

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What's your favorite hymn? That's a tough question isn't it? It's too hard to pick just one. But if I gave you a hymnal and half an hour, you'd have no trouble coming up with your top ten or twenty. And I'd be willing to bet that for a majority of us, I'd find quite a few hymns being repeated on many of your lists. Hymns like *A Mighty Fortress* hymns like *Be Still My Soul*, and hymns like *In Christ Alone*. They're all great hymns and all great hymns for Reformation day.

But besides being great hymns do you know what else they have in common? All three express the thoughts recorded in Psalm 46. And I can't help but think that Psalm 46 was a favorite hymn of many Old Testament believers for the same reasons that *A Mighty Fortress*, *Be Still My Soul*, and *In Christ Alone* are so popular today. Because they all express the quiet confidence that we have in spite of our many struggles and trials because of God's certain promises. They all express the quiet confidence that gives peace now and lets us be still. They all express the quiet confidence that drives out fear and makes us bold. Listen again to the familiar words of Psalm 46—the Psalm on which Martin Luther based his hymn *A Mighty Fortress*...

¹ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. ⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. ⁸ Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. ⁹ He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. ¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." ¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

I. God is Our Refuge

Right away the Psalmist gets right to the heart of the matter. He first gives the solution, then the problem. *¹ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear...* Now, fear can be crippling, can't it? Fear can be a master and make you its slave. And fear robs us of confidence, peace, and strength. Fear is a major problem.

But what causes fear in your life? Do you fear the results of the upcoming elections? Do you fear for the future of our nation? When you consider our economy and think about your financial security, do you grow worried, even scared? Do you fear that trip to the doctor because you're afraid of what he might say? Or because you're afraid of what she'll tell you to do? Are you afraid that your relationships will forever be strained? That you'll never reconcile? That you'll always be alone?

There are many things that cause fear. But in Matthew 6 Jesus pointed out the real cause: "***If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?***" (Matthew 6:30) Fear and worry really come from a lack of faith. Fear and worry say to God, "I don't really think you are my refuge. I don't really think you're my strength. I don't really think you're present. You can't really help me now."

INstead of being worried about the elections, or the economy, or our relationships, or anything in this life, we ought to be worried about our relationship with God, who we refuse to trust. We ought to be worried about the way we've offended him who's made such gracious promises to us. As Jesus put it in Matthew 10: "***Do not be afraid of those who kills the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.***" (Matthew 10:28)

And that is something that is truly worthy of our fear.

That thought of hell is something that at one point had Martin Luther terrified. He struggled against his sinful nature, he fought hard against his worry and doubt, he tried with all sincerity to do everything he could to please God. But he knew he was a sinner no matter what he did. He knew he could never do enough to make God happy since God demands perfection, since Jesus said, "***When you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'***" (Luke 17:10) Martin Luther was full of dread and terror.

So what removed the fear? The same thing that removes the fear for us. The truths sung about in Psalm 46: "***God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.***" "***God is within her,***" –that is, the city of God, a picture of the Church. And so, "***she will not fall...***" But what kind of protection does God promise? Does he promise that he will spare his people from every calamity that may hit? Does he promise to spare them from pain or frustration? No. Look at the context:

"***Though***" – or really the Hebrew says, "when" as if it were expected – "***[When] the earth give[s] way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea... Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.***" Then, a clear picture of Judgment Day – when God will put an end to this earth once and for all... Then, when he will destroy it, not with water, but with fire... Then, when the earth breaks apart and the mountains are sunk... Then we still have the confidence that, "***The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.***"

How do we know? How do we have this quiet confidence? Well, that title for God is a good hint: "***The God of Jacob***" was meant to call to mind that God was the God of a promise, of an unbreakable covenant. In Genesis 28 God repeated the promise he'd made to Abraham and to his son, Isaac, now to Isaac's son, Jacob: "***All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring...***" referring to the one promises to Adam and Eve in the Garden, the promise of the Messiah, the Savior.

