

Psalms 46

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[0 : 0 0] I'm doing it again to Psalm 46. Psalm 46. And we're finishing. After the next number of weeks, Stuart is going to take us through two Thessalonians.

! And they play football.

And at the end of it, you could buy a same-speed bar of chocolate. And it was remarkable to see the reactions of different people in the church. Some people thought it was a brilliant thing.

That it brought the First World War to life. And showed people what the First World War was like. Other people in the church thought it was terrible. And thought it trivialised war.

And so I'm not on Facebook myself. But I know my mother's password. And I can go on Facebook in that way. And so occasionally I can see what some of you get up to on Facebook. Changed the settings. And it was interesting to see different reactions to war.

[1 : 1 1] But when we think about it, war is a horrific thing, isn't it? There's nothing romantic at all about war. War is sometimes necessary. If you followed what's going on in Iraq in the last week.

War is sometimes necessary. But it is always horrific. And I don't think any of us here, maybe one of us, have maybe experienced war firsthand.

But you only need to look at a few points by Wilfred Owen. You see one of those documentaries about World War I. You read about the fate of Soviet prisoners during World War II.

Or you watch the first five minutes of Saving Private Ryan. And you appreciate something of the horror of war. From the sublime to the rim.

In the film Miss Congeniality, Sandra Bullock plays an FBI agent who goes undercover as a participant in a U.S. beauty pageant.

[2 : 0 9] I know many of you will have watched it and loved that film. The emcee of the beauty contest asks this famous question. What is the one most important thing that our society needs?

And Miss Congeniality, Sandra Bullock, replies, Well, that would be harsher punishment for parole violators. And the crowd is silent. Then she remembers it, she adds, Oh, and world peace.

And the crowd goes wild. And they start cheering ecstatically. It used to be the stock line, didn't it? Not that I've ever watched for this world. People would often say to me that the great kind of stereotypical line, What is the great dream?

Well, the dream of Miss World was world peace. So imagine that. Imagine a world where there was no longer any war. Do you think that will ever happen? Well, the Bible gloriously and wonderfully assures you and I in this part of Psalm 46.

Can you see verse 9? It will happen. The Lord, our God, makes wars to cease. To the ends of the earth.

[3 : 1 7] I don't really picture that. It's one of a number of texts in the Old Testament where it speaks in those terms. That there will be an end to war. War will be no more.

Isaiah chapter 2, verse 4. They shall beat their swords into plowshares. And their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation.

That's the promise. Neither shall they learn war anymore. So no mobility exercises. Or training. No more jobs in the army. Because war will be a thing of the past.

We're all familiar probably with those words of Isaiah 9, 5. They're said in carol services up and down the country every Christmas. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult.

And every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire for a Jew as a child was born. Verses 8 to 11 take us back in this psalm to this original setting.

[4 : 1 8] That Jerusalem was being attacked. Attacked by an invading army. So that's what I want to think of tonight. About war and the longing for world peace. One day God will bring an end to war.

That's the first point. It's the end of all wars. Verses 8 to 9. It begins with this wonderful assurance, isn't it? That he makes wars to cease to end to the ends of the earth.

What a prospect. A world at peace. He makes wars to cease. Not just an armistice. In a war. Not just a 24 hour truce.

Not just a cessation of hostilities in a conflict. But the cessation of all wars. To the ends of the earth. Brought about by the Lord God himself.

A world at peace. Verse 9 goes on to say, He breaks the bow and he shatters the spear. And he burns the chariot with fire.

[5 : 17] God himself. What an amazing picture. God himself will destroy all weapons of war one day. There will be a divine disarmament program.

Is that a desirable outcome? Of course it is. Can you imagine a political candidate who could promise world peace? Well, they would be a shoo-in to Downing Street, wouldn't they?

What a pledge in the race for the White House. If you could promise world peace. But the outcome is something that we would all vote for. But did you spot the process the Lord will bring to bring this about?

Look at verse 8. It begins, Come, behold the works of the Lord. So what are the works of the Lord? What are the works of the Lord that you are being invited to view?

Is it the beauty of his creation? Is it the stars and the skies and the mountain tops as in other parts of Scripture where told to behold? No, in this case, it's not works of creation.

[6 : 19] Can you see what it is? But works of judgment. Look at verse 8. Come, behold the works of the Lord. How he has brought desolations on the earth. Desolation means that the earth has been devastated.

It's been laid waste by God himself. He makes wars to cease to the ends of the earth. Well, how come all wars have ceased? Well, it's because it is the Lord, the divine warrior, has defeated all his enemies in a final conflict.

