

Bridge Over Troubled Water

All 3 ULC mission teams to Ecuador have taken a rather difficult hike to a beautiful waterfall. There is some distance involved, as well as elevation, but the hardest part is crossing several wooden bridges over a roaring and foaming river. These bridges are wet and slippery from rising mist, and swing back and forth.

Now, the bridges, of course, are safe, though they look somewhat scary to cross. The slippery feeling underfoot, combined with the strange sensation of their swinging, does cause one to look down once or twice at the angry water below. I think we could safely call each one of these, a bridge over troubled water.

Psalms 46 describes a similar scene for us. Only there are not only roaring and foaming waters, but there are also mountains which are shaking and trembling. The images here are of floods, storms, and earthquakes. Apparently, nature was as scary to people when Psalm 46 was written, as it can be for us today.

For example, in our own nation, recent hurricanes, flooding, and California fires, remind us of the power of nature, and how it can wreak havoc and cause turmoil in our lives. Nature has its way of shaking our lives, of roaring at us, and yes, there are those days where we are afraid of the wrath of the natural world.

Then, later in the Psalm, we see not only nature is in turmoil, but so are the nations. It says the nations are in uproar, meaning there is chaos, and the kingdoms totter, meaning they are unsteady. Apparently, nations and kingdoms were as scary to people when Psalm 46 was written, as they can be for us today.

It is no different for us in the United States. Recent angst due to harsh words between political parties, racial tensions, fires in our cities, and a contentious election season, are just a few examples

of the way our own culture, our own way of life, our own people, can actually make us afraid, right where we live.

Life in this world is simply this way. It roars and foams, shakes and trembles, and this causes us trouble, and makes us unsteady. I am not telling you anything you do not know. The coronavirus pandemic and Covid-19 have indeed shaken our world and caused us all sorts of personal trouble and political turmoil.

This virus has shaken our lives, kept us home for weeks, hurt us financially, changed how we work and attend school. Our worship services are impacted, and your confirmation has been adjusted, meaning no banquet, no reception after worship, no group picture, and important family members who could not attend.

Furthermore, today I am looking at a confirmation class that has experienced death like few others. Three of you have lost parents, others, uncles, still more of you, grandparents. If you combine these with other hardships you have experienced, it is safe to say, you know something about the troubles and turmoil of life.

Yet, even if the troubles of your life seem all too close to you, remember what Psalm 46 says. It says, even though mountains tremble and shake, even though waters roar and foam, even though nations are in uproar and kingdoms totter, and even though we experience great personal troubles, we will not fear.

Perhaps this sounds impossible to you with all that is going on in the world and in your life, that anyone could say, we will not fear. But that is what Psalm 46 is all about. It proclaims there is nothing nature or nations can do, and there is nothing that can happen to us in life, which can overcome the help we have in God.

In fact, Psalm 46 is your reminder today that you have a bridge over these troubled waters. Psalm 46 names this bridge by saying, God

is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. So, even though troubles and turmoil are very present to us in this world and in our lives, so is our helper, the Lord of hosts.

The language Psalm 46 uses, speaks of the protection and the strength of God. First, it uses the word refuge. Refuge means safe haven, or shelter from the pursuit of danger or trouble. I am reminded of visiting bird refuges in northern Minnesota, where ducks and geese can rest in still waters, without being shot.

During the hunting season, my dad and I would walk for fun through some of these protected places. It seems like the birds knew we could not touch them there. Psalm 46 wants us to see God in such light, as one in whom we can take refuge, because he is our safe haven, and he is our shelter from danger and trouble.

Second, it uses the phrase: Lord of hosts. It says: **The Lord of hosts is with us.** This phrase does not refer to some nice party God is hosting, but rather to the Lord's angel army. Indeed, the Bible speaks of God as having an angel army which fights to keep us safe, as well as to overcome evil in the world.

For example, we sang, "A Mighty Fortress" at the opening of the service, and indeed, the language in this hymn speaks of the Lord of hosts, battling for us, strongly defending and protecting us. This Lord is a very present help to us as we face trouble in this world. The song says: **But now a champion comes to fight.**

This means, we have a bridge over trouble water. The Lord Jesus Christ is our bridge. He helps us to cross over all the troubles and turmoil of this world, whether such troubles are from nature, of human origin, or from the power of evil itself. No matter what trouble is present, the Lord is even more present for us.

Simon and Garfunkel wrote and sang a song called, "Bridge Over Troubled Water" in 1970. I grew up listening to their albums, and this is one highly successful song. Many have tried to figure out what Simon and Garfunkel meant, but I have always understood the "bridge over troubled water" to be the Lord Jesus.

Let me share just a few words of the song with you:

When you're down and out; when you're on the street.

When evening falls so hard; I will comfort you.

I'll take your part; when darkness comes;

And pain is all around.

Like a bridge over troubled water; I will lay me down.

Like a bridge over troubled water; I will lay me down.

Whatever was meant by this song, I see what Psalm 46 sees, a God who is very present to help us in times of trouble. I see a Lord Jesus Christ, who does in fact lay down his life as a bridge over the troubled water of our lives, so that even if life roars loudly and we are completely shaken, he is beside us to save us.

So, whatever is shaking your life today, Psalm 46 hopes you face such troubles without fear. I don't mean you are never scared. I mean that you are fully confident in God, in the Lord Jesus Christ, who stands with you. Jesus will help you with your sadness and hurt, your loneliness and grief, and anything you fear.

Yes, the Lord is your very present help today, and in any time of trouble. And, because Jesus stands with you, you stand in his grace, you stand in his love, and you stand in his saving power. The Lord is your bridge over troubled water. He laid his life down for you, so you may cross over every bridge in your life.

Amen.