

Standing Firm in Unsettling Times

by Skip Heitzig

In times of calamity, we can find strength and peace in God's presence and trust in His sovereignty.

Duration: 42:56

Scripture: Psalm 46:1-2, Psalm 46:7, Psalm 46:9, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Standing Firm"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the recent events that have taken place and compares them to a movie trailer, a preview of what is to come. He divides the psalm into three sections: refuge, river, and ruler. The first section focuses on God's presence as a strong refuge, and the speaker acknowledges that the world has witnessed a trailer of what the Bible has predicted for a long time. He mentions Jesus' description of distress and fear in the world, and the expectation of the Son of Man's return. The speaker emphasizes the need to look beyond ourselves and to something that transcends us in times like these, as seen in the unity and prayer displayed by Congress and the nation.

Transcript

It's a very different meeting tonight than last Saturday night. We of course had no idea what was coming in our week. It's been talked about as a wake-up call.

I got a phone call as I was taking my son to school on Tuesday morning from my wife. She was in tears and she told me the news of one aircraft and of course I couldn't believe it. It was like total denial.

The next phone call I got shortly after that was from a local TV network wanting to interview me because a second one had gone through. Now at this point I'm reeling from it all, as the nation was. The week has been really a nightmare.

Our nation echoes the words of Job when he said, that which I have greatly feared has come upon me. This has been called our nation's worst catastrophe. It's been likened then to Pearl Harbor, you have heard that.

However it's much worse. This was not a wartime situation. We had no troops that were attacked, but thousands of innocent victims and now millions are mourning around the world.

Even our president, you may have seen as he faced the press, became very, very emotional. This week is and will always be a dark cloud on America's horizon. But if there is a slight glimmer of hope, if there is a

slight sensing of a silver lining on that dark cloud, we have seen that too.

We have seen a very, well, an unparalleled unity in our country. People weren't discussing partisan issues this week. We have seen an unparalleled patriotism, flags sold everywhere, can't buy one, they're sold out.

We have seen an unparalleled sense of our spiritual need as people are gathering around the country this week on days and nights to pray for our nation. And even the president calling for a special day of prayer. I talked to a pastor in Manhattan this week and he said, Skip, there's this eerie sense of calm in the city.

Flags everywhere, signs around the city that people are just handwriting, they say pray everywhere you look. He said, going through the Lincoln Tunnel into Manhattan this morning, I had police officers salute me. People were giving water for free.

He said, now this is New York and there's just this sense of love and camaraderie and fellowship. Clearly at times like this, we are forced to look beyond ourselves to something that transcends us. You saw it if you saw any of the news at all, both houses of Congress singing together, God bless America, praying together on the steps of the Capitol.

I was interviewed this week by several media outlets. One asked me to pray publicly on a secular radio station, just pray for our country, pray for us, lead us right now. I've never been asked that before, ever.

Franklin Graham called me this week from Washington, D.C. He hosted for four hours, CNN. That's never happened before. Tomorrow afternoon, I leave for New York City to be part of grief counseling teams that are on their way.

Some have left from our fellowship, a couple of them, and I'll join them tomorrow. I wanted to share, however, Psalm 46 with you, if you would turn there. Psalm 46, you may know, was quoted at one of the congressional prayer meetings this week.

It was part of the official statement by Dr. Billy Graham this week. It was part of what he shared at the National Cathedral this week, and it is also the psalm that Martin Luther loved the most. In fact, this psalm inspired one of his hymns, A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.

Luther loved the psalms, he was a teacher of the psalms, but of all of the psalms, this was his favorite. In fact, it is said that in times of great distress, tribulation, darkness, he would go to his friend Philip Melancthon and say, Philip, let us sing the 46th psalm. And they wrote, A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.

One of the stanzas reads, And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us. Fellow believers, people are asking the question, they've asked it now of you this week, not only me. Why? Why? How? Why would God allow? Have you been asked that this week? We dealt with that Wednesday night.

Tonight, I'm not getting into reasons. I believe that in times of great calamity, more than reasons, we need resources. And I think that this psalm has some.

We're going to read together the 46th psalm. And though we usually don't do it, would you stand with me? And I'm going to read the first verse and the even-numbered verses. And I'd like you to read with great feeling the second verse and the even-numbered verses after that.

You may have a different version than what I'm reading from. And we have planned for that event. We have Bibles in your chairs that match this version, so we all won't sound like Babel tonight.

Psalms 46, as we read together. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling, God is in the midst of her.

She shall not be moved. God shall help her just at the break of dawn. The Lord of hosts is with us.

The God of Jacob is our refuge. He makes war cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and cuts the spear into.

He burns the chariot in the fire. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Would you have a seat? You have already seen that there are three movements to this psalm. You can tell that because after each movement, each thought, comes a little musical notation of rest called Selah. And that's mentioned three times in our psalms.

And so the psalm is divided up into three sections. You don't have an outline this week in your bulletin, but I'll give you three words that sum up those three points. Refuge, river, and ruler.

That sums it up. It's a psalm of great confidence and inspiration. The first section then is God's presence, a strong refuge.

I'm going to read it again. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.

You need to know the timing that this psalm was written under. At the time that the psalmist, who is called Korah, at the preface to your psalm, the time this was written, the Assyrians were coming in from the north and attacking Israel. It was a surprise attack.

They came in and ravaged the fields, burned them to the ground, destroyed the crops, were destroying people. And in their surprise attack, they moved around Jerusalem. And King Hezekiah was the ruler at the time.

And imagine King Hezekiah looking up one morning, absolutely surprised to see Shennakereb and the Assyrians all around him. The nation, the capital city, looked like it would be destroyed. And so the psalmist writes, God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear. The word trouble means tight places, literally. It's those periods of life where you feel constrained, constricted.

The circumstances strangle you. The tight places of life, trouble. You know, sometimes God will keep us from trouble.

He would shield us. The trouble is coming. He protects us.

But there are other times like this one. And the psalmist who writes this in Jerusalem with King Hezekiah notices that there are times that God doesn't keep us from trouble, but He keeps us in trouble through the adversity while the tribulation is going on. That's the meaning of this.

Sometimes God calms the storm. At other times, God calms the child in the storm, lets it rage. Notice the calamities that are mentioned in the second part of verse 2 and then into verse 3. They're the calamities of the worst kind.

Even though the earth be removed, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea and the waters roar and be troubled. That sounds like a reversal of the third day of creation. Everything that God made stable is now very unstable.

My world is topsy-turvy, in other words. Trouble, calamity. Earth and mountains in the scripture is often a symbol of stability.

And they would only move if there was great terror. But when that which is stable becomes unstable, when seemingly the whole world is about to fall apart, He says, therefore, we will not fear. Many Americans this evening are overcome with fear.

America Online had a poll. I took part in it because I was interested in the statistic. They asked, in light of Tuesday's events, do you feel safe in the United States? Almost half responded by saying no.

Fear debilitates. Walter Stone wrote, fear is the most destructive force in the world today. It's much easier to frighten people than to persuade them.

We have seen that. But Paul wrote to Timothy and said, God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love and a sound mind. Power, love, and a sound mind.

Some fear. I've heard the questions. They fear that this could be the end of the world.

You know what? It might. It's going to end one day. This could be it.

But maybe not. Some fear that they're next. You know what? You might be.

We don't know. We know it's appointed unto every man once to die. Your time may be up this week.

Mine might be as well. I recognize that I am a pastor of a large pro-Israel congregation. But you know what? I am not going to succumb to fear.

Even if the mountains fall around me. That's the sentiment of this psalm. Listen, life is dangerous.

Period. No matter what you do. Life is dangerous.

We are very frail. You have a four times greater chance of being struck by lightning than winning the state lottery. Think about that next time you take a walk.

