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Sermon Notes

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God's Unshakable City

Psalm 46

Richard Baxter, perhaps the greatest of all the Puritan pastors in England in the 16th & 17th centuries... Preached “as a dying man to dying men...”

I. Terror in the City

A. September 11, 2001... “A date which will live in infamy”

Symbols of America's financial and military power...destroyed in an instant

B. Lasting images of terror

C. How Should We Think & Feel?

1. Ultimate Questions

- Where is God in all of this?
- Are we forever vulnerable? Can we ever get in a building again, go to a large sporting event again, step on an airplane again... without fear?
- What can we learn from this tragedy?
- How can we advance Christ's Kingdom even in the face of this event?
- What should we think of those who did these terrible things?

2. Raging Feelings

- Can fear give way to courage?
- Can apathy give way to concerted action?
- Can pride forever be replaced by repentance and humility before our mighty God?
- Can human anger be replaced by a yearning for God's glory in human salvation?
- Can despair yield to unshakable hope?

When all the rubble is swept away, will the true foundation for our national future be revealed... the unshakable character and plans of God; The unshakable and eternal city of God

Or... will we simply pridefully trounce our enemies with bombs, smugly build even higher skyscrapers to replace the World Trade Center's twin towers... and go on proclaiming that we are the greatest nation on earth? All the while ignoring the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?

D. Psalm 46: God's answer to these questions

1. Written by the Sons of Korah... it speaks of the power of God even if the earth itself should give way
2. It speaks a word of warning to the warring nations: "Come and see the desolations of our God... He makes the earth melt!"
3. More than anything it speaks a gospel message of peace through salvation:

vs. 10 "Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth."

4. Background:

a. Sons of Korah

Descendants of man who rebelled against Moses in Numbers 16

The ground opened up and swallowed Korah and his rebels whole...

vs. 2 "Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way..."

Apparently some of Korah's descendants survived and lived their lives to sing God's praises

b. modern hymn-writers

Martin Luther, John Newton, Frances Ridley Havergal... found in this Psalm what we yearn for the most during this hour:

Peace, security, assurance from the invincible purpose and unchanging character of God Almighty

Three points, each with their own conclusion:

- 1) God's Might is Our Refuge... Therefore we will be courageous
- 2) God's City is Eternal... Therefore we will be gladly humble
- 3) God's Name will Be Exalted... Therefore we will be still

II. God's Might is Our Refuge... Therefore we will be courageous (vs. 1-3)

Vs. 1 "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

A. God's Power a Fortress

Martin Luther: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"

On his way to his trial at the Diet of Worms... literally on trial for his life; composed a meditation on Psalm 46; many times afterwards, he would say to his friends during times of distress or anguish, "Come, let's sing Psalm 46"

Vs. 1 "Refuge" = safe place

Vs. 7 "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

Vs. 11 "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

1. "Refuge" = place of sanctuary... concept is perhaps from a storm

Like a bird flying in a storm rejoices to find a crag in the cliff to wait out the tempest, so do we hide ourselves in God

2. "Fortress" = mighty place of military protection from invading armies... human attackers

Modern fortresses no longer exist... explosives and the airplane have made fortresses a thing of the past

BUT for most of human history, the safest place you could be in was a fortress, a castle, a stronghold

Settlers in the American wilderness (like Daniel Boone) would make stockades of timber and protect the women and children and themselves from Indian attacks

John Newton (Amazing Grace) also wrote of this concept concerning Zion, the City of our God:

[Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken] *"With salvation's walls surrounded, thou mayest smile at all thy foes."*

- a. ancient Israel harassed by raiding marauders, like the Midianites
- b. Midianites would ride in unannounced and kill everyone, destroy crops, burn farmhouses

Just like modern terrorists... Israelites lived in constant fear; wide open, exposed to attack any time someone was powerful enough to sweep in like a flood unannounced

They needed a fortress, a stronghold, a place impervious to attack

When David became their king, he conquered Jerusalem... a mountain fortress, the city of Zion... protected by God's power it stood invincible as long as God was with her

3. "Strength"

- a. God's invincible power gives us surprising energy for our struggles
- b. like the firefighters who worked literally around the clock for days on end, so our strength gets renewed by our faith in God Almighty

Illus. One firefighter was being treated in a hospital near ground zero... nurses hooked him up to an IV... doctor came a few minutes later to check on his condition; the IV was just hanging there—the firefighter had girded up his strength and gone back into to fray

So God renews our strength during the most severe trials

4. "Ever-present help"

- a. God is immediately present... not a distant God
- b. "Call on me, and I am there"

Psalm 145:18-19 "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy."

Psalm 50:15 "... call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honor me."

God and man take shares in times of trouble: He commands us to call, we respond and call upon Him in faith and truth; He responds to the cry and delivers us from the trouble; we respond to the deliverance and give God the honor and glory for our salvation!

Hebrews 13:7 "God has said, 'Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'"

This is true for the Christian... for all who have called on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; God is present to deliver His children from many immediate dangers... and from the ultimate danger on Judgment Day itself

God's strength is our refuge, our fortress, our constantly present help

B. THEREFORE... We will be courageous

Vs. 2-3 “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.”

1. Courage is REASONED OUT BY FAITH

- a. “Therefore” is a reasoned work
- b. WE MUST PREACH TO OURSELVES!!!
- c. “Come now, let us reason together... why be afraid???”

Illus. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Fireside chats” during early days of Depression

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

That was true during times of economic depression, when fear and uncertainty produced runs on banks and economic collapse

It seems a wholly different situation when the office building you work in melts in the heat of a terrorist attack

What can defeat this fear?

Faith-filled reasoning

“Therefore we will not fear...”

2. Courage tested by extreme trials

- a. Korah’s sons knew about the ground giving way under their feet...
- b. I do too

Illus. Kobe earthquake

3. Ultimate trial is yet to come

vs. 6 “He lifts his voice, the earth melts...”

When will the earth melt? At the end of the world

2 Peter 3:7 “... the present heaven and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

2 Peter 3:10 “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will melt in the heat, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”

2 Peter 3:12 *“That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.”*

Illus. On Tuesday, the jet fuel ignited in a fireball that probably exceeded 1700°F... the World Trade Towers literally melted and imploded in the heat

But how much more devastating will it be when the very ground beneath our feet is destroyed at the end of the world... where will our refuge be then?

ONLY GOD AND GOD ALONE!!!

Through faith in Christ, we will survive, even when the earth and the heavens are destroyed by God’s powerful word

God’s Might is Our Refuge... Therefore we will be courageous

- Courageous to keep living day to day in trust and reliance on Christ
- Courageous to keep preaching the gospel, even to enemies whom our human nature would like to destroy
- Courageous to help our neighbors rebuild their lives, and to lead them to the only safe refuge... Jesus Christ

III. God’s City is Eternal... Therefore we will be gladly humble (vs. 4-7)

Vs. 4-5 *“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at the break of day.”*

A. Zion: the Earthly City Reflects the Heavenly City

1. “City of David” a powerful fortress... unbeatable as long as God protected her
2. In one night, one angel killed 185,000 Assyrian troops surrounding her walls
3. BUT it was just an earthly city... when they abandoned God, God abandoned her
4. The Heavenly Jerusalem is God TRUE dwelling place...

“God is within her...”

5. SHE WILL NEVER FALL!!!

B. No Foe Can Defeat Heavenly City

1. God permits His people to suffer greatly on earth
2. BUT God has decreed heaven as a place of total security
3. No foe can ascend the heights of heaven and pull God from His throne

C. Earthly Empires Rise and Fall

Vs. 6 “Nations are in an uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.”

1. The tumult of the nations comes from greed, pride, hatred
2. Human history will continue to be full of strife and blood

Matthew 24:7 “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”

3. MOTIVE: men seeking to exalt themselves and build an empire
 - a. empires of money and economic power

Illus. Diane Sawyer holding reams of paper which fluttered from the financial offices of the World Trade Center... one companies' long range financial planning, another man's stock portfolio

- b. empires of land and territory. Political & military power

Illus. Osama bin Ladin wants Muslim nation, military conquest & power; focused on military defeat of United States and Israel

4. God lifts his voice and the very ground beneath our feet melts... human empire builders are defeated

D. God Dwells in an Unapproachable Place... BUT ALSO WITH Spiritual Beggars

1. God's Unapproachable Dwelling Place

1 Timothy 6:15-16 “...God, the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light...”

2. Approached and dwelt in by spiritual beggars

Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty one says—he who lives forever and whose name is holy; “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit...”

E. THEREFORE We will Be Gladly Humble

1. The streams of the city make her glad
 - a. JOY JOY JOY in God's eternal city
 - b. no more death, mourning, crying, pain
 - c. this takes away the sting of death for Christians who died in that crash

Illus. Billy Graham, National Cathedral on Friday afternoon: "Many of those who died that day were Christians... Would any of them like to come back to this earth now?"

