

Psalm 46  
None But Zion's Children  
PS1701

April 30, 2017 AM  
The Church

“God’s Mighty Fortress”

INTRODUCTION: I have been clearing out my office files over the past few weeks ...

1. Part of that process has been to throw out duplicate copies of Sermon notes that date all the way back to 1982!
2. As I cleared out these old notes, filed in order of the Books of the Bible and the Biblical text of the sermon, I noticed what Book of Scriptures I preach on the most often ...
  - a) ... most sermons and throughout my 35 years of preaching.
  - b) Which Book was it? You’ll be surprised; or maybe not!
  - c) Answer: **The Book of Psalms** (my favorite Book in Scripture)
    - (1) Psalm 90: 14 sermons (a 13-part series, plus one other time)
    - (2) Psalm 85: five times (about Revival)
    - (3) *Songs of Ascent*: Pss. 120-134; 3 times, 3 series
  - d) **Songs of Zion**: 12 sermons
    - (1) Psalm 46 – 6 times
    - (2) Psalm 48 – twice
    - (3) Psalm 76 – once
    - (4) Psalm 122 – 3 times
  - e) *My favorite sub-set of Psalms, in my favorite Bible Book: The Psalter*
3. Look at Psalm 137: The saddest Psalm in the Psalter
  - a) *By the waters of Babylon,  
there we sat down and wept,  
when we remembered Zion.  
On the willows there  
we hung up our lyres.  
For there our captors  
required of us songs,  
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,  
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”  
How shall we sing the Lord's song  
in a foreign land?  
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand forget its skill!  
Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth,  
if I do not remember you,*

*if I do not set Jerusalem  
above my highest joy!  
Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites  
the day of Jerusalem,  
how they said, "Lay it bare, lay it bare,  
down to its foundations!"  
O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,  
blessed shall he be who repays you  
with what you have done to us!  
Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones  
and dashes them against the rock! (Ps. 137:1-9)*

- b) Notice verse 3: "*Sing us one of the Songs of Zion!*"
- c) A cruel taunt by Babylonian soldiers, as the exiles from Jerusalem march off to the Babylonian captivity (exile).
- d) **David L. Thompson:** *Ashbury Bible Commentary: "Songs of Zion"*

*The fact that "Zion Songs" existed and were known as such, were even famous among Israel's neighbors and enemies. Babylonian soldiers may have overheard these songs sung for encouragement by besieged Jerusalemites before the collapse of 586 B.C. In Babylon these captors demanded, perhaps at spear point, the exiles in forced march (?) by the canals to sing ... one of the songs of Zion (137:3). What humiliation to face those extravagant lyrics now.*

4. What were these "Songs of Zion"? They were six special Psalms that extolled the greatness, goodness and glory of **Jerusalem** and the **Temple** ...

- a) *Zion: The City of God ...*
- b) First: *Psalm 46 – The Fortress of God*

*God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.  
God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;  
God will help her when morning dawns.  
The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah (Ps. 46:1, 4-5, 7)*

- c) Second: *Psalm 48 – The Royal Palace of God*

*Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised  
in the city of our God!  
His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation,  
is the joy of all the earth,  
Mount Zion, in the far north,  
the city of the great King.  
Within her citadels God*

*has made himself known as a fortress. (Ps. 48:1-3)*

*As we have heard, so have we seen  
in the city of the Lord of hosts,  
in the city of our God,  
which God will establish forever. Selah (Ps. 48:8)*

*Walk about Zion, go around her,  
number her towers,  
consider well her ramparts,  
go through her citadels,  
that you may tell the next generation  
that this is God,  
our God forever and ever.  
He will guide us forever. (Ps. 48:12-14)*

d) Third: *Psalm 76 – The H.Q. of God in the World*

*In Judah God is known;  
his name is great in Israel.  
His abode has been established in Salem,  
his dwelling place in Zion.  
There he broke the flashing arrows,  
the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war. Selah (Ps. 76:1-3)*

e) Fourth: *Psalm 84 – The Temple of God*

*How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O Lord of hosts!  
My soul longs, yes, faints  
for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.  
Blessed are those who dwell in your house,  
ever singing your praise! Selah (Ps. 84:1-2, 4)  
Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion. (Ps. 84:5)*

f) Fifth: *Psalm 87 – The City of God*

*On the holy mount stands the city he founded;  
the Lord loves the gates of Zion  
more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.  
Glorious things of you are spoken,  
O city of God. Selah (Ps. 87:1-3)*

g) Sixth: *Psalm 122 – The House of God*

*I was glad when they said to me,  
“Let us go to the house of the Lord!”  
Our feet have been standing*

