

Reformation 2020. “BE STILL” – Psalm 46

“A Fortress.” That’s what our God is for us, who have been brought to know Jesus and trust in Him.

One might think that the reason this Psalm was such a “go to” for a child of God like Martin Luther, with what he faced in life, must be a phrase like that one: *a fortress; the God of Jacob is a fortress for us who through faith are in Jesus secure*. And if not that phrase, then maybe one like it would’ve had the same kind of appeal, describing God as “our refuge” or “our strength.” There’s no part in this Psalm that is lacking in offering assurance and comfort to a Christian’s heart. But there’s another phrase that rivals the ones I’ve already mentioned for imagery and impact, to convey God’s power and bring us certainty and peace. It’s this:

“Be still.”

Would you go with me briefly to where this phrase – “Be still” – appears in another book? I bring this example up not because I like the book so, though I do. It’s because I think it really points us toward the power - the importance and the impact – behind this *otherwise seemingly little statement* “Be still.” I wonder if any of you from your childhood memory know where I’m going.

“That very night in Max’s room a forest grew – and grew – and grew until his ceiling hung with vines and the walls became the world all around – and an ocean tumbled by with a private boat for Max – and he sailed off through night and day - and in an out of weeks – and almost over a year – to where the wild things are. And ... they roared their terrible roars – and gnashed their terrible teeth – and rolled their terrible eyes – and showed their terrible claws - till Max said, ‘Be still’ and tamed them...”

I’ve loved to read that part. The children always seemed to delight in it. The forces lined up: Terrible! Roaring! Gnashing! Clawing! Anger and opposition. And the reply? “Be still!” And the amassed forces acquiesce. They comply. They concede and stop, like that (in the snap of the fingers). It’s epic! really, if you think about it. How the scene pivots, turns on this phrase. And the child’s heart, which maybe the first time hearing the story was scared, suddenly is lifted and lightened and given that feeling of “yay!”

If you just pause, at that moment before and after “be still,” and take in that change in the scene, you see the power – you see the impact of this not-at-all-little statement.

Dive back into *real life*. You and I understand why there’s a longing, in real life, for such a power: to turn a scene (to turn what’s happening) from terrible-roaring-scary, to under control & it’s-alright.

Just to make that point... Maurice Sendak – the author of *Where the Wild Things Are* once explained: ‘Childhood is a tricky business.’ He went on: ‘Usually, something goes wrong.’ Sendak grew up in Brooklyn. He was the son of Polish immigrants. Because of his own experiences, he explained that he didn’t see childhood through rose-colored glasses. [See: www.bustle.com/articles/27544-maurice-sendaks-where-the-wild-things-are-taught-us-these-7-vital-life-lessons.] This view comes out in his beloved fictional tale. There’s real tension in the story of Max. But then there’s this amazing outcome, and there’s the “good feels” to go with it. So there is a gritty, relatable aspect to the story, and at the same time the happy ending everyone desires.

But someone might think, “This is only possible in the fictional world - where forces so great yield to an individual’s command. For who in the real world holds such power, to affect that kind of world-changing outcome?”

You know the answer, if you’ve heard the Word of God in front of us. “**Be still,**” the Lord says, “**and know that I am God...**”

Think through with me all that this means, all that is involved here. There's more than one might at first see. "Be still" really conveys a message that looks in two directions, kind of like two sides of one coin.

First, looking toward the opposition... "Be still," spoken from the Lord Almighty to His enemies, says loud and clear the truth: "I'm in charge! And you must listen!" And in the end, He will say the final "Be still!" to all of them, "Drop your arms! Stop your attacks!" And that rebuke will bring an end to all the efforts of rebel forces at work against God's people.

Then turn the perspective, and hear the Lord's "Be Still" spoken to His people. "Be Still. Yes, even amidst the troubles you are going through. Know that I am still God, Almighty, and in control. And I am with you. And I have helped, and I am helping, and I will help you in all you face."

And there's more still, even more than that in the Lord's "Be Still." The Lord says to His people, "Be still. Let your soul rest. You are at peace with me. And that means eternal peace with me is also yours."

One thing I want for each of you today, along with our dive into this place in Psalm 46, is the assurance: "that's what my God says *to me*." That "Be still." That word of "Peace." So that you know the "our refuge" and the "we will not fear" and "God with us" throughout the rest of the Psalm are yours.

And the place I'd direct your eyes to find such personal application is: look for the individual mentioned in the Psalm and make the connection between you and him. Did you catch how there is an individual mentioned by name? Jacob.

If you know anything more about Jacob, you might recall... Jacob deceived his ag-ed, blind father into thinking he was his brother. He received the blessing Isaac thought he was giving to Esau. And because the way Jacob went about that, he received a brother's fury along with a father's blessing. And later in Jacob's home we hear about his own favoritism toward one son, Joseