

## WHEN YOU ONLY HAVE TIME FOR ONE VERSE - Part four

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Sunday, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023 - 5:30 p.m.

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket

### TWO DIFFERENT WAYS GOD BRINGS VICTORY OVER TROUBLE

**Psalm 46:1** - “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

This Psalm has often been called “*Luther’s Psalm*” for the simple reason it was the inspiration for his famous hymn, “**A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.**” It would be hard to count the many thousands of Christians who have received comfort in the storms of life in Luther’s powerful words - “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; Our Helper, He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.”

The reason this song has had such a long and fruitful ministry in the Church is that Luther captured not only the *truth* of this Psalm, but the *intent* of the Holy Spirit in having these truths made the theme of the Church’s worship and song. This Psalm was, right from the beginning, written for the “*choir director,*” or, “*the worship leader.*” The Holy Spirit intended the worship of God’s people to center around His care and protection in the middle of their troubles. The people of God are to celebrate the *reliability* of God.

Certainly troubles come. Luther said God was our Helper “***amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.***” Catch the emphasis on that word “***flood.***” Even Luther knew troubles don’t come ***one at a time.*** The second trial doesn’t wait until you’ve caught your breath from the first. Life sometimes comes in an ***overwhelming*** fashion, just like a flood. You go through seasons that are actually hard to understand or explain. Life can sour so quickly for all of us.

In vivid pictorial language the Psalmist captures one of the most difficult times we can imagine:

**Psalm 46:2-3** - “Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, [3] though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah.”

This is more than beautiful poetry. The Psalmist knows of what he speaks. Mountains don’t usually just slip into the ocean. Mountains stay put. You can ***count*** on mountains. Mountains are strong and reliable.

There is nothing that devastates our personal world more than the shaking up of things we thought were unmovable. You get used to some things as sources of strength. There are certain things we quickly grow to rely on. We come to ***count*** on certain things to hold our lives in proper place.

Then the market crashes. Or that rock solid person in our life dies. We betray our most cherished moral convictions. And everything is suddenly changed. The mountains really have crashed into the sea. Our supports are gone. It's very easy for even buoyant Christians to become disillusioned and discouraged with life. ***Where is God when you really need Him?***

Now, that's where this Psalm has news for us - very ***good*** news. It tell us God hasn't deserted us. Regardless how we may ***feel***, the Psalmist says God is "***a very present help in trouble***"(1). He's not far away. He's not hard to reach. In other words, God is not ***useless*** when He's most ***needed***. He is there and He is not inactive. He's not an ***absent*** help. An absent help is no good at all. God is a ***present*** help. In fact, as if for emphasis, the Psalmist says, He's a "***very present help.***"

All of this brings us to the subject for this teaching. ***How*** does God help us? Lots of very good people wonder if He helps at all. Lots of Christians put on a good face, but deep inside wonder why God isn't doing anything about their situation. What are we to say to them?

I want to look at the ***two different ways*** God wants to help us in our time of deepest failure and trouble. Because, if we don't know ***how the help comes*** we will likely conclude, quite falsely, that God doesn't help at all. And that would be a great tragedy to the honor and glory of God and His willingness to keep His promise of help to His people.

The key to all of this is in our text for the day:

**Psalm 46:1 - “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”**

The beauty of those simple words is this: they tell us *how* God wants to help us. They tell us the *kind* of help we should look for in two very different situations. Sometimes God wants to be our *refuge*. Sometimes He wants to be our *strength*. And if we ever get those two situations reversed, disaster will result.

1) **THERE ARE TIMES WHEN GOD PROMISES TO BE OUR REFUGE**

Sometimes safety is found in *flight*. Sometimes safety comes by *fleeing*, not by *fighting*. That’s what a refuge is for. People *escape* to a refuge.

In the Old Testament there were specific *cities of refuge* where a person who was *falsely accused*, or a person who had committed a crime by *accident* could find refuge and safety from his accusers. Once inside the city of refuge those who were helpless could rest in safety and security.

That's the picture the Psalmist had in mind. God is our **refuge**. And there is profound insight in those words. Sometimes we win the battle, not by **engaging** the enemy, but by **fleeing** the enemy. Sometimes the need isn't **armor** but **refuge**.

Do you see the concept here? Sometimes we can overlook the most **obvious** truths in the Word. There is so much talk about spiritual warfare today (and there **is** a need for spiritual warfare at times) that it's easy to forget you don't need to constantly be fighting battles. In fact, you will fight many **needless** spiritual battles if you forget that many conflicts are avoidable when you simply **flee** the enemy and find **refuge** in the presence and safety of God.

Sometimes **fleeing** is better than **fighting**. Sometimes the best way to win a battle is simply to **avoid** it in the first place. There are some battles we are never even **meant** to fight.

Let me give you just a couple of examples of sins that are beaten simply by leaving them alone:

- a) **Christians must flee sexual immorality - 1 Corinthians 6:18**  
- "**Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.**"

In this area victory is gained by **putting distance** between ourselves and any sexual impurity. Pick any television program you want. Look at the articles on the cover of any of the magazines in the supermarket racks. We're a society obsessed with sexual expression and experimentation.