It really is, verse 8, isn't it? The war to end all wars. He breaks the bow. He shatters the spear. He burns the chariots with fire. This is not a picture of an amnesty in which everybody comes and hands in their weapons to God.

No, and he disposes them. No. It is a picture of a victorious general who is wiping out systematically an opposing army. So in Joshua chapter 11, he is faced, Joshua is, with the kings of the northern Canaan.

And their armies, which are like the sand on the seashore. But Joshua says he has defeated them. He wiped out every last man. And he burned their chariots with fire.

[7 : 34] Joshua 11. It's the same phrase here. Psalm 46 was written on the occasion of a crushing defeat which the Lord has inflicted on a foreign army that was attacking the historical city of Jerusalem.

And this invitation in verse 8 is for the people to go out from the city. Come and witness what God has done. Come and see the carnage that God has brought about.

Come and see the piles of enemy bodies. The smouldering remains of a defeated army. It's gruesome. But that historical victory back then is seen as a foreshadowing.

It anticipates the Lord's end of time defeat of all his enemies. There will be no more enemies.

So Revelation 19 verses 13 to 16 fills in a few more of those details. Let me read it to you.

Revelation 19 verses 13 to 16. Revelation 19 verses 13 to 16.

[9 : 10] Revelation 19 verses 13 to 16.

How about, how can world peace ever be achieved? It's not going to be achieved by changing the Downing Street or changing the White House.

No president will ever make that sort of claim. But the website of the Baha'i religion, that declares confidently, listen to this, that for the first time in history world peace is not only possible but inevitable.

That is optimism, isn't it? That is optimism, isn't it? It is hopelessly naive. But it doesn't show on that website, as far as I can tell, any process to actually realise that.

Let me read to you from the Charter of the United Nations. It affirms that it affirms that it was funded to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.

[10 : 37] But there have been more conflicts in our world since the founding of the UN than in any previous period in history. The Lord God declares that he will make an end to war and he will bring in world peace.

But in contrast to the UN and the Baha'i religion and this world, the Lord God has got a process that will achieve it. And the process is judgment.

It is judgment. And that is the only process that will ever achieve it. Peace will come, but it will only come after the divine ruler has established his rule and he's overthrown all his enemies.

And at the carol service, when you hear Isaiah 9 being read, it is saying exactly the same thing. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burnless fuel for the fire.

But actually we don't read that in the carol service. We read the nice bit. For unto us a child is born, isn't that sweet? Unto us a son is given. And the government will be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[11 : 46] And of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. That is the global reign of Jesus Christ. That will achieve world peace and will guarantee it.

And there will be peace. But only because a rebel world and all opposition and all evil will one day forcibly be disarmed by God.

The outcome will be peace. But the process will be judgment. So although this outcome of world peace is what everyone longs for, the process is not exactly a vote winner, is it?

But the uncomfortable truth is this. The Lord isn't seeking election from you and me either. That Jesus Christ has been crowned as king by God the Father. And when he returns to this world, what this world will see is what this psalm foresees will happen.

And so how should we respond to this? What are the implications of this world peace and this judgment? Well, the remaining two verses tell us. Look at verse 10. Verse 10 says, So be still and know that I am God.

[12 : 53] And I will be exalted among the nations. And I will be exalted in the earth. And so we turn from the end of all wars to the call to God's enemies.

The end of all wars and the call to God's enemies. I think in studying this psalm, verse 10 must be up there as one of the most widely misunderstood and misused verses in the whole of the Bible. Be still and know that I am God. But who is speaking? God is obviously speaking. The verse is punctuated, isn't it?

With speech marks, verse 10. But who is God addressing and what is he saying? So more often than not, it is assumed that God is addressing his people.

And he's telling the people, silence. That it is in silence and in quietness that you will get to know God better. Have you heard that? So the idea is this.

[13 : 55] If you want to get to know God better, what you need, and you want to go deeper in your relationship with God, you need to cultivate the art of contemplative prayer.

And maybe some silent meditation. Go on a retreat and do some contemplative prayer and silent meditation. So what you need is you need to get somewhere quiet, maybe light a candle and sit in silence before God.

Don't say anything. Words are going to get in the way. Instead, be still and know that I am God. But this verse isn't advocating that at all.

It isn't advocating silent meditation. I mean, bluntly, such a practice, there's no way to get to know God better at all. Sitting alone in quietness.

Well, that's good, isn't it? Sitting alone in quietness is certainly good for you. It's good for me. It's going to be relaxing for anyone in a busy job. But sitting on your own in quietness is not going to grow your relationship with God.