So when the Psalmist says, "***Come and see the works of the LORD...***" we can't help but think of the great works of the LORD that we've seen in Christ. In Christ alone my hope is found. Because of his work for me on the cross, by his grace alone, through faith alone, revealed in Scripture alone, I know without a doubt that I will go to "***the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells***" where the river of

life will forever flow, of course, to heaven. Though I may live to see the desolation of the LORD that he will bring about on Judgment Day, "**[When] the earth give[s] way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea... [When] he lifts his voice, the earth melts...**" I know that I will survive it. And so I have no fear.

You know what's the best thing to do when you fall into some quicksand? Keep calm. Don't panic. Don't fight to work your way out. Just be still. Lay flat. And wait for rescue to come. In a similar way, when we worry about our sin, about our guilt and shame, about Judgment Day and hell, the best move is to be still and look for God's rescue. The more I work to earn his favor, the more I really fail. But when I quit struggling and look to him, I see what he's already done. I know there's nothing left for me to do. I'm safe. No fear.

This is the confidence Martin Luther found in God's gracious promises. This Gospel truth became to him a mighty fortress that shielded him from fear and worry and the attacks of Satan. And this Gospel truth is our castle too, our mighty fortress, that we too might have no fear.

II. **God is Still With Us**

If only it were that easy, right? My sins are forgiven. Heaven is certain. I need not fear Judgment Day, so all worry and fear will now cease! ...Ah.. if only. But we're still so afraid aren't we? We ask, "What will I do next year if the election doesn't go my way? What will I do next month if the spot doesn't go away? What will I do next week if the boss decides to lay me off? What will I do tomorrow if this relationship isn't fixed? I know I have heaven, but heaven is still such a long ways off... and I'm afraid."

But did you notice the problem with all of those questions? They all asked, "What will *I* do?" Too often we think, "I am within this (this relationship, this job, this body, this economy, this whatever)! Therefore, she will not fall!" But what foolishness to think **we** are in control. That's why we still have so much fear! But what removes fear—not just the fear of hell, but the fear that our day to day problems still bring? The truths of Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble... God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day... The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress... Be still, and know that I am God... The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

"**Therefore**," because of his gracious promises to continue to be our strength and help, not just for eternity, but already now in time, "**we will not fear.**" Because "**He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?**" (Romans 8:32) "**we will not fear.**" Because "**we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose...**" (Romans 8:32) "**we will not fear.**" Because, "**we know and rely on the love God has for us...**" (1 John 4:16) "**we will not fear.**"

Do you ever go to bed and worry that the sun will never rise; that never again will you see the light of day? Of course not! Even in Alaska where you may not see *sunlight* on a given day, you know without a

doubt that there will still be daylight, no matter what. Well, here's God's promise to you: "***God is within [his Church], she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.***" The night will pass. The nightmare will end. Day will come. Even if all of the world's nations fail, God still stands. Even if you lose all else, God still stands. Even if your life ends, God still stands. And his help will come. You can be more certain of that truth than that you'll see daylight tomorrow.

And so we can, "***Be still,***" literally in the Hebrew, "Cause it to go slack." Maybe in our modern English slang, we can "Drop it," or "Let it go," or maybe just "Relax," because we know without a doubt that we are safe within the Mighty Fortress. Our salvation is secure through the horrors of Judgment Day, even as the world is destroyed, because of Christ alone. We can drop it, let it go, and relax, because we know that God is still with us, promising his ever-present help in trouble. God is with us. We will not fall. God is with us. He is our impenetrable fortress.

And this truth, gives us a quiet courage, and at the same time makes us bold to take a stand... just like Luther, just like those leaders of the Lutheran Reformation who signed the Augsburg Confession and offered their heads to the emperor, just like so many others before and after them, because we too have ... No fear! And this is our hymn of courage:

**No guilt in life, no fear in death This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man Could ever pluck me from His hand
'Til He returns or calls me home Here in the power of Christ I stand.**

So, "***Be still,***" dear friends, "***and know that... The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*** " ***We will not fear!*** Amen!