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## **“Be Still”**

Sermon Series: *BE!*, No. 3

*January 26, 2025*

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### **Psalm 46:1-11**

*1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*

*4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. 5 God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. 6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. 7 The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

*8 Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. 10 He says, “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 Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

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Psalm 46 is our text today...turn back there with me, if you would to the Bible’s songbook...the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm.

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We began this series by saying that ours, here in the United States, is definitely a **doing-centered society**; and though there’s nothing at all wrong with being a **doer**, for us to live **balanced, healthy lives...and...**for the things that we **produce**...for that which we **do** to be balanced and healthy...we need to make sure that we have a good and right and godly sense of **being**.

Certainly God wants good **products**, but God also **knows** that good **products** come from good **factories**.

Good **water** comes from good **springs**.

So God calls His people to develop and to live in a healthy state of **being** so we can **do truly good** things...**and**...so we can navigate our **doing-centered** world in godly ways.

What does a healthy state of being, then, involve?

God says that His people should **be...prepared**; and while the Bible speaks of being prepared for many important things, it especially emphasizes our being prepared for Jesus’ return. We said,

two weeks ago, that being ready to see Jesus brings context and perspective to every other part of life.

God wants us to live in a state of preparedness.

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Then last Sunday we said God also tells us that His people should *be...faithful*...like the believers at Smyrna were faithful...to Jesus and to His will...and especially in hard times...especially in the face of persecution.

Be faithful.

Making preparedness and faithfulness our default positions helps to keep us on an even keel and gives our days and years an orderly and sustainable cadence.

God says, “Be prepared. Be faithful,” and today, a third component of a healthy state of being: “Be still.”

Be still.

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Now, let me say...if it's true that the most poignant sermons are those that come out of the preacher's personal experience, then this one would have to be up there on the list.

I knew that I was going to be out of the office one day...all day...*last* week. I also knew that I would be out of town for about ten days beginning tomorrow, which meant I had a lot to get done in a short amount of time. So the plan for last week was to work way ahead and try to knock stuff out.

But then...last week actually happened, didn't it? There were all the complications of the weather, which then created issues, both here and with my mom in Ohio, that I needed to tend to. And then I had a vehicle issue and then a plumbing issue and then several urgent things came up here at church...and it seemed like the more I tried to think and write and pray – about being still, remember – the more distracted I became.

I was preparing for today, but I could not get any peace at all about what it was that I was preparing. I started in one direction, and then I deleted that, and then I started in another direction, and I deleted all that.

I got going in a third direction and it wasn't long before I knew that wasn't it either, but I didn't delete that one. I think that was worth holding on to for some other day...and I'll let you know when that day comes by.

But still, at that point, on a week I *needed* to work ahead, I was *way* further *behind* than I would have been on a *normal* week.

I thought of a saying one of my aunts used to say, “The ‘hurrieder’ I go, the ‘behinder’ I get.”

Then, last Wednesday night, sometime in the middle of the night, I was lying in bed awake. Usually when I'm awake at night, there's a reason...there's something specific on my mind. But you know that night, there was truly nothing...nothing at all on my mind.

I know some of you are thinking, “Oh...that sounds about normal for you,” and I want you to know I forgive you for that.

But in that moment...lying there, the Lord said clearly, “So, how are you going to teach anyone anything about being still?”

And that’s all He had to say. I knew exactly what He meant.

I mean...if you have to wait until the middle of the night to be able to ask someone that question, then that means it’s a question that that someone needs to be asked.

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God declares, there in verse 10, “***Be still and know that I am God.***”

***“Be still.”***

That’s the way most translations put it, though I found some that say, “***cease striving,***” or, “***be quiet.***”

The Message paraphrase says, “***Step out of the traffic.***”

The Hebrew word there is *harpu*, which translates as a combination of the ideas of, “letting go, surrendering, quieting ourselves, sinking down,” and, “relaxing.”

So that was the message of this ancient Jewish song: “***Let go of your striving, your tension, all that noisy worry that has you in it’s grip...let go of all that and remember ...realize...know...that God is God.***”

That was a very practical and necessary thing for Jewish people to remember.

And unfortunately, it still is.

About a week ago, my son, Ben, sent me an article about a recent survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League.

They surveyed over 58,000 adults from 103 countries and territories representing 94% of the world’s adult population, and the survey found that 46% of them displayed anti-semitic...anti-Jewish attitudes.

And that reality is pretty much why the Psalmist wrote Psalm 46: a huge part of the world, and I’d imagine that even more back then than now, resents the Jewish people.