Channel 13. I was on last night with Dick Niffing and he said, What do people do in times like this? Do you ever see a difference in people's lives? And of course the answer is yes. If you have a refuge.

If you have someone called God, your Savior, to tuck your life in. Then you can say, I will not fear. So that's the first part, the refuge.

Look at verse 7 now. We come to the second section of this song. I've summed it up by the river.

This now is God's peace. A satisfying river. There is a river whose stream shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.

God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. God shall help her.

Just at the break of dawn, the nations raged. The kingdoms were moved. He uttered his voice.

The earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

There's a picture that the psalmist writes of a gently flowing stream as opposed to the torrents that were written about in the previous verses. This is not a flood. This is not a loud river torrent.

This is a gentle flowing stream. As he says here in the city of God. It's a picture of peace.

Let me once again give you the setting. In Jerusalem, there was a single source of water that fed the city. It was called the Gihon Spring.

It was down in a valley. The problem with the Gihon Spring is that it was unprotected for a period of time. That is, enemies could surround the city and plug up the spring, and then no one could get water, so you'd thirst to death.

So, King Hezekiah. Remember, that's the guy who is the king at this time the psalm is written. King Hezekiah built cleverly a conduit.

Out of solid bedrock, he had his men dig 1,700 feet through the bedrock into the city, and that river was created, and the river ended up at a pool. You've read about the pool in the New Testament, the pool of Siloam. So, after he built that, he then covered it up so the enemy didn't know where the water source was.

So, as the Assyrians were encamped around the city, the people of God within the city were satisfied by this source of refreshment, this gently flowing stream. And even during the siege, they were refreshed, even though the enemy didn't know about it. Had that stream of water not been in the city of Jerusalem, the inhabitants would have perished.

They would have lost, not because of the strength of the enemy, but because of the weakness of the inhabitants by lack of water. The point is this, then. There is a source of inner refreshment that comes to those who may God their refuge.

He will also be their continual river, their source of refreshment. Americans are thirsty, not just because of this week. We have always been thirsty for meaning and purpose in life.

That's why we have tried to chase what we have called the American dream. Oh, happiness is in this or in that. I'm going to chase it.

I'm going to get it. I'm going to get satisfaction. Americans spend... Now, this is before the crisis.

Americans spend more money on pleasure and on recreation every year than on education, new homes, and national defense. You know why? Simply because we're thirsty. That's why.

We're thirsty. We want refreshment. We want meaning.

We want to say, in this life, I have a reason to live. Purpose. I know where I'm going.

Jesus said to a woman at a Samaritan well who had come to take water, if you drink of this water, you're going to get thirsty again. But whoever drinks of the water that I will give will never thirst again because it will be in him like a river of water unto everlasting life. On the last day of a certain feast in Jerusalem, in the temple, the very city where this psalm was penned, Jesus stood up and he said, If anyone is thirsty, let him come unto me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his innermost being will flow torrents of living water. Jesus is saying, I am the eternal drinking fountain. I am the quencher of your thirst.

Hey, listen, you who are thirsty, and I know so many of you are because the crowd is so much bigger tonight. Where do you drink from? What has been quenching your thirst? I have a hunch that it hasn't been quenched. Could it be said of us as it was said of the nation of Israel at one time? God put it this way through Jeremiah, My people have committed two evils.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and they have hewn themselves cisterns, broken cisterns. That can hold no water. What a picture of security this is.

Refuge, river, refreshment. Here is Hezekiah, here is Korah, here are the people of Israel, the Jerusalem inhabitants. National security in Israel at this time was on the highest state of alert.

But there was an internal security that could not be shaken. Some years ago, when the Rwandan Civil War broke out in Africa, organizations were sent to feed, clothe, bury the dead. Samaritan's Purse was over there, Franklin Graham was going from Rwanda into Uganda, crossing the border, and there was in the back of a pickup truck in the heat of the day a young girl clutching a blanket.