And Christians buy these things and watch these things. Soon their lives are as gummed up as the thinking expressed in media around them. Then those same Christians will **call out to the Lord** for help and deliverance when their hearts and minds are all twisted and their relationships turn sour.

And no deliverance is going to come. And they're going to be the first ones to complain that God is **far away** and **inattentive to their cry**. But He isn't. They have simply **ignored the way God wanted to deliver them**. They **could** have had freedom and blessing and the protection of God on their lives, but they ignored the **kind** of provision God wanted to use in their circumstances. They **dabbled** with illicit sexual excitement. They didn't **flee** when they could have found **refuge** in the loving, sustaining, preserving grace of the Lord.

- b) **Christians must flee idolatry - 1 Corinthians 10:14 - "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. "**

We mustn't think of idolatry as a ***dated*** sin. Idolatry isn't confined to smoke-filled temples in far away lands. Idolatry is an issue of your heart's ***devotion***. Idolatry has to do with what ***claims your attention and affection***. We all live perilously close to this greatest of sins. Our hearts are ***idol factories***.

This is why Paul says there is only one way to deal with idolatry. You and I must constantly ***flee*** from it. Your greatest chance for purity in this area is found, not in ***engaging*** an inner battle with idolatry, but ***fleeing*** - not ***feeding*** - the contamination of competing rivals for your heart's affection.

Paul exposes the foolishness of letting your heart wander wherever it would like, while praying that Jesus would be Lord over all. God won't protect a ***careless*** heart. He preserves those who ***flee idolatry*** and find their ***refuge*** in His Word and way.

- c) ***Christians must flee youthful passions - 2 Timothy 2:22 - "So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."***

These are wonderful, hopeful words for all of us, but especially those who are still blessed with youth. Paul writes these words particularly with Timothy in mind. And Timothy is very young. But here's the hopeful part: Paul expects great things from Timothy. Just because Timothy is **young**, doesn't mean he has to be **immature**. Timothy can shine for Jesus.

But Timothy, like all young people, will have to make up his mind how he wants to live. He must **flee youthful lusts**. He can't have it both ways. He can't **entertain** youthful lusts and **devote** his heart to the Lord.

Paul calls these "**youthful lusts**" because they are particularly dominant in those earlier years. This is when these **desires** can solidify into **habits** that will sow sorrow and weakness into all the years to follow. Paul tells us **youth is the time to learn to say "no" to a lot of things**. Don't park your heart right on the edge of worldliness. Flee youthful lusts and let God be your refuge.

These are just some examples of areas where God wants to bring deliverance, not by **an entangled battle with the world, inch by inch**, but by a **quick and abrupt refusal and separation** from things that will only be defeated by **distance**.



***Some evil desires dry up when neglected.*** This is God's plan for giving you refuge. It is a dreadful mistake to over-estimate your own strength. And it is an even greater mistake to carelessly presume God's protection from evils He told you to flee in the first place. There are many times when you will hear the Spirit of the Lord telling you to ***flee***. The solution is ***fleeing***, not ***negotiating***. There is no victory in negotiating. God's help comes to those who flee. This is frequently how God wants to keep your heart clean and holy.

2) **THERE ARE TIMES WHEN GOD PROMISES TO BE OUR STRENGTH**

**Psalm 46:1** - "God is our refuge and ***strength***, a very present help in trouble."

**"Strength"** - we should be grateful for this second provision. We all know there are some things in life we just can't run away from. You can't run away from ***disease***. You can't run away from ***bereavement***. You can't always run away from ***sorrow***, or even ***failure***. You don't go looking for these things. They seek us all out.

What hope do we cling to when the ***"mountains slip into the sea?"*** Do we just tell people to "hang in there?" Do we just tell them to keep a "stiff upper lip?"

The Psalmist has better news. When you can't **run away**, you can **find strength**. There is strength to **fight** the battles you can't **flee**:

**2 Timothy 4:6-8** - "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. [7] **I have fought the good fight**, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8] Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."

These verses are different. They aren't about **fleeing**. They're about **fighting**. You can feel the conflict in the verbs. The fight is the fight to "**keep the faith**." There are trials that **war against your faith**. They turn courage into fear, confidence into doubt. The fight is the fight to "**finish the course**." And finishing is much harder than starting.

You can see the divine strategy in the words of the Psalmist. There are some dangers you must **flee**. But there are others you must **fight**. You must fight the good **fight of faith**. Nobody will keep your life rooted in the Word but you. You must fight the good fight of faith against indifference and laziness. And God will give you strength to win that fight.

Nobody will win the battle with bitterness but you. You must, with God's strength, win the battle with your own anger and pride and rule your own emotions. You must stand and win that fight. Nobody will keep you going to church when you're miffed or depressed. You will have to fight the good fight of faith with your own whims and moods and self. You must stand and win that fight. And God will give you strength when you do.

So, remember that victory isn't always won the same way. Sometimes we win by **fleeing**. Sometimes we win by **fighting**. Don't settle for religious clichés. Don't just say, "O, I'm just relying on the Lord." Use the Word with **understanding**. Know how God's help comes.

God **is** a very present help in time of trouble. You just have to know how He works and put your actions in line with the promise as He offers them. There is victory in **fleeing** to His refuge. And there is also victory in His **strength** for the fight of faith.