*within your gates, O Jerusalem!  
 Jerusalem—built as a city  
 that is bound firmly together,  
 to which the tribes go up,  
 the tribes of the Lord,  
 as was decreed for Israel,  
 to give thanks to the name of the Lord. (Ps. 122:1-4)*

5. “Zion” was the ancient name of the city of Jerusalem, conquered by King David, and turned into both the Holy City and the Capital City:

- a) *At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, “You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off”—thinking, “David cannot come in here.” Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. (2 Samuel 5:5-7)*
- b) *And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the Millo inward. And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him. (2 Samuel 5:9-10)*
- c) *David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim. And it was told King David, “The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God.” So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. (2 Samuel 6:1-2, 12)*

6. **David L. Thompson:** *Asbury Bible Commentary: Psalms; “Songs of Zion”*

*Jerusalem’s most beloved name, “Zion,” evoked history, tradition, pride, faith, and loyalty in her people. “Zion” designated the Jebusite fortress, straddling the hill crest between the Kidron and Tyropeon Valleys captured by David (2 Sam. 5:5-9). The name was extended up the hill to what became the temple mount and eventually to the whole city of Jerusalem and its residents. Of course references to Jerusalem and Zion abound in the Psalms. But these Songs of Zion are uniquely devoted to extolling this city of [God] the Great King. No other city or place, including the temple receives this adulation.*

7. What made Zion (Jerusalem) so special was this one reality: *God lived in that place; in His Presence in the Tabernacle, and later in that same Shekinah Glory in the Temple of Solomon.*

- a) Zion was thus repeatedly called “*The City of God*”
- b) and also: *My Holy Hill, the Hill of the Lord, the Mountain of God, God’s dwelling place, fortress, citadel; the House of the Lord, etc.*
- c) **David L. Thompson:** *Asbury Bible Commentary: Psalms; “Songs of Zion”*

*Thus, these Songs of Zion celebrate Yahweh's unique presence in Jerusalem, and rightly so, for much depended on that presence. Zion's stability and security are connected directly in these songs to Yahweh's presence in spite of international turmoil (46:6; 48:4). The congregation's safety was at stake (46:7). God himself was the citadel's defense (48:3;*

76:3). *These themes, among many others, no doubt, brought Zion intense love and deepest loyalties from her residents and those who made frequent pilgrimages there. The poets of these works describe her beauty and majesty with extravagant endearment. The songs express intense longing for Jerusalem, for Yahweh's house, and for their good. The absolutely sacred and unimaginably precious nature of Zion, her temple, and even her songs stands behind the potent emotions driving Ps 137:*

*If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
may my right hand forget its skill.  
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not consider Jerusalem  
my highest joy. vv. 5-6*

8. In NT imagery and theology, Zion points to *The Church*: It is in the Church that God is present, that the Lord is in this world, that God's people are secure, and in which worship and fellowship with God take place:
- a) *But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (Gal. 6:14-16)*
  - b) *The Israel of God = N.T. Church (God's NT Covenant People)*
  - c) *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Heb. 12:22-24)*
9. This *desire* for and *love* for the *City of God* is the driving force of true Faith, for the people of God, past and present.
- a) The Author of Hebrews says this:
 

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1)*
  - b) The conviction that there *really is a City of God* on earth!
  - c) This is the *passion of the faith* that moves people toward God and heaven
    - (1) *By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. (Heb. 11:9-10)*

Note: *a city that has foundations whose architect and builder is God.*
    - (2) *These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that*

*they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Heb. 11:13-16)*

Note: *God ... has prepared a city for them.*

- (3) *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, (Heb. 12:22-24a)*

Note: *the city of the living God*

- (4) *For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. (Heb. 13:14)*

Note: *the city that is to come*

10. And we see that City of God, at the end of the Bible and the end of human history –

- a) *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. (Rev. 21:1-3)*
- b) *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (Rev. 21:10-14)*
- c) *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. (Rev. 21:22-25)*
- d) *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Rev. 22:1-5)*

11. Between the glory of O.T. Zion, the Old Jerusalem, and the magnificence of the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem, there lies *the beauty and glory of the Church!*

a) The Bride of Christ

*“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Eph. 5:31-32)*

b) The Wife of the Lamb (Rev. 21:9)

c) The Great Love of God

*Let us rejoice and exult  
and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his Bride has made herself ready; (Rev. 19:7)*

