** Leader Guide**

**Sunday, May 26, 2019**

**The Exalted God is a Refuge for His People**

**Sermon Text:** Psalm 46

**Study Texts:** Psalm 125

**Sermon Recap**: The main idea of this week’s sermon is: In the midst of a broken world, the LORD of hosts is our help, and His people rest in Him. Take time before your growth group to review the key points you noted from today’s sermon.

**Sermon Connection:** The Bible is telling one grand story of God’s redemption through Jesus Christ. As we see in Psalm 46, God stands in defense of His people; He is our refuge, our very present help in times of trouble. It is important for us to take time and really meditate on the truths that emerge from texts like Psalm 46. One such truth is that God is our refuge. While many biblical texts take up this theme, Psalm 125 is particularly concerned with developing this truth for the people of God. Psalm 125 is written to instill confidence in the people God on the basis of God’s protection and comfort. Therefore, as we work through it, we should consider how the Psalm applies to us now: our church, our growth groups, our families, and our individual lives.

**Lesson Plan**

**Lesson Goal:** To see that our true hope in this world is in God alone.

**Lesson Points:** Working through the Psalm verse-by-verse.

**The Context:** Psalm 125 is a Psalm of Ascent, meaning that the Jews would sing it/recite it as they walked up the mountains to Jerusalem. This psalm is particularly appropriate given the mountainous terrain of Jerusalem. As the people labored to climb the mountains around the city, this psalm would have reminded them of God’s defense and protection.

**Opening Question:** When you are faced with a hardship, some form of suffering, or something that makes it seem as though your world is crumbling, where do you turn for hope?

A more pointed question might be, “Is your response to suffering and hardship a Christian response?”

**Transition Statement:** Biblical texts such as Psalm 46 and 125 help us to know why Christians can respond to hardship with calm, resolved hope.

**Psalm 125**

**1** *Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.*

***2*** *As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.*

***3*** *For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong.*

***4*** *Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts!*

***5*** *But those who turn aside to their crooked ways the Lord will lead away with evildoers!*

*Peace be upon Israel!*

**Study/Reflection Questions**

What does v. 1 mean when stating, “*Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion…*”? What is Mount Zion? See also Ps. 87:2-6; 99:2; Col. 3:3.

Throughout Scripture, and particularly throughout the Psalms, Mount Zion is used to speak of the place where God dwells. Such a place, being out of reach from all, except for those whom God allows, is a place of perfect safety. Because God is there, it is immovable; it is off limits to evil. And because of this imagery, the Psalmist states confidently, “*Those who trust in the Lord...cannot be moved…*” Paul sums up this idea nicely in Col. 3:3 stating, *“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”* The life of the believer is safely held with God in Mount Zion.

How does the imagery and geography of v. 2 help to drive home the idea of God’s protection?

If you have ever been to Jerusalem, you understand the imagery of the verse. Jerusalem sits atop a mountain and is surrounded on all sides by mountains. The city is, in a very real sense, in the middle of a natural fortress. The geography of the land offers the city immense protection from invaders. The Psalmist calls our attention to this by saying, “*As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people…”* But, in a greater sense than a physical mountain, the Psalmist goes on to remind that God’s protection of His people is forever. So, whereas Jerusalem has been conquered many times throughout history despite the mountainous terrain, God will never be conquered.

How can the repeating/memorizing of a Psalm like 125/46 help the people of God find comfort in the midst of hardship, struggle, or strife?

It would have been very likely that many of the Jews would have had this Psalm (and all of the Ascent Psalms) memorized. As they crested a nearby peak and laid their eyes on the Holy City, this Psalm would have come to mind like a breath of fresh air in an arid desert. These Psalms are gifts to the people of God for times of hardship. They remind us of God’s faithfulness, His stead & unwavering presence, and His promises to save. As we memorize them, the Holy Spirit is able to utilize our recall abilities in times of need.

Verse 3 states, “*For the sceptre of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous..*.” Knowing that God’s people have experienced times of exile, ruin, and persecution at the hands of the wicked, what does this verse mean in light of the whole Bible?

It is important to understand the nature of biblical promises in light of the entire Bible. This verse does not mean that Jerusalem would never experience evil, never experience being conquered, and never experience anything but godly leadership. We know this because all of these bad things have happened to Jerusalem throughout its history. When we ask the question of meaning to the entire Bible, we see that this promise from God has an eternal aspect to it. God will not let the wicked go on forever; He will judge the unrighteous. As Paul notes, “...*God is not mocked…*” (Gal. 6:7).

How does reflecting on the truth of v. 3 help us to better understand our own place in modern culture? Things like: mainline protestant denominations abandoning the true gospel, the marginalization of the Christian faith in America and around the world, and a generation that is weakening the gospel message, etc.

If we take Psalm 125:3 as a literal promise from God to be fulfilled each moment of each day in this fallen life, we are left with no explanation and the feeling of hopelessness. On the contrary, when we understand the eschatological nature of the verse—that is, its pointing to the end of days—we gain a much better understanding of the world. Even though we see many evil things happening all around us, v. 3 remains as true as it always has. We can take stock of the world and its ills and with confidence say, “*For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous…”*

Verse 4 is a prayer. What does the content of this prayer and its location in the Psalm teach us about a Christian response to hardship?

At this point in the Psalm, the people of God have reflected on God as their refuge; they have been honest about the wickedness that seems ever present in the world, and now they pause to do the most essential act of the Christian faith: They pray. This is where we see the true refuge of God being enjoyed by the people of God in this life. While we do not yet approach the physical throne of God, we can confidently approach the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). A Christian response to hardship is to seek refuge in God through prayer and godly living.

Verses 4-5 compare two types of people. Who are they, and why is this not works-based salvation?

The two types of people compared to in these verses are: the good and the bad. Everyone in human history can be fitted into one of these two categories. And here is what they mean. Those who are good and do good are those who have faithfully trusted in God for their salvation. The Psalmist is not saying God serves as a refuge for those of us who deserve it because of our good actions. Rather, he is speaking of the goodness that comes through faith in God for salvation. Those who are good and do good are those in whom the Spirit of God dwells; He is actively working out the gospel in their lives.

The other groups of people, the bad, are those who reject God. As the Psalmist notes, only punishment awaits those who turn aside from the Lord and pursue their own crooked ways. They have no hope of refuge when suffering comes. There is no peace for them.

**The Big Picture - Peace Be Upon the People of God**

The closing of Psalm 125 reads, “*Peace be upon Israel.*” In the context of the Psalm, the meaning is this, “The peace of God—the shalom of God—rests only upon those who love God and have been saved through His redeeming work.” As we zoom out from Psalm 125 and consider the entire biblical message, we see that the peace of God rests on those who have been saved through the gospel work of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, just as the people of Israel would recite Psalm 125 as they looked up to Jerusalem, the City of God, the New Testament Church should recite this Psalm as they/we look to the finished work of Jesus Christ, through Whom we have access to the Eternal City of God which awaits us in heaven.

**Application Questions**

* How are you trusting in God in times of hardship? How might you need to repent of false trust?
* How are you leading your family to trust in God’s salvation?
* Knowing that the Jews would have sung this Psalm together as they approached Jerusalem, how might you lead your family and your growth group to do the same?
* How are you teaching the world that God saves in the midst of your hardship and struggles?