She was a Rwandan girl. One of the two factious tribes that had been fighting. And she was just swaying back and forth and she was gently singing something.

She had lost her family. They had all been hacked to death by machetes. No one she knew was alive.

She was alone in the back of a truck in the hot sun singing. And Franklin went near and asked the soldier who knew the language, what is she singing? And he says, I don't know. And he got closer and he listened.

And as he listened to her sing, he then interpreted to Franklin, she's singing, Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so. Can you imagine? Stripped of absolutely everything, her whole life, her whole world, all of the foundation stripped away.

And she is saying, I have a source of refreshment that transcends this wicked time. Jesus loves me. So you can have that river of refreshment.

I want you to notice something else more closely in this text. That piece is based upon something. It's based upon a certain kind of confidence that those in Jerusalem at that time had.

Now go through some of these verses with me again and notice as I emphasize. Verse 4. There's a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God. They call Jerusalem God's city.

Of course, it's called that throughout the Scripture. That shouldn't astound us. But the idea that it's the personal possession of God.

The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her. God shall help her.

And then it says the God of Jacob. Of course, that was the third patriarch who became Israel. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

They were saying that we have a relationship with the covenant God who made a covenant with this nation of Israel. And we trust him in that covenant. He made certain promises which means we can't be destroyed.

We have to continue. He promised it. You know, the easiest thing to say in a war, and we are in one, the easiest thing to say is God is on my side.

Isn't it? You know, the other side often says the same exact thing. Oh, God is on our side. And so we have this war of words as the real war goes on.

A war of ideologies. You know, the issue isn't is God on your side. Are you on God's side? Remember Joshua when he was fighting the enemies? And he was there in camp before he raided the city of Jericho? And he saw a guy, the angel of the Lord, but he just looked like a soldier.

And Joshua came up to him and said, Hey, are you for us or are you for our enemy? And the Lord, who was the angel, spoke and said, No. That wasn't the question. Are you for them or for us? No.

I'm the commander of the armies of the Lord. In other words, the issue isn't which side I'm on. You better be on my side.

It seems that this attack on America is not really about us. Partially it is. It seems, however, to be centered on some other country.

Israel. Zion. Our alliance with the nation of Israel.

And that any nation that supports Israel is considered an enemy. To put it in Saddam Hussein's word, the great Satan. Ten years ago.

From the Gaza Strip, the Islamic Jihad official, Nafez Assam, said recently, after this week's events, What happened in the United States today, this was a news release on Tuesday, what happened in the United States today is a consequence of the American policies in this region. We are against the killing of innocent people. We deny our responsibility, and we call on the U.S. administration to review attitudes and policies toward the Palestinian question.

Because this policy arouses the hatred and the anger of Arab and Islamic peoples and urges them to harm U.S. interests in our region. We know this by now. Our intelligence knows it.

But now we know that three weeks ago, Osama bin Laden threatened to launch an unprecedented attack on the United States because of its relationship to the nation of Israel. The Associated Press, back in February, reported bin Laden as saying, I'm still alive and kicking, I'm still active, I'm still preparing for more attacks against my enemies, the Americans and the Israelis. And that is why Benjamin Netanyahu this week said a very pregnant statement after Tuesday's bombing.

Tuesday evening he said to the world, Today, every American has become an Israeli. The Bible tells us that the final conflict of mankind will center in the Middle East, over the plot of land known as Israel. In Zechariah chapter 12, a portion of it reads, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all surrounding peoples reeling.

I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all nations. Last Thursday night on satellite television, at the wedding of his son, bin Laden sang the Ode to Jerusalem. And he was saying that the city that was holy to the Muslims, the Jews and the Christians was burning him from within, he said.

At the ceremony, very emotionally, bin Laden sang, The wound of Jerusalem is making me boil. Its suffering is making me burn from within. We've been praying a lot this week, and I tell you, that is great.

But we should pray for the peace of Jerusalem. The Bible tells us to do that. We are experiencing what Israel has experienced on almost a daily basis.