12. And so, the people of God make up “Love Songs” to express their affection for, devotion to, and delight in and their longing for this Beautiful Wife of God –

a) The Sons of Korah

*On the holy mount stands the city he founded;  
the Lord loves the gates of Zion  
more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.  
Glorious things of you are spoken,  
O city of God. Selah (Ps. 87:1-3)*

b) **John Newton**, using Ps. 87:3 and other phrases from the Songs of Zion – “*Glorious things of Thee Are Spoken*” (1779)

(1) *Glorious things of you are spoken,  
O city of God. Selah (Ps. 87:3)*

(2) *Glorious things of thee are spoken,  
Zion, city of our God!  
He, whose Word cannot be broken,  
Formed thee for His own abode;  
On the Rock of Ages founded,  
What can shake thy sure repose?  
With salvation’s walls surrounded,  
Thou mayst smile at all thy foes. (Stanza1)*

(3) *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.  
God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;  
God will help her when morning dawns. (Ps. 46:4-5)*

(4) *See, the streams of living waters,  
Springing from eternal love,  
Well supply thy sons and daughters,  
And all fear of want remove:*

*Who can faint while such a river  
Ever flows their thirst t' assuage?  
Grace which, like the Lord, the giver,  
Never fails from age to age. (Stanza 2)*

- (5) *And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. 22 The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (Ex. 13:21-22)*

*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys. (Ex. 40:34-38)*

- (6) *Round each habitation hov'ring,  
See the cloud and fire appear,  
For a glory and a cov'ring,  
Showing that the Lord is near;  
Thus deriving from our banner  
Light by night and shade by day,  
Safe they feed upon the manna  
Which He gives them when they pray. (Stanza 3)*

- (7) *And of Zion it shall be said,  
"This one and that one were born in her";  
for the Most High himself will establish her.  
The Lord records as he registers the peoples,  
"This one was born there." Selah  
Singers and dancers alike say,  
"All my springs are in you." (Ps. 87:5-7)*

- (8) *Savior, if of Zion's city,  
I through grace a member am,  
Let the world deride or pity,  
I will glory in Thy name;  
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,  
All his boasted pomp and show;  
Solid joys and lasting treasure  
None but Zion's children know. (Stanza 4)*

13. "Solid joys and lasting treasures, none but Zion's Children know."

- a) The Title of this final series: *None But Zion's Children Know*
- b) "The Beauty and Glory of the Church"

- c) My *last sermon series*: 6 messages (April 30-June 11)
- d) How life in the local church (Christ Covenant Church) will give you “*solid joys and lasting treasures*”
- e) Blessings “*none but Zion’s children know!*”
- f) Six **poetic pictures** of the Church of Jesus Christ.

14. And we begin with **Psalm 46: God’s Mighty Fortress**

- a) *God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,  
though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah (Ps. 46:1-3)*
- b) Refrain: *The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Fortress (Selah)*
- c) *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.  
God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;  
God will help her when morning dawns.  
The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;  
he utters his voice, the earth melts.  
The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah (Ps. 46:4-7)*
- d) *Come, behold the works of the Lord,  
how he has brought desolations on the earth.  
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the chariots with 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 fortress. Selah (Ps. 46:8-11)*
- e) **Note:** We think *selah* was an O.T. Hebrew musical term that meant either “*pause*” or “*(musical) interlude*”
- f) Psalm 46: by the *Sons of Korah. (A Song)*

I. THE CHURCH IS A PLACE OF REFUGE IN GOD (Ps. 46:1-3)

*God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,*

*though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah (Ps. 46:1-3)*

*The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Ps. 46:7)*

1. **Gerhard Kittel:** “*It is the most magnificent song of faith that has ever been sung.*”
2. What is unique about these *Songs of Zion* is this: The City of God takes on the attributes, the glory and the blessings of God who lives there.
  - a) Like a husband and wife who “rub off” on each other over the years
  - b) ... sharing the same values, the same vision, the same virtues.
  - c) “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Eph. 5:31-32)
  - d) “... *the two shall become one flesh (person/life)*”
3. God is portrayed as a “*refuge and strength ... present help in trouble ... our fortress.*” And so his city (Zion) is also.
4. We can’t read or sing this Psalm without calling to mind **Martin Luther’s** great hymn “*A Mighty Fortress*”
  - a) Luther was an OT teacher, and his favorite book in the OT was the *Book of Psalms* ...
  - b) ... and *Psalm 46* was his favorite!
  - c) When things were tough Luther would go to his friend Philip Melancthon and say, “*Come, Philip, let’s sing the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm!*”
  - d) **Martin Luther** wrote this about Psalm 46 (**Boise; Psalms: 2:385**)
 

