

SCATTERED WORSHIP: SABBATH DEVOTIONAL

JANUARY 29, 2012: PSALM 46

As The City Church worships God by resting, “ceasing from work,” celebrating, and carrying out Sabbath throughout 2012, our goal is to equip you with one way that you can spend a few minutes dwelling deeply with God in the midst of whatever other activity (or “non-activity”!) you participate in as you Sabbath. So for each “Scattered Worship: Sabbath” day of this year, we’re providing you with a Sabbath Devotional. Each this year will look at specific teachings on Sabbath, rest, and trusting God, and each will follow a simple pattern: introduction – verses – explanation – questions. As you prayerfully read, use the questions for personal reflection. Or if your Sabbath involves other folks, take a few moments and discuss what they teach. Simply use these devotionals as God leads you, and worship well by resting well, church!

If you grew up in a church, it is quite possible that you were introduced to Psalm 46 through Martin Luther’s classic hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” And even if you did not grow up in a hymn-singing, khaki-wearing church, chances are you have still managed to come across this psalm somewhere along the way. Perhaps you were one among the tens of millions gathered around the television this past September 11th to watch the 9/11 memorial ceremony. It was on this occasion that the US President, seeking to console and provide hope for the nation, quoted Psalm 46 in its entirety.

All of this goes to show the amazing amount of familiarity with the Psalm (both inside and outside the church). But, as the saying goes, “familiarity and ignorance are ugly cousins.” This being so, this short devotional is a challenge to meditate afresh on Psalm 46, for personal meditation, reflection, and if you want, for discussion on The City Church’s first Sabbath Sunday of 2012.

PSALM 46

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- ² 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*
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- ⁵ God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
- ⁶ The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*
- ⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
- ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
- ¹⁰ **“Be still, and know that I am God.**
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”
- ¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

COMMENTARY

Psalm 46 is one of the many Psalms encouraging its readers to consider and celebrate the presence of God. The structure of the psalm falls into three parts, divided by “Selah”: (1) the presence of God in cosmic troubles (1-3) (2) the presence of God in judgment/political troubles (4-7); and (3) the presence of God both in history and in the future (8-11). Both the structure and language seem to tie the first two parts together. In verses 1-7 we find a brief description of the troubles of the world. There were both cosmic and political disturbances that, no doubt, led many of God’s people into a state of fear. In the midst of such fear, the psalmist instructs the people of God to find rest in God and God alone. God is their “refuge,” “strength,” and “fortress,” three synonymous metaphors commonly used throughout the Old Testament to remind Israel of the power and sovereignty of God during times of trouble and distress.

Verses 8-11 were probably a later development of the hymn. These verses distinguish themselves on account of their prophetic language and character. Here the Psalmist commands the reader to “behold the works of the LORD.” The works of the Lord include all of his acts of power and salvation throughout Israel’s history. In response to meditating on the power and faithfulness of God, we find the command for the people to “be still and know that I am God.” Here we have the climax of the psalm. The God who is described throughout the psalm now speaks (notice the switch to first person singular). After considering the amazing works of God, God Himself calls His people into a sobering acceptance of who He is. Verse 10 ends by pointing forward (notice the switch to future tense verbs) to a day God would exalt Himself among the nations. Unlike the original readers of this hymn, we know how this prophecy was ultimately fulfilled. It is through Jesus, God’s Son, that God is glorified. The entire gospel of John makes it very clear that it is Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection that glorified/exalted God among the nations. Not only is verse 10 fulfilled in the person of Jesus, but I would contend that the entire Psalm is fulfilled in Jesus. It is Jesus who stills the roaring waters (Mark 4). It is Jesus who “dwells” with his people (John 1:14). It is Jesus, at the end of the Bible, who sits enthroned over the rivers that make glad the city of God (Rev. 22). It is in Jesus we find our refuge and strength.

QUESTIONS FOR SABBATH REFLECTION

1. What are your initial reactions to reading Psalm 46? What stands out?
2. In your own words, what do you think it means for God to be our refuge/strength/fortress?
3. What does it mean for us – as individuals, as a family, and as a church family/Village to be still and know that God is God?
4. In what ways does Psalm 46 point forward to Jesus?