[15 : 06] Alright? At best, such a very responsibility of failing to read this verse in its context. At worst, using this verse as a convenient peg on which to borrow kind of practices from other religions is incredibly dangerous.

It's basically doing what King Ahaz did. When he saw an altar in the Syrian capital of Damascus one day, and so he sent it back to Uriah the priest in Jerusalem as a model.

And he says to Uriah, you can make one of these in Jerusalem. So you can be like the nations around them. What is this verse actually saying there? What is it saying? To be still and know that I am God.

What's it mean? Well, the Hebrew verb translated be still, it basically means stop. That is the refrain. What are you doing? Refrain from what you're doing. Stop from what you're doing. Withdraw. Freeze. It is to be still, but in the sense of stopping doing what you're doing. And stop saying what you're saying.

[16:15] So you find it, for example, in 1 Samuel 16. Samuel the prophet confronts Saul the king. And Saul is coming up with some pathetic excuses as to why he disobeyed God.

And Samuel breaks him off and says, stop. Stop what you're doing. And it's the same word. Stop and I will tell you what the Lord just said to me this night.

Be still. It's a rebuke. It's a rebuke. So although it's a different word in Mark 4, it is the same sort of force when Jesus rebukes the wind and says to the raging sea, peace, be still.

Stop it. Be still. It's the same sort of idea. So in context, God is actually addressing his enemies. He is not addressing his people.

It is what the Lord is saying to the nations, which in verse 6 are raging against his people. Be still and know that I am God. So these are not words of comfort for God's people.

[17:23] They are words of rebuke and of warning to God's enemies. The sense of it is stop your rebellion. Lay down your arms.

Submit to my authority. Be still. Be still and know that I am God. And that I will be exalted among the nations. And I will be exalted among the earth.

And I will be exalted, says the Lord. Exalted in the eyes of everyone. The Lord is God. He is the king. He is the ruler. And one day, everyone, everyone will have to acknowledge him.

Philippians chapter 2 tells us that this will be fulfilled in Jesus, doesn't it? It tells us Philippians chapter 2 and verse 9. God has exalted him.

God has exalted among the nations.

[19:11] God has exalted him. He is not saying that. He is not like some Formula 1 racer.

He is not like Lewis Hamilton in the Formula 1 who is dreaming of becoming Formula 1 champion again. But not actually knowing if that is going to be the case until the last lap.

Until the final race of the season. It is not like that. And then finding out he has been pipped at the post. No, this is for certain. The Lord is saying, I will be exalted in the earth.

Nothing can stop that happening. There is no one bigger than our God. There is no one more powerful than God. How does this make you feel?

Do you feel not all resentful about that? Do you feel, who does he think he is? Well if so, that is a sign of a rabble heart by nature.

[20:12] We don't want to submit to God's godness. And to God's rule. And that is the very essence of sin.

But God's rule is best. And given that he is creator. He has got the right to rule us after all. So how does he call us to respond? Be still he says. Be still and know that I am God.

And so God says to Elin tonight. God says to my neighbours. Stop your raging. Stop your rebelling against me.

Lay down your arms. And submit to my authority. And to that of the king whom I have appointed. Jesus Christ. And if we don't do that today.

If we will not be still and know that he is God's today. Then one day we will hear that command again. But on that last day it will be too late to change.

[21:11] So that powerful command will be the means. On the last day of Jesus. By which he overthrows his enemies. Just as with a word. God, Jesus calms the raging seas.

If we don't submit now. Then we won't be part of his kingdom in the future. It was peaceful rain. On the far side of judgment.

God will be exalted. So now is the time to come into line with that reality. To be still and submit to him. And accept the pardon gives to rebels like ourselves through Jesus Christ.

But what if we are already God's people? We'll look at verse 11. The Lord of hosts is with us. And the God of Jacob is our fortress. The refrain that you got in verse 7.

The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. It's exactly the same thing. Back in 1 Kings chapter 20.

[22:14] We read of an incident. Where the king of Syria. Came against Israel. And the king of Syria boasted about how he was going to wipe out Israel. And all the Israelites and the king of Israel responded by saying.

Let not him who straps on his armour. Boast like him who takes it off. It's brilliant. Don't start boasting before you've had the battle. Like you would if you've won it at the end. The beginning of the battle is not the place for boasting. Wait till the end of the battle. But as God's people we can have total, total confidence of victory. Even though the battle is going on. Why is that? It's not presumption. But that God is fighting for us. This God who will be exalted will be on our side. God is going to win. And so what was a warning to God's enemies. Is a comfort to God's people. That's the third point. What was a warning to God's enemies. [23 : 18] Is a comfort to God's people. And just imagine that you're in some work football tournament.