*We sing this psalm to the praise of God, because God is with us and powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends his church and his word against all fanatical spirits, against the gates of hell, against the implacable hatred of the devil, and against all the assaults of the world, the flesh and sin.*
5. When I was a small boy, one of the first of three hymns I learned was Psalm 46 – “*A Mighty Fortress*” But the first stanza reflected Psalm 46’s first stanza more literally –
 

*“A Mighty Fortress is our God, a Bulwark never failing;  
Our Helper, He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.  
What though the waters rage, and surging seas rampage;  
What though the Mountains fall; the Lord is God of all;  
On earth is not His equal.”*
6. I learned, early on, that the Church of Jesus Christ was a *refuge* from the world; a place to go in order to seek the *safety* of the Lord and the *refreshment* of His grace.
7. Our world remains a dangerous place; full of “*mortal ills prevailing*”
  - a) physical dangers that can maim and even kill,

- b) social disruptions that harm family, church, community
- c) psychological pressures that rob us of joy, peace and sound mind,
- d) spiritual forces who war against our fragile souls!

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6:12)*

*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1 Peter 5:8-9)*

- 8. Christians, find in the church both a *people* to whom they can go and a *place* in which to retreat in order to protect, preserve and prosper their souls, their lives, their families and their Faith.
- 9. The Local Church is that *Mighty Fortress* wherein God awaits on our “*very present help in trouble*” (v. 1)

## II. THE CHURCH IS A PLACE OF REFRESHMENT IN THE SPIRIT (Ps. 46:4-7)

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.*

*God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;*

*God will help her when morning dawns.*

*The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;*

*he utters his voice, the earth melts.*

*The Lord of hosts is with us;*

*the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah (Ps. 46:4-7)*

- 1. “*There is a river whose streams make glad the City of God ...*”
- 2. This is a reference to the *stream of Shelah/Shiloah/Siloam* which formed the *pool of Siloam* in the city – a reservoir dug by King Hezekiah:
  - a) *The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah and all his might and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? (2 Kings 20:20)*
  - b) This Pool of Siloam saved Israel during an Assyrian invasion in Hezekiah’s reign.

*After this, Sennacherib king of Assyria, who was besieging Lachish with all his forces, sent his servants to Jerusalem to Hezekiah king of Judah and to all the people of Judah who were in Jerusalem, saying, “Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, ‘On what are you trusting, that you endure the siege in Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you, that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, “The Lord our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria”?’ (2 Chron. 32:9-11)*

- c) Later, Ezekiel saw this stream of Siloam becoming a river of revival for all the earth!

*Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing." (Ezek. 47:1-12)*

d) Ezekiel's vision points to the Heavenly Jerusalem, and the City of God –

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Rev. 22:1-2)*

3. I believe that after God gave to Hezekiah and Israel a mighty deliverance from Assyria, that Psalm 46 was written by the *Sons of Korah* –

*Then Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven. And the Lord sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword. So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies, and he provided for them on every side. (2 Chron. 32:20-22)*

4. For us, this *stream that makes glad the City of God* is none other than Jesus Christ and the gift of His Holy Spirit!

a) *On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who*

*believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39)*

- b) “*God will help her when morning dawns*” (Ps. 46:5)
- c) **The Helper** is the Holy Spirit ...

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17)*

- 5. The local church is the *only place* where people can know and imbibe in the refreshing grace of the Holy Spirit.

*Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. (Acts 3:19-21)*

### III. THE CHURCH IS THE PLACE OF RESPITE IN CHRIST (Ps. 46:8-11)

*Come, behold the works of the Lord,  
how he has brought desolations on the earth.  
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the chariots with 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 fortress. Selah (Ps. 46:8-11)*

- 1. Notice the only imperative (commandment) in the Psalm ...
  - a) The only thing we must *do* ...
  - b) The *response* God wants from us ...
  - c) “*Be still and know that I am God ...*” (v. 10)
- 2. When we “go to church” we really have but *one purpose* = to be reminded that there is but one God, and we are not Him.
  - a) *Our God is God!*
  - b) The Sovereign Lord over human history and all the nations of mankind ...
    - (1) *Come, behold the works of the Lord,  
how he has brought desolations on the earth.  
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the chariots with fire. (Ps. 46:8-9)*

- (2) The God who stops wars, defeats evil empires, and brings peace to the earth through His Son – *The Prince of Peace*

*The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.  
You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.  
For the yoke of his burden,  
and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned as fuel for the fire.  
For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isa. 9:2-7)*

- (3) ... through *the Gospel of Peace*.

- c) The Glorious God who is to be exalted by all creation ...

- (1) *“Be still, and know that I am God.  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!” (Ps. 46:10)*
- (2) *I will be exalted among the nations:* glorified by mankind
- (3) *I will be exalted in the earth:* glorified by nature, animals and the beauties of creation.

3. The only God, the Victorious God, the Glorious God; *He lives in Zion, in the Church, in the City of God!*
4. You can find this Victorious God in His Champion – His Son, *Jesus Christ* – anytime and every time you come to church. And His symbol of both victory and peace stands over all: **The Cross**.

*And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (John 12:23-32)*

5. But to come to God, to belong to Christ, to know His peace you must **surrender**.

- a) There is room in the human heart for only one Lord
- b) There is room in the world for only one Savior
- c) There is room in the Church for only one God

*And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)*

6. The Hebrew words "*Be still*" really means, "*Cease striving*" (against God). The way of surrender is the way to peace!

7. **James M. Boice**: *Psalms: Vol. 2; p. 392*

*Therefore, in this setting, "be still, and know that I am God" is not advice to us to lead a contemplative life, however important that may be. Elizabeth Elliot was not wrong to say that this should be our goal in times of emotional turmoil. It means rather, "Lay down your arms. Surrender, and acknowledge that I am the one and only victorious God."*

Conclusion: There are **three primary lessons** about God, and life, and people that I have learned at Church ...

1. **First**: In the Church we find **Refuge** in God. And only in the Church ...

- a) **Illustration**: On the day of 9-11, **Ligon Duncan** (who was then the Sr. pastor of 1<sup>st</sup> Pres. in Jackson), called me to see if we at TPC could host an impromptu Prayer Meeting that fateful evening.

(1) We had mainly word of mouth (some email) to spread the word.

(2) But on Sept. 11, 2001, at 7:00 pm, our sanctuary was overflowing.

(3) *God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble. (Ps. 46:1)*

(4) Somehow, people *instinctively* knew that fact, and it brought them to church.

- b) We do live in the same world as King David and Martin Luther – "*The flood of mortal ills ... a world with devils filled ...*"

- c) People are **not** strong enough to stand alone; **not** smart enough to figure things out, **not** sophisticated enough to always "be cool"

- d) Cancer, terrorism, divorce, job loss, miscarriage, a broken heart - *They all drive us to God our Refuge ...*
- e) And to His Place of Refuge – *the Church* – the people of refuge!
- f) The **Refrain** of this Psalm is obvious: *“The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”* (v. 7, 10)
- g) I am **not** recommending either a *fortress mentality* against the world **or** an *escapist attitude* toward trouble.
- h) But what I **am** saying is this: *Through all the sorrows and sadness of my 68 years of life – and I have known this deeply, many times – God and His Church have always been there for me. Without the Church, I would have been over whelmed by the flood of evil which rose up against me, in billowing waves.*
- i) But I have always found my refuge in God and found my God at Church!

2. **Second:** I have found **Refreshment** from the Holy Spirit, time and time again, in my local churches.

- a) A place where the *means of grace* and *the people of the Spirit* have renewed my tired, weary and thirsty soul time and again.
- b) *Worship, hymns, choir singing, the Lord’s supper, Baptism, the Word read and preached, the Apostles’ Creed, the pastoral prayer, the doxology, the Gloria, the Benediction ...*
- c) ... They’ve all flooded my soul with “springs of living water,” and kept my soul alive in this fallen wilderness.
- d) **Our frenzied world sucks the juice out of your soul quicker and more often than you realize.**
- e) This is why God says to you: *Go to church every week!*

(1) Two Reasons for keeping the Sabbath

(2) Reason #1 – Rest from Work ...

*“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Ex. 20:8-11)*

(3) *Refreshment in the Creation!*

(4) Reason #2 – Release from bondage ...