I've traveled to that country and lived in that country, and I know what they live with. And it's a small country in comparison to ours. Our population is over 100 times that of the state of Israel.

And so if you think about it in just a proportionate term, if they lose 8 people in Israel, that's like losing 800 here. If they lose 40 people in a bombing in Tel Aviv, that's like 4,000 here. They've lived with that constantly.

And so, the psalmist declares, in Jerusalem, from Zion, as God's covenant people, surrounded by the Assyrians, God is in her midst. Our source of refreshment. Finally, and we close with this last section, verses 8-11, it deals really with the ruler.

This is God's power in view here. Come, behold the works of the Lord, who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease.

Oh, can't wait. To the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and cuts the spear.

He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations.

I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

I'm not going to get into it much, but this does, I believe, at least in part, picture what is coming in what the Bible refers to as the coming tribulation or the great tribulation period. Because of the pervasiveness of the language. Desolations that will ultimately culminate in the end of all wars and the coming of Jesus Christ.

Now look at verse 9. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. This is presenting God not as a peace negotiator. He's not going to the negotiating table in verse 9. This is an imposed peace.

This is when Armageddon is over with. This is when it's the intervention time, the coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the tribulation. And he puts an end to all wars.

As predicted in Isaiah 2, they will beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. Ooh, we just long for that, especially tonight as we think what will almost certainly be coming in the weeks ahead.

When movies come out, studios produce what they call a trailer so that when there's a feature film in the theaters, you see a preview of what's coming. The film's done, but you don't see it all. You just see a trailer, a preview of coming attractions.

What the world witnessed this week is a trailer. It is a preview, unfortunately, of what the Bible has predicted for a long time. Coming attractions.

Jesus described to his followers, there will be distress of nations with perplexity. The sea and the waves roaring. Men's hearts will be failing them for fear.

And the expectation of those things which are coming upon the earth for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now, I don't want to make this event this week bigger than it is necessarily.

I don't exactly know what it is. And I'm not going to say that this is the end of the world. It might be.

This may be an isolated event and there will be a quick military response and then it's over for a long period of time. Or, it could be an event in a chain of events that will lead to the end that the Bible predicts. What should we do then? I mean, either one of those scenarios are frightening.

What do we do? Verse 10 is what you should do. Be still. And know that I am God.

Keep in mind who wrote this. Keep in mind who the king was. Keep in mind what was going on.

The Assyrians, the mighty, dreadful, feared Assyrians were surrounding them. It was a surprise attack. They were all around.

What do we do? Be still, man. I mean, what can you do? Be still and know that He is God. Be fixed on Him.

Don't be so transfixed on CNN. Be fixed on Him. Do you remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, how unflustered He was? I mean, it was a very tumultuous time.

He's in the garden. He's praying. And then, there are the soldiers.

They're coming. They've got swords. They've got shields.

They've got spears. They're going to arrest Jesus. And Peter gets up, takes out a sword and cuts an ear off in his haste.

You know, more commotion. There's Judas. He's betraying.

He's scheming this whole thing. More confusion. Then the disciples freak out.

They flee. They run away. More confusion.

Then the soldiers say, we're looking for Jesus of Nazareth. And Jesus said, I'm Him. And they fall over.

Man, you've got soldiers arresting. Ears falling. Disciples freaking.

And Jesus, calm. Still. Stayed.

Solid. Be still and know that I am God. Why? Why? Verse 11.

The Lord of hosts is with us. I'm absolutely amazed at how Christians are so worried about demons. What are demons? They're angels, hosts of heaven that fell with Satan.

The Bible says a third fell. Ooh, that's a lot. They're everywhere then.

Well, there's two thirds left. They're outnumbered. The Lord who commands those hosts is with us.

The God of Jacob is our refuge. You see that word with us? Emmanuel in Hebrew. Where the messianic title, Emmanuel comes from.

