

Where Is God During This Pandemic?

Psalm 46:1-2,10

God is our refuge and strength, a helper who can always be found in times of trouble. That is why we will not fear when the earth dissolves and when the mountains tumble into the heart of the sea...Be still, and know that I am God.

It began a world away from us. Now it's here. It has brought the world and our lives to a screeching halt. It has disrupted our ability to gather together for worship, to go to school, and to just do things. It has caused panic and mass hysteria where people are snatching up supplies right and left leaving shelves empty. It has sent our nation's economy in a downward spiral. People have been quarantined or have quarantined themselves. When you are out in public, people turn and look at you for just coughing. A new catchphrase now dominates our speech as a result of its arrival. It has been the cause of sickness and for some even death. You know what I'm talking about. The COVID-19 virus has done all of that as this pandemic just seems to have rapidly taken over the world leading many to wonder, "Where is God?" "Why is he allowing this virus to spread the way it has?" "What is God doing about it?" Today as we look at just a few verses from Psalm 46, we are pointed to the Almighty God and see that he is being the God we need. **(read text)**

When you hear that word "refuge" what comes to your mind? Are you thinking about your house, a big sturdy building, a castle or fortress? A refuge is a place where you seek shelter. It is a place where you have security. It's a place of safety where you are saved from the dangers which threaten you. That is God. God is your refuge that saves you. Through Jesus who died on a cross and rose from the grave, you are brought into the refuge of God's saving grace. You are kept safe from the enemy of sin having the forgiveness of sins. You have the security of life in heaven. God is your refuge and your strength.

I don't know about you, but I'm feeling pretty weak and helpless right now. I can't worship with you here. I can't send my daughter to her normal school day. I can't really go anywhere because everything is more or less shut down. At times I can barely find certain things I need for my family like bread and milk. I can take all the precautions possible, but I could still get the virus. I feel helpless. I feel weak. I need a refuge who is also my strength to strengthen me. That strength is God himself. God says to us in Isaiah 41:10, **"Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be overwhelmed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."**

God's strength is what has saved us from the very real weakness of our sins. We are weak and helpless to save ourselves. Since he has saved us, he continues to strengthen our faith by pointing to the cross of Jesus. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians reflecting on the thorn of his flesh. He said, **"Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that he would take it away from me. And he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will be glad to boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may shelter me...For whenever I am weak, then am I strong." (12:8-10)** Returning to the grace of God in Christ Jesus, God strengthens us in our weakness of faith and we look to him as our helper in times of trouble.

When I was child, one of my favorite shows was "Mister Rogers Neighborhood". Perhaps some of you grew up with him too or maybe have seen some old episodes on You Tube. I recently finished reading a biography about the life and work of Fred Rogers. In that book, the author mentioned something Rogers said regarding scary times. In fact, it's one of his more famous quotes. Rogers said, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" If Fred Rogers was still alive today and he spoke to children about scary things like this

virus, what helpers would he say to look for? Perhaps people like doctors, nurses, other hospital staff, grocery store workers just to name a few. Certainly these people are helpers who are trying to help others in our communities so that sick people are taken care of and the virus is contained. These helpers are also those who are working to make sure we still have basic needs of life. Ultimately though, who is the helper to look for? It is our perfect helper - God.

God is the one who helps us in times of trouble. God is present everywhere. He has not distanced himself from the world he has made. He hasn't left us to figure out how to handle this pandemic ourselves. As our refuge and strength, he is the God who is right there with us as the perfect help we can turn to when everything seems like it is spinning out of control. He is helping us by remaining in control of the world and all that is happening. He is helping us at work through those people in our communities. He is even helping in ways we do not always see or know. God is indeed our refuge to save, our strength when we are weak, and our help in times of trouble. Therefore we have no reason to fear.

As our God who is all of those things for us, he picks us up and holds us in his mighty arms like a parent holding a fearful child. Calmly he says to you today in light of all the troubles and scary things that are happening in our world, "Be still, and know that I am God. Be calm. Don't be anxious or fearful. I have already saved you. Trust that I am still helping you. The world may look like it's falling apart, but I am in control." When we leave all our troubles and concerns in the hands of God - our refuge, our strength, our helper, when we trust God to be exactly who he is, only then are we able to truly be still and answer those questions with a heart of faith. When we wonder where God is and what God is doing, faith leads us to confess: "God's got this!"

Yet one question remains for us to consider today. "If God's got this, why did he send this virus to affect so many people and disrupt our lives?" Well first of all, understand that God is not the cause of sickness and disease. Sin is the cause of all sickness. Yet God who is in control still allows all of this to happen. Why? I won't pretend to know the mind of God. I can't answer the question completely, but here's what I can tell you: God allows stuff like sickness to come into our lives and affect our world always with a greater, eternally beneficial purpose in mind by drawing us closer to him seeking refuge, strength, and help from him alone.

Sometimes we need the reminder that there is no one else to turn to, but the Almighty God himself who is a refuge to save, a strength for the weak, and a helper always present in times of trouble. When you think God is not here or that he isn't helping us, look to Jesus and in him you see God your security, and strength, and help. Showing you his nail marked hands, he speaks from his Word, "My child, be still. I was nailed to a cross for you. I died there to save you. I live victoriously for you. See the marks of my love for you and know that I am God. I've got this." Friday, no matter what happens, you are never alone. Amen