

God is With Us in This Messed Up World

Years ago, a major art gallery sponsored a competition for artists. They were offering prizes for the best painting on the subject of "Peace". As attenders browsed through the entries, most had decided that a one certain painting was almost sure to win. It portrayed this lush green pasture under a vivid blue sky, with the cows grazing lazily and a little boy walking through the grass with his fishing pole over his shoulder. It really made you feel peaceful. But it came in second. The painting that won was a real surprise. The scene was the ocean in a violent storm. The sky was ominous, the lightning was cutting across the sky, and the waves were crashing into the rock walls of the cliffs by the shore. No peace. But you had to look twice to understand what was going on. There, about halfway up the cliff, was a birds' nest, tucked into a tiny hollow in the rock. A mother bird was sitting on that nest - with her little babies, tucked underneath her, sleeping soundly. That was "Peace in the Midst of the Storm".

Now that was the title of the prize-winning painting - and rightly so. Because peace is not just the absence of a storm - it is peace in the midst of the storm. The kind of peace many of us could use right now - the kind of peace that you can have right now. If you're resting where you ought to be.

Psalm 46, v1-3, paints a similar picture for us and it asks the question, *where can we find God in our messed-up world?*

When we look at the world today, I'm sure we can all agree, it is in a mess. But in the mess, we can see a paradise that is still there; in the rising of the sun, the stars at night, the beauty of nature, the wisdom of design and there is something that speaks of another world, a world which is still there but yet lost.

What the psalm tells us is that even the most violent and calamitous events ought not to make the trusting believer afraid. For the fact is, even if the earth is moved and the mountains be lost in the ocean...God is with us. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

This psalm is not just about physical destruction, it is also symbolic of political, and governmental upheavals. It also speaks into our world of seismic change – exactly what we are living through at this time. It speaks into our personal situations, relationships, health, illness, bereavement.

It speaks into our spiritual lives and where the Church is today, as the tide has turned against us, and we may well feel like we're drifting and we are like the little Dutch boy who tried to put his finger in the dyke to stop the water.

It is a psalm for all occasions.

It sends a great message to all believers, that whatever may happen, we can still find our peace in this life; God is still sovereign and God is still with us.

The psalmist describes the messed-up world but he also goes on to state how we can find peace in the mess. That's my theme this morning – *God is with us in this messed up world.*

V1-3 begins with God. "God is our refuge and strength".

There have been horrific images this week coming from the centre of the earthquake – times of excruciating pain, as we watched those buildings collapse in a heap and times of joy when little children are brought from the rubble alive.

But one image that challenged me this week was of two little Turkish children huddled together in the freezing cold, asking God to help them.

The second image speaks of where we can find peace in the midst of this messed up world. V4-7 speak of something different. From the tumult and the roar of the troubled waters, collapsing about us. The psalmist moves suddenly but gently to a quiet flowing river. Verse 4 begins with the statement, "There is a river!"

Here God enters the story. The river.... is a symbol of the presence of God, running right through the heart of Jerusalem. It is a river that runs deep under the city; it is a river that brings life, water and healing.

It brings refreshment and joy. In a delightful silence, the river flows and its people find hope, encouragement and peace.

What the psalmist wants his hearers to catch is that God is their river, and He is in their midst and because of this He will not fail. While God is with them, they are safe.

This psalm brings comfort, assurance and peace to its hearers. The world outside the city may rage and there may be clamour and roar and boisterous tumult but when the mighty God utters his voice, the uproar melts away.

The psalmist wants us to ask the question, *where is our river?* Where is that place of peace in your lives? We all have our troubles; we all have times of the world crumbling around us; we all have our own personal earthquakes and times of feeling as though the very earth is giving way under our feet. In those times, we must find our river, we must find that place of tranquillity, healing and peace.

Jesus's final words to his disciples were, *I will be with you always, even unto the end of the age.* In other words, God is with us through all circumstances of life. He said, *those who come to me will find streams of living water.* They will find their peace, but we need to go to the river; it's not just a philosophical or theological idea, but we need to visit the river and even swim in the river and allow God to remake us, refresh us and renew us.

When was the last time that you were at the river? When did you last swim in the grace, mercy and love of God. Oh, you have been trying to do it in your own strength, but there comes a time when God says to us, Come, there is a river, come and swim in it! Perhaps today, he is inviting you to come to Him and know his peace.

The third slide v8-11 speaks of peace. It is an invitation to see what God has done. He writes, "Come and see what the Lord has done." He has brought peace!

God has brought peace to the nations. He has the power to bring cessation to war and bring peace to the troubled world.

The psalm finishes with beautiful words, that we have already sung this morning, Be still – These words are precious. Be still!

These are important words for us to focus on today. "Be still and know that I am God". It's a picture of perfect peace; a time that has yet to come when God will bring peace to this world and all things will be restored to their original design.

As our headlines become dominated with new troubles around the world - so many hearts have been struggling with new anxieties, new fears – are we ready for the incredible peace offered in Psalm 46?

I call it "Good News for Troubled Times." It's our word for today from the Word of God. Maybe it should be our word for every day right now!

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." So, the more troubled things are, the more present God makes Himself.

Sometimes we need to turn off the news and simply turn to God. Turn off the news and turn to the Words of God...be still and know that I am God!

Sometimes, we need to leave those other voices, and get to where you can just be with God. And realise that as long as you're in His hands, there's no such thing as out of control. He is still God and you are still His!

And if you have never given yourself to Jesus, the Man who died for you, on that lonely cross, there's never been a better time than this. With so much changing, with so much uncertainty, it is so great to know you are safe in a relationship with Him.

Today turn to the Eternal God and find His peace given through Jesus.

When you are nesting in the care of the Lord Jesus Christ, you can rest through any storm. You belong to the One who can give you peace in the middle of the storm.

Today we have witnessed the joy of Emily's baptism and it is a joy to welcome a young life into the family of God. This is the most precious gift that you can give a child, you can give them everything in the world, but the greatest gift is the knowledge that God loves them and He is with them through this life and into eternity.

Amen.