

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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God Provides Refuge

Psalm 46:1-7

Key verse: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

Stress may be an overused word, but it seems to me that when most people today describe their lives, the word “stress” keeps popping up. The reality in which most of us live is that our lives are filled with stress.

It’s not just the pace of life and the demands of balancing jobs and family. On top of these day-to-day pressures, we face the bigger heartaches and disappointments of life: sickness, financial pressure, family problems. There are times when these extraordinary demands of life pile on top of the daily challenges to the point that we feel we’re about to be ripped apart at the seams.

The psalmist describes such a time: a time when “nations are in an uproar,” a time when “kingdoms totter,” a time when “mountains shake in the heart of the sea.” In other words, the psalmist describes a time when life threatens to pull people apart at the seams.

Some Bible scholars think that the psalmist had in mind a threatened invasion of Israel by foreign armies. That may be. But read this psalm, and the psalmist could just as easily have been sitting in the waiting room of a local hospital, waiting for the oncologist’s report...or in the boss’s office when he hands out the pink slip...or in the upstairs bedroom when a wife says, “I want a divorce.”

This psalm describes a life situation such as you and I might be facing. But this psalm also offers a truth that you and I need desperately to hold onto: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (v. 1).

The word “refuge” in the Hebrew literally means “a high tower, a retreat beyond the reach of our enemy.” The Protestant reformer Martin Luther had this particular psalm, Psalm 46, in mind when he wrote the words of the hymn: “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.”

There was once a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of *peace*. Many artists tried. The king looked at all the paintings. But there were only two that he really liked, and he had to choose between them.

One painting was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for the peaceful, towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. Everyone who saw this painting thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The second painting had mountains, too. But these mountains were rugged and bare. Above them was an angry sky, from which rain fell and lightning flashed. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a raging waterfall. This scene did not look peaceful at all.

But when the king looked more closely at this second painting, he saw behind the raging waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There in the midst of the rush of angry water sat the mother bird on her nest—in perfect peace.

Which picture do you think won the prize? Well, the king chose the second painting. Do you know why?

“Because,” the king explained, “peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, no stress, no trouble. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things...and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.”

The New Testament writer called this peace “the peace that passes understanding” (Philippians 4:7). In other words, when our circumstances seem out of control, when everything around us is in turmoil, God gives us an inner peace that defies the logic of our circumstances. Jesus called it “my peace,” a peace that the world cannot give (John 14:27).

Such peace does not overtake us without our participation. What is our part? A great Christian by the name of A.W. Tozer once said, “Faith is the gaze of the soul upon Jesus.” When our world is in an uproar, when life is pulling us apart at the seams, our greatest need at that moment is to take our eyes off of our negative circumstances—especially the ones that we can’t change—and fix our eyes on the Lord.

When we start looking to the Lord in faith, when we fix the gaze of our soul on Him—then we can know Him as our refuge, our strength, and our very present help in trouble. Throughout the ages, men and women have found strength and courage through their confident conviction that God is their shelter in life’s storms— and that nothing, absolutely nothing, can overwhelm or destroy a person when he lives in this faith!

So, Psalm 46 has a word for every stressed-out, hurting, fearful soul: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Fix the gaze of your soul on the Lord.

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