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I told Ben, “Well, I believe that and I’m not surprised by it, and though ***we*** may not ***feel*** it as brutally as many around our world do today, the fact is, the ***very same*** is true for ***Christians***...and the reason is simple: our fallen world does not like it when any one person or group stands up and declares, “I know the way.”

Or in Jesus’ case, declares, “I ***am*** the way.”

No matter how kindly or graciously or genuinely lovingly they’ve said that, anyone who dares to say it, in most places of our world, gets beaten up by the unsaved, non-Christian world around them.

And that is nothing new. That is precisely why the world has beaten up the Jews ever since Abraham declared that Yahweh – the Lord – was the only God.

The unsaved world, unwittingly operating under the influence of Satan, just cannot accept that sort of exclusivism.

That is, though, the assertion of God...it always has been...and now, in our New Testament world, it is the assertion of God's son, Jesus.

God...Yahweh...the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob says that He is **the** God...the **only** God, and there is no other God but Him. There is no other way or truth or life.

That is God's position, and that is God's people's position.

And so the natural person...the unredeemed person either spits in the face of that idea, and sooner or later, spits in the face of the person who suggests that...**or**...they come to embrace it and to realize that they need God's grace for themselves.

To the Jew, God is the only God.

To the Christian, Jesus is the only Savior...the only way to the only God.

That's the position of God, and of all who follow God in our world, and the writer of this Psalm understood that.

He understood the Jewish predicament, and so the purpose of half of this psalm is to assure God's people that, in a world where their assertions and declarations about God would be heavily challenged, God will indeed prevail.

God will prevail over...verse 6 there...the world's chaotic nations and falling kingdoms. He is powerful to make wars cease...even to destroy the instruments of battle.

So even though the nations rage against them, God's people have no reason to fear.

That's **half** the reason the writer wrote this Psalm.

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The other half of the reason involves the instability of the earth itself.

Because of the fall, not only was the stability of **people** upended, the stability of the **earth itself** was upended, and so now we have things like floods and storms and earthquakes and fires...and these sorts of things were the **other** threateningly unpredictable components of the lives of the ancient peoples.

So powerful were these things in their lives that many cultures presumed that those phenomena represented gods themselves – gods of the seas and the skies and the rains and the winds.

Yet God assures His people that none of these weather related events, any more than the angry, warring, godless nations, could ever truly harm the son or daughter of God.

Because of the sin of our world, these troubles and calamities are all with us...as we all understand...as we've all recently seen in parts of our own nation.

But they cannot do us any lasting harm, because God is far greater, far bigger, far more powerful than them all.

Verse 1: ***“God is our refuge and strength...an ever-present help in trouble.”***

God does not deny that there is trouble...real trouble...in our world.

But in the midst of it, God is our refuge and our strength and our always-present help, and because of that, come what may, we need not fear.

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OK – we know all that, maybe, up here (head.) But how do we know it...here...in our hearts...in our gut? How do we appropriate this fearlessness such that it is the settled reality of our day-to-day lives?

We have to ***know*** that God is God.

We have to make that reality the default position of our thinking...our understanding...of the way we see and respond to the challenges and concerns and tragedies of life.

We have to know that God is God. And to do that...to get to that place and to stay in that place involves this...***being still***.

***“Be still and know that I am God.”***

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Now, it’s important to mention that this “being still” is not a...laying around - passively floating through life - doing nothing...sort of being still.

This is choice we make that leads to an action we take that results in a healthy state of being.

Knowing that God is God is the result of our choosing to *harpu* – our choosing to cease striving and to let go of...to surrender the pressures and concerns and threats that life brings.

*Harpu* is choosing to do those things and through *harpu* we know that God is God.

But, often, though, we get this backward.

Often we think that God’s imposition of His power and sovereignty in some divine, miraculous way causes us or forces us or allows us to *harpu* – to cease our striving.

But God’s saying here that our choosing to be still...our choosing to relax and surrender is what reminds us of His power...which then empowers us to live fearlessly.

You see the difference?

We tend to think that if God would only do something...if God would only be God in this situation, then we could relax.

But God’s saying that we need to relax...and then we’ll know that God is God in this situation.

We put ourselves in a place of trust, and God makes up the difference in our lives.

And you see, that’s walking...that’s living...in faith.

That’s what Moses said to the people as they were running from the Egyptians...the same idea. He said, ***“The Lord will fight for you...all you need to do is be still.”***

Faith means the stillness comes before God’s action.

And that stillness...that surrender...our letting go of those things that threaten us...that's the way to a life without fear.