That crash was an act of grace and kindness to them...free forever from suffering in this terrible, sin-cursed world

GLADNESS... not SADNESS, through the salvation that only Christ can offer

2. Humble people dwell in her

BUT it's a HUMBLE gladness... God gets all the credit

God's City is Eternal... Therefore we will be gladly humble

IV. God's Name Will Be Exalted... Therefore we will be still (vs. 8-10)

A. God's Victory Guaranteed

1. NOW: Constant striving of the nations for earthly supremacy
2. Wars and rumors of wars

Illus. President Bush: "This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way and at an hour of our choosing."

Perhaps that is true in this case... but ultimately only God can make such a statement... only God alone can make all wars cease... and He will do it by His powerful mighty word

3. God's power alone ends all wars

Vs. 6 "Nations are in an uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice and the earth melts."

Vs. 8 "Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth."

- a. what desolations? Simply the end of the world, when all sinful nations will meet their final destruction

- b. clearing the way for the new heavens and the new earth... human empires must first be defeated

Vs. 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.”

4. God will destroy all weapons forever with a display of His powerful word

Revelation 16:16 “Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon..”

There God will pour out his wrath on all armies from all nations

Isaiah 34:2 “For the Lord’s wrath is on all nations; his anger is against all their armies...”

- Fertilizer bombs and nuclear bombs alike will be destined for the fire
- Stealth bombers, cruise missiles, and hijacked planes alike will be fuel for the fire
- Arrogant, wrath-filled empire building nations will all alike be destroyed by the Prince of Peace... clearing the way for a New Heavens and New Earth... the home of righteousness

God makes His guarantee... final victory will be His

God says: “The rebellion of sin was begun by Satan and man at a place and time of his choosing; but by my power and my word it will end in a way and at an hour of my choosing!!!”

B. God’s Glory in the Nations Guaranteed

Vs. 10 “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.”

1. Literally “Cease striving” all you arrogant human empire builders
2. Stop warring against me... throw down your weapons of spiritual rebellion
3. Submit to Jesus Christ, trust in Him alone, obey His commands, bow to His rule
4. WHY? Because only one empire will last forever... the Kingdom of Jesus Christ

“I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.”

People from every tribe and language and people and nation will worship Christ

SAME TEACHING in Habakkuk:

Habakkuk 2:13-14 “Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

Illus. All the financial planners in WTC exhausted themselves for nothing

All the military planners that seek to build the glory of any nation... whether that of Muslims or of the United States of America...EXHAUST THEMSELVES FOR NOTHING

In one instant, two 110-story buildings melted and disappeared forever... BUT God’s name and his glory will never disappear

C. Therefore, we will be still

We will “Cease striving with God”... we will repent, humble ourselves under His mighty hand

We will yield to His kingdom and follow His ways

We will find our peace in His power

We will find our comfort in His salvation alone

“Cease striving and know that He is God...”

John 17:3 “Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Know Him in His power... know Him in His word... Know Him in His plans for you and the world...

Know Him in His past achievements... know Him in His present comforts... Know Him through His Son Jesus Christ alone

There is no other safe refuge in this world, or in the one to come!!

V. Applications

1. Concerning fear: find present rest and refuge in Christ alone

not in America’s military response

not in stepped-up security procedures at the airports

not in the capture, trial, and execution of Osama bin Ladin

“God is our refuge and strength...”

2. Concerning life: life is short and can instantly end
3. Concerning physical world: it will all disappear in an instant

World Trade Center melted, imploded in a minute

So it is with everything we can see

4. Concerning our enemies: PRAY for their salvation

NOT AT ALL saying nations must not protect themselves militarily

RATHER that the issues are eternal... Islam is a false religion that will lead all of its adherents to eternity in the Lake of Fire

Hotter than jet fuel burning... no escape

5. Concerning our leaders: PRAY for their wisdom

Many missionaries in Afghanistan serving the Lord

Response is difficult and requires wisdom only God can give

6. Concerning our nation: PRAY for our repentance and humbling

Luke 13:4-5 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ^s I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Don't be proud... repentance is not just a one-time event, but a lifestyle

Luther's first thesis of the 95 Theses: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he wanted the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Let us renounce our sins and turn back again to God

NOT stepped up national pride and chants of USA

NOT in the great day when WTC II is built even higher and better than before

RATHER in humility, repentance, and faith in Christ

7. Concerning judgment day: well worth fearing the wrath of God

Illus. VOIDS