*“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your*

*gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deut. 5:12-15)*

(5) *Refreshment in the Redemption!*

- f) In our materialistic, work-a-holic, and consumer society we need to be refreshed every Sunday. *We are men, not machines!*
  - g) In our pagan, anti-Christian, and carnal culture we need to be released every Sunday. *We are Children of God, not slaves!*
  - h) **Every single Sunday – morning and evening – I need to be recalibrated on the inside.**  
And if the Pastor needs this, then so do you – perhaps even more so!
3. **Third:** I have found a **Respite**, a place of soul-peace, in Jesus Christ and His local church, since the time I was a little boy in Columbus, Ohio.
- a) I loved going to Church on Sundays, and in the morning, Monday to Friday, at my parochial school.
  - b) And often – then as an elementary school child, and now as a retiring pastor – I go into a sanctuary in the middle of the week, in the midst of a day – just to “*Be still*”
  - c) ... and to experience the *Peace I have in Jesus Christ!*
  - d) **Are you aware** *how much noise is in our world and in our souls? Soul-numbing, mind-boggling, body-wearing noise!*
  - e) *American Society is the most noisy, the most unsettled, and the most stress-filled society in the world – perhaps second only to Islam!*
  - f) And this noise is *hurting you* more than you know = TV, internet, Facebook, music, smartphone, Hip-hop (!), Cinema, Sports Arenas, Traffic noise, loud restaurants – *it’s hurtful to the human soul.*
  - g) Begin to form three good and healing practices for your soul
    - (1) *A Quiet Time every morning* (It’s called that for a reason!)
    - (2) *A weekly stop at the CLC Prayer Chapel* (even if for just 15 min.)
    - (3) *Sunday Evening Worship* (Quieter and more restorative than morning services)
  - h) *Be still and know that God is God.*
4. Some of you (perhaps many of you) will say: *Pastor, I’ve not found these things at Church!*
5. My answer: *Because you can’t see them or hear them! Yet ...!*
6. The realities of Psalm 46 are an “*acquired taste.*” Something you work at over time.
7. **Illustration:** When I go hunting in the Fall, and get alone in the woods the first few times are torturous!

- a) I'm jittery, distracted, can't see anything, can't hear anything, and I never get anything! Why? *Because I've stepped into a different world, a quieter state of being, a new dimension to which I am not acclimated.*
- b) But as I grow *still*. As I expunge things from my *mind*. And I work at *listening*, in time ...
- c) I begin to *see*, and to *hear*, and to *experience* all kinds of beautiful life around me! It's amazing. It's *another world!*
- d) There all the while, but a world I've neglected!

8. When I come to Church, I enter *another world*: **The Kingdom of God**; and I've come to a beautiful place: **The City of God**. And I see and hear things most others don't

*But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Cor. 2:9)*

- a) The Sermon: *The Voice of God speaking to me!*
- b) The Lord's Supper: *The family meal for the children of God.*
- c) Baptism: *The Citizenship papers for the Kingdom of God.*
- d) The Sanctuary: *The place where Heaven touches Earth and where I make room for God in my life.*
- e) Holy Things – pulpit, fount, table, etc.: *These develop Piety in me; a value for God and the things of God.*
- f) Holy Days: *Time to remember and rejoice in God's works in our history.*
- g) Celebrations: *Reasons to be glad; Divine Excuses for a Party! And the development of gratitude in my soul.*
- h) The offering: *Practicing the economics of the Kingdom of God: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)*
- i) Rituals and Rubrics: *These are the shapers of my spirituality; aids to help me see and hear God.*
- j) Morning and Evening Worship: *The Recalibration of my soul so that I remember, Monday to Saturday that life begins in God and ends in Jesus Christ, and everything in-between is from the Holy Spirit.*

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:17-18)*

9. I would not know, I would not believe, I would not experience these new realities of a New World were it not for the people and that place called "*The Church*"

10. If we cannot see, and hear, and realize these realities, it's only for one reason: *Our lives are not yet immersed in the Bride of Christ, the City of God, the Temple of the Spirit ... the Local Church.*

11. But, God is with us, in His Church ...

*“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 fortress. Selah (Ps. 46:10-11)*

**12. John Newton:** *Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken (s. 4)*

*Savior, if of Zion's city I, through grace, a member am,  
let the world deride or pity, I will glory in thy name:  
fading is the world-ling's pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show;  
solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion's children know.*