I realise that for some of you. This isn't a great illustration. But you're in a work football tournament. I used to be in them when I worked for BT. And just before kick off. You look around. And you notice that all the other members of your team. Are premier league football stars. So they're all there. And Wayne Rooney is there up front. Eden Hazard playing just behind. John Terry is in defence. Harry Kane. And you look across at the opposition. And they're just normal blokes. Who work at their desk answering phones. Would you be confident of victory? Well of course you would. Why would you be confident of victory? Because of the people who are on your side. And when we look around at God's people. [24 : 17] We see that God himself is on our side. Even though the match isn't over. Is it? We can have total confidence we are on the winning side. Because the God who will be exalted is with us and for us.

And the titles of God in verse 11. They just reinforce that. This confidence. They reinforce it. That he is the Lord of hosts. Verse 11. The Lord of hosts speaks of power. Host is talking about armies. The Lord is the all powerful divine warrior. At the head of the heavenly army. And no one can match his fire power. And he is in verse 11. The God of Jacob. That speaks doesn't it. Of his covenant promises. That I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Who keeps his promises. He is the covenant God. And so those two titles reassure you that God is able. And God is willing to help his people. He is both powerful. The Lord of hosts. He is faithful. The God of Jacob. [25 : 20] And he has the strength. And he has the commitment to ensure it. That we will overcome. And that is why. The apostle Paul is so confident in his name.

That when you read a passage like Romans chapter 8. Where Paul says. If God is for us. Who can be against us? If God is for us. Who can be against us? It's the same idea. If God is on my side. If God is for me. Who can be against me? He goes on. What shall separate me from the love of Christ? And he goes through a list. He says. Well. So tribulation. Or will distress separate me from the love of Christ? Will persecution? Will famine? Will nakedness? Will danger? Will sword? Will struggles with money? Will problems in my marriage? Will a horrible job. [26 : 22] Will that separate me from the love of Christ? No. In all these things we are more than conquerors. Through him who loved us. Knowing that this God is with you and on your side is a great comfort.

And so if you are sitting in Jerusalem. In ancient Jerusalem. And you are facing an invading army. Or if you are a 21st century living in a world that is full of conflict. And full of war. God is with us. And one day he will establish world peace. And he will keep us safe through that judgment. That will establish the reign of peace. And that is a great comfort to you tonight. If you are facing persecution as the people of God. I'm sure you've read of some of the horrific things. That our brothers and sisters are going through in different parts of the world. That as the nations raged against God's people in the Old Testament. So they do today. And even in our culture. [27 : 26] There is real hostility isn't there? Against Bible believing Christians. We've seen it this week haven't we? It was just some of the things that have been said about that Asher's bakery case.

No matter what you think of that case. But some of the things that have been said about Christians have been horrific. There is real hostility against Bible believing Christians.

And some of you probably are enduring opposition from family, from colleagues. But Psalm 46 says, but God is with us. And he will be exalted.

And it is a great comfort if you are facing an uncertain future at work. And if you're wondering what does the future hold. God is with you now. And so your eternal future is secure.

It's a great comfort if you're facing temptations. Perhaps those temptations you fear that they're going to overwhelm you. But this all powerful faithful God who is at your side will strengthen you and help you if you look to him.

[28 : 28] It's a great comfort if you're going through bereavement. If you've known the loss of a loved one. If you've known a miscarriage. And we may not always know that the Lord is with us. But by faith we trust that this is true.

That he really is. And knowing that this God is with you is a great comfort when you yourself are facing the ultimate challenge of death. It's probably not something that you often think of in the busyness of day to day life.

But it is going to happen. And if there is one time when you need to know that this God is with you. It's when you're standing at the entrance of the valley of the shadow of death isn't it?

When John Wesley, the kind of great Methodist who just read a biography of John Wesley. He's a great character. And there were a little group of friends that gathered around him.

He was a very old man. Incredibly old. And he often tried to speak. There were no words that came out because he was so weak by that stage. But then he beckoned them to kneel by his bed and pray with him.

[29 : 31] And as they concluded their prayers we read that he summoned up his final reserves of strength. And he cried out his last words which were The best of all, God is with us.

And then apparently he again lifted up his arm. And he raised his feeble voice to proclaim The best of all, God is with us. And may that be our experience.

When death comes for each one of us. Let's pray.