[ 26 : 26 ] No, the Lord is alright. I'll ask for it, therefore, the world will fear. Take refuge in the living God, or pretend it's Saturday.

And if you think that, if you're listening to me, there's no real difference between that. I just want to encourage you, talk to the Christian who's maybe next to you. But for those of us who are

Christians, who do know God, how are we seeking refuge in God?

I think in the way that our country has been in the last 10 years, well, the kind of fear epidemic, it looks differently at different times, but the kind of, the world, the world is going to collapse.

It's a massive disaster. Global warming, the whole thing. Energy crisis. One of the greatest differences of Christians, people who know the Lord, is who we are not fear.

And so what about death? Keeping in front of us this week. Facing death, facing the prospect of being called to account by the God of various, like who this is, that's me. If they ignore the fact that they're going to die, Lord Archer was recently asked, if he dwelt much on his mortality, and he said mortality, he said certainly not, I'd just go on with life.

[ 27 : 53 ] The article said he's got no religious faith, no interest in spirituality. He's preoccupied with the hero now. By contrast, I think he looked at Christianity, and it faces death head on.

And as we face death, there are two of those emotions that we feel as Christians. One is we are scared by it, because it's in the truth there. And the other is we're relieved because the Lord Jesus has come to do with it.

How do you cope with the inevitability of your own death? It's a point of if a man wants to die, and after that to face judgment. On that day, it won't help very much to pretend it's Saturday.

And the only way to face death, and judgment, and life, without feedback, is to make God your refuge. To make God your refuge while there's no time.

And wonderfully, that's what we need is to fit. Romans 8, verse 1 says, There is therefore no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, for those who've taken refuge in Christ.

[ 29 : 08 ] Nothing to fear. That's all. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar from, though the mountains tremble as well.

Lord God, may we be those who make you our refuge. And if we've done that, may we today, we'll keep seeking refuge in you.

not just for the last day, but also for the challenge of life. Come to us in the present, with the faces of the sun.

We pray that there will be a wide spread to it, in the light of many people, who put their refuge, and find their strength. In God we pray in Jesus' name.

[ 30 : 09 ] Amen.