It's a choice we have to **make** of how we're going to **be**, and just like the choices of being prepared and being faithful, it's a choice we have to make from time to time.

Whenever we detect in ourselves fearfulness or anxiousness or worry or hopelessness, that's the signal that it's time to make, again, the conscious choice to let that go and be still...to enter into this state of surrender and release, so that we can know...not just up here (head,) but down here (heart)...that God is God...that God is in control of things.

If God is God of the weather and of the nations that rage against us, then certainly He's God of whatever it is that concerns us today.

God is God of our family, of our parents and our children and grandchildren and all of their circumstances.

God is God of our health.

God is God of our nation and her leadership and direction.

He's God of our bills and our friends and our jobs and our futures.

He's God of the largest and the smallest details of our lives.

And while we may well know all of that here (head,) it takes *harpu*...being still before Him...surrendering and letting go of those things...to know that God is God here (heart.)

I wonder if anyone might need to do that this morning...to *harpu*...to let go, surrender, quiet ourselves...be still...so we can know who God really is...so He can take away the fear we have of even the most fearsome situations of our world.

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To be still is a decision we make about how we're going to be...a decision about the baseline attitude of our life.

But it's also a decision we have to re-make from time to time.

I said that one sense of the Hebrew word, *harpu*, was to "sink down."

I imagine that as the difference between sitting on a hard, formal dining room chair and sitting in a huge, overstuffed couch.

Where are we most relaxed? When we're sitting **in** something and not **on** something, right? When we sink down into a comfortable, secure, embracing place.

That's part of the image of being still before God...which leads to knowing that He is God...which allows us to face anything and everything life brings without fear.

Regardless of whether they're literal or figurative, God is God of all the storms of this broken world.

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Maybe you've never made the decision to trust God like that...to be still, so you can know that God is God. You need to know that because of Jesus and His grace, you can make that decision today about the direction of your life.

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Maybe you know that God is God here (*touches head*) but you're dealing with something that's hard, and you need to know it, again, here (*taps heart*.)

You need to sink down...to be still...to reset your state of being.

If that's you this morning, there's no shame in that. As time goes by and as Jesus' return gets closer, the enemy's work in our world is only getting more intense, so the tensions in the lives of God-followers are only increasing.

We all have our limit, and unless we learn to deal with our fears and tensions, they will break us.

People try all sorts of things to deal with their fears and their tensions...drugs, alcohol, hobbies, holidays, go on vacation or go buy something...but God says the only way that really works is to be still...to sink down and know that He is God.

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I don't even remember what the situation was, but I remember waking up one morning so tense that my head wasn't touching my pillow. That was a moment I had to choose, again, very literally, to *harpu* ...to sink down...to sink down into the pillow again...and know that God is God.

Do you need to be still...to sink down in God's presence today? Let's bow our heads. We're going to close in two ways.

The first is this: the psalmist wants us to feel a relief...a relaxation...a realization that God is God of this situation... of this situation...of this situation.

There is a quietness and a relief. A sigh kind of a moment. So, you can make an altar where you are or you're welcome to come to this one here. But if you need to release something to the Lord...if you need to *harpu*...to sink down...to let go so that you can be still and really know in your heart that God is God, I want you to do that.

We want to give a moment to let the Spirit give you that sense of calm release because He wants us all to live in that place...to sense that and feel that.

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And now here's the second part of how we're going to close. That God works with us like this is great news. It is victorious; it is strong because God is strong. This psalm is the scriptural underlayment for "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and we're going to sing that in victory and in triumph...as our way of saying, "Yes, we know God that You are God, and we are walking forward without fear no matter what life brings. You are our refuge and our strength...our Fortress that nothing can damage."

**Closing Prayer:**

Jesus, thank You for making a way to God the Father...and for helping us to know that we can be still before You...we can relax before You...we can know that You are God and we need not fear no matter what life brings.

**Closing Song :** “A Mighty Fortress” – a hymn based on Psalm 46.

**Closing Word & Benediction:**

One other thing about this Psalm...certainly it's a word of encouragement to those of us who know God to rest in Him and to trust Him with our days.

But you know, this Psalm also serves as a warning to those who would try to rebel against God...a warning that says, “Try as you might, you will neither overcome Him nor His people, and the suffering you brought to them on earth will be yours to suffer for eternity...unless you repent...unless you *harpu* – unless you will be still and realize...be still and know that only God is God.

May the Lord speak to and convict those who need to repent today, and may He give His deep peace to all of us who know already that He is God.

Thanks for coming to worship today. The Lord bless and keep you. Amen.

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