The Lord with us. When John Wesley, the great evangelist, was on his deathbed and he was losing his voice, he could barely speak. He knew he was going to pass into eternity soon.

He lifted up on one side and he said, the best of all is that God is with us. And he slumped back and then a minute later lifted up his hand again and he said, the best thing is God is with us. And he died.

Great way to go. You're going to go. That's a good way to do it.

Two planes struck at a very real target Tuesday morning. A real physical object with real human lives that had no idea what was coming. The World Trade Center was also, it's amazing to refer to it as was, isn't it? Was also a symbol of our great economic wealth.

The Pentagon was a very real structure with real people in it, but it was also a symbol of our national defense and many have thought, not all, but many have thought that our nation is strong and the key to its success is its economy and its defense. They were attacked. There are many committed believers in our country today.

Many of them. God has shown His grace and favor on this country, but you know as well as I do that there has been a tide in our country where we have said basically to God, get lost, God. We don't want you anymore in our schools.

We don't want you in our courts. We don't want you in our public buildings. And we have groups that will sue everybody who tries to do that.

So get out of here. God won't stay where He's not welcome. One commentator this week made a very powerful statement as I was going home.

I heard him say that our president now, well he said, never has a president before faced what our president now faces since Abraham Lincoln in the Civil War. The decisions that Lincoln had to make during that time were so immense and the only thing he could compare it to in conferring with historians was the Civil War. Well listen to now what Abraham Lincoln said in October of 1863.

During the Civil War. We have been recipients of the choices bounties of heaven said our president. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity.

We have grown in numbers and in wealth and in power as no other nation has ever grown. But now listen to our president speak. Lincoln said, but we have forgotten God.

We have forgotten His gracious hand which has preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us and we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace too proud to pray to the God that made us. You know in that speech what he was getting at? He was just about to make the announcement calling for a day of thanksgiving every November in the midst of the Civil War.

We need a day of prayer he said of thanksgiving of humbling ourselves before God. Our Congress sang this week God Bless America. Beginning of our service we sang God Bless America.

But you know what it says God Bless America. Land that I love. Stand beside her and guide her through the night with the light from above.

That's what we need more of. Light from above. We need God.

Be still and know that I am God. Now I just applied that in the sense of serenity. However, I've got to tell you because I have to be honest when I give you a message from the Scripture.

In the context of this he is not talking about leading a contemplative life. He is saying the Lord is coming he is going to impose his order in the world so be still. In other words lay down your arms.

Surrender to him. Is it a wake up call? Well listen let it serve at least as a wake up call. Lay down your arms tonight.

Give your life to the Lord Jesus Christ. Be committed to the God on whose principles this nation was founded. It must begin by individual response.

That's what revival is all about. Heavenly Father we can experience your peace we don't have to be at enmity with God. You love the world.

You love the world so much that you sent the sinless one the Savior the only sinless one to die a very long, painful, shameful death. We could just as easily look up at that cross and say how could a God of love do that? Until we discover that the very worst thing that could happen to the world God's only son, the creator dying became the very best thing that could happen to this world because salvation is offered through it. Lord may we come tonight to the river of peace and make our own hearts glad with his refreshment.

Come to you as refuge that no matter what goes on around us we will not succumb to fear. But be ever fixed and confident in you and in your plan to finally and ultimately bring all of the wars of this world to an end. Lord until that lasting peace here we stand in the precipice of time awaiting fulfillment of scripture not knowing what will happen next but we know the one who knows.

And we rest. Lord tonight we ask that you would let this serve as a summons an invitation to many who have come tonight up to this point they've thought about you at one time were really serious about you but that's waned but thank you Lord that they've come. We welcome them.

We love them and we welcome them all for the sake of Christ. We want to show your love to each one. And as a nation comfort one another in these wounds.

But Lord we pray that peace would be made with heaven tonight. That many would lay down their arms. They've been fighting you.

They've been going another direction. Pray that you draw them to yourself.

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