



SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 46

That first verse of Psalm 46 is probably one of the more familiar in all the psalms. But what does it mean that our God is a “very present help in trouble”? To be sure, our God is very present: he is the God who is everywhere at all times. Even when we can’t see him, he is there; and there is no place that we can go where he is not. He is as near to us as our shadows.

But the Hebrew word has the idea of “well-proved.” And that is another gift to strengthen our trust in this time. Because that tells us that God is a helper who has been tested time and again in his people’s lives—and has been proven to be reliable. After all, it does little good to have a friend who is always around but is utterly unreliable: he might as well not be around at all. But our God is not that kind of friend; he is a well-proven friend, a very present help, a mighty fortress. We can trust him.

HYMN: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” Trinity Hymnal 92

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and pow’r are great; and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
were not the right man on our side, the man of God’s own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he,
Lord Sabaoth his name, from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

That Word above all earthly pow’rs, no thanks to them, abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth,
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
the body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever.

PRAYER:

O God, our refuge and strength, our very present and well-proven help: grant us grace not to fear in this time. The earth as we have known it feels like it is given way; the waters seem to roar and foam; the mountains look like they are trembling. But you are the God who is with us, in the very midst of us, able to help—as you have helped us in the past, help us again. May we have confidence that we shall not be moved, not because we are strong, but because you are. We ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.

CATECHISM: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1

What is your only comfort in life and in death?

That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.



SCRIPTURE READING: James 1

There are a lot of things in life that I might count as joyful: the birth of a child; graduation from school; landing a big job. I'm not likely to include meeting trials of various kinds as something that I would count as joyful. And yet, the Apostle James tells us to do just that—because trials produce endurance and endurance is a key ingredient in the Christian life.

But how do we endure? That's where verse 5 comes in—we ask God to help us. We ask him for wisdom. We ask him in faith. We trust in him in the midst of the trials and tests—not blaming him, not suggesting that it is his fault that we are tempted to some evil word, thought, or deed because of the trial. Rather, we trust him to give us every good gift, every perfect gift, because that is the kind of God and Father we have. Not one that changes like the wind; not one that turns around and connives behind his and our backs—but one who loves us and has called us as the firstfruits of a new creation. We can trust him.

HYMN: “O GREAT GOD” Kauflin

O great God of highest heaven, occupy my lowly heart.
Own it all and reign supreme; conquer every rebel power.
Let no vice or sin remain that resists your holy war.
You have loved and purchased me; make me yours forevermore.

I was blinded by my sin, had no ears to hear your voice;
did not know your love within, had no taste for heaven's joys.
Then your Spirit gave me life, opened up your Word to me,
through the gospel of your Son, gave me endless hope and peace.

Help me now to live a life that's dependent on your grace;
keep my heart and guard my soul from the evils that I face.
You are worthy to be praised with my every thought and deed.
O great God of highest heaven, glorify your Name through me.

PRAYER:

O Father of lights with whom there is no variation, no shadow of turning, no quick changing: I confess readily that I do not count trials as joys and difficulties as growth opportunities. And yet, you tell me to rejoice because these trials produce the very thing I most desperately need: a steadfast trust in you. I ask you to give me all that I stand in need of: wisdom, strength, endurance, grace, love, joy, and above all faith. Help me to believe that though the grass withers and the flower falls, you endure forever and so will I in your joyful presence forever more, through Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: Lamentations 3

It might strike you odd that we have an entire book of laments in the Bible—odd because we don't practice much lamenting in our lives or in our church. A lament is a public declaration of grief and sorrow; and Lamentations has a specific reason for such griefs and sorrows, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The book is structured in five poems and each poem is an acrostic—the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used to write each poem.

Chapter three is the longest poem and the central poem in the book. It is long and it is tragic, from the very first words: "I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath." And the poet focuses on the ways in which he feels that God has disappointed him, attacked him, laid him low: so much so that he will say, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the Lord." But at that very point, the poet stops, recalls to mind who his God is, and hopes again. Why? Because "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end." Hope revives when we remember who God is and what kind of love is his. We can trust him.

HYMN: "GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS" Trinity Hymnal 32

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father; there is no shadow of turning with thee;
 thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not; as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.
 Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see:
 all I have needed thy hand hath provided—Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest, sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
 join with all nature in manifold witness to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.
 Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see:
 all I have needed thy hand hath provided—Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
 strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
 Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see:
 all I have needed thy hand hath provided—Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

PRAYER:

O Lord, these past few days and weeks have made me feel as though you have brought the rod of your wrath against me. There are times in which I feel sad, overwhelmed, anxious, and fearful; in fact, I feel as though I might lose hope. In these times of sadness, remind me about what is most true about you: your steadfast love never ceases; your mercies never come to an end; your faithfulness is great; and you are my portion. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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**SCRIPTURE READING: Romans 8:18-39**

It is hard for us to believe that our present suffering will be outweighed by future glory. After all, the suffering is present; the glory is future. The suffering is hard, painful, bitter; and while the glory sounds delightful, how do we know that it will outweigh and outstrip what we presently know?

The Apostle Paul gives us several strong proofs that this is the case. First, our own conversions—and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us—are a first-fruit, a promise, that there is a future glory coming. Too, the Holy Spirit is not only in us, but he acts on our behalf so that when we don't know how to pray, he takes our groans, moans, wails, and tears and turns them into prayers. Further, God works all things together in such a way as they bring salvation for his own—his purpose is unstoppable and his people will know glory. Finally, he answers all our questions so that we might be persuaded that nothing will separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ. We can trust God.

HYMN: "HIS LOVE CAN NEVER FAIL" Miner

I do not ask to see the way my feet will have to tread;
but only that my soul may feed upon the living Bread.
'Tis better far that I should walk by faith close to his side;
I may not know the way I go, but oh, I know my Guide.
His love can never fail; his love can never fail.
My soul is satisfied to know his love can never fail.

And if my feet would go astray, they cannot, for I know
that Jesus guides my faltering steps, as joyfully I go.
And tho' I may not see his face, my faith is strong and clear;
that in each hour of sore distress my Savior will be near.
His love can never fail; his love can never fail.
My soul is satisfied to know his love can never fail.

I will not fear, tho' darkness come abroad o'er all the land,
if I may only feel the touch of his own loving hand.
And tho' I tremble when I think how weak I am, and frail,
my soul is satisfied to know his love can never fail.
His love can never fail; his love can never fail.
My soul is satisfied to know his love can never fail.

PRAYER:

Triune God, Father, Son, Spirit, it is so difficult to believe that future glory will outweigh all of the mess, hurt, difficulty, and pain we know right now. Help us to listen for the Spirit's voice as he prays through our groaning; help us to look for the different ways the Father is at work in our lives right now; and help us to feel the certainty that there is nothing in this world that can separate us from Christ's love. I do believe all of this is true; help me in my unbelief, fears, and doubts so that I might hope in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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**SCRIPTURE READING: Joshua 1**

Undoubtedly, you have heard someone say over the past few weeks something like, “We are strong. We will get through this. We will be better on the other side.” Of course, we know that this sort of self-talk really isn’t that helpful, but we do it anyway because we need courage through this uncertain and difficult times.

It is striking that the Bible doesn’t talk this way at all. Rather, what we find in the Bible is a remarkable honesty about our inability. That’s the case here in Joshua 1. Notice God doesn’t tell Joshua: you have everything you need; you are strong; you can do this. Rather, he tells Joshua: I am with you, you go in my strength, and so you will make it. Three times he says this: “I am with you; I will not leave you or forsake you; the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Our confidence and courage in this time comes not from our ability, but God’s. We can trust him.

HYMN: “ISAIAH 43” Anonymous

When you pass through the waters I will be with you,
and the waves will not overcome you.
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you.
I have called you by name, you are mine.

For I am the Lord your God, for I am the Lord your God;
I am the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
For I am the Lord your God, for I am the Lord your God;
I am the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I am the Lord. Do not fear.

When you walk through the fire you’ll not be burned,
and the flames will not consume you.
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you.
I have called you by name, you are mine.

For I am the Lord your God, for I am the Lord your God;
I am the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
For I am the Lord your God, for I am the Lord your God;
I am the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I am the Lord. Do not fear.

PRAYER:

O Lord, my own resolve during these days is wavering and uncertain. My inner voice telling me to be strong and the voices of our culture telling me that I can do this aren’t helping me. I need to hear you tell me in your Word, “I am with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. The Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Remind me that you are my strength, your presence is my courage, your Word is my guide—and be my strength, O God, my salvation! Amen.

CATECHISM: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1

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SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 6:19-34

We tend to read this passage in Matthew 6 as sheer law, as a command that comes to us that we have to accomplish in our own will power. After all, Jesus commands us, “Do not be anxious about your life”—so it is up to us not to be anxious. How’s that working for you? Not too well, I suspect. In fact, telling ourselves not to be anxious is guaranteed to do one thing: make ourselves more anxious.

That’s where we have to step back and hear the Gospel in this passage. We have a glorious treasure in heaven already; in this present life, our God takes care of us better than the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, or even the grasses we see; our God knows what we need and supplies all that we want. And because these things are so, we do not need to be anxious. That puts it in a completely different light, doesn’t it? We can trust God.

HYMN: “THOUGH TROUBLES ASSAIL US” Trinity Hymnal 95

Though troubles assail us and dangers affright,
though friends should all fail us and foes all unite,
yet one thing secures us, whatever betide,
the promise assures us, “The Lord will provide.”

The birds, without garner or storehouse, are fed;
from them let us learn to trust God for our bread.
His saints what is fitting shall ne’er be denied
so long as ’tis written, “The Lord will provide.”

When Satan assails us to stop up our path,
and courage all fails us, we triumph by faith.
He cannot take from us, though oft he has tried,
this heart-cheering promise, “The Lord will provide.”

No strength of our own and no goodness we claim;
yet, since we have known of the Savior’s great name,
in this our strong tower for safety we hide:
the Lord is our power, “The Lord will provide.”

PRAYER:

O God of the birds, the grass, the lilies, as you take care of them, take care of us. You made us, you know what we need, we are yours. Supply all that we need, feed us, clothe us, heal us, and keep us safe from harm. Take away our fears and anxieties so that we might obey your command, “Do not be anxious about tomorrow.” Grant us grace to seek your Kingdom first and always and supply all our needs richly in Christ Jesus our Lord, for it is in his name we pray, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: John 3

This discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus is fascinating. Nicodemus is the teacher of Israel; yet he doesn't know basic Bible interpretation and has to be taught by "an untrained peasant." And Jesus is so patient with Nicodemus as he alludes to enough biblical texts to make his head spin (for example, Ezekiel 34 and 37 as well as Numbers 21—in just fifteen verses!). He wants this teacher to know the truth so that "whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Sometimes we presume that we are okay with God because we grew up in church, learned hymns and the catechism, or performed certain religious activities. Jesus is patient with us too—because he wants us to realize that while those are good things, they aren't saving things in themselves. They are all meant to lead us by the hand to Jesus himself—that we might believe in him, trust him, rest in him and receive him as our Savior, Lord, and friend. We can trust him. Are you trusting Jesus?

HYMN: "IN CHRIST ALONE" Getty & Townend

In Christ alone my hope is found; he is my light, my strength, my song;
 this cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
 What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
 My comforter, my all in all—here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe!
 This gift of love and righteousness, scorned by the ones he came to save.
 Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied;
 for every sin on him was laid—here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground his body lay, light of the world by darkness slain.
 Then bursting forth in glorious day, up from the grave he rose again!
 And as he stands in victory, sin's curse has lost its grip on me;
 for I am his and he is mine—bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death—this is the pow'r of Christ in me.
 From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.
 No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand;
 till he returns or calls me home—here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand!

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior of sinners, thank you for your patience with me. Your Word comes to me day-by-day and week-by-week—and it shows me what is true. You are a great King, a glorious Savior, and true Friend who loves me and gave yourself for me. I do trust in you and desire to know you better today than I did yesterday. Assure my heart that I belong to you, both body and soul, in life and in death. Grow me in love, joy, and peace this day and always, for it is in your name that I pray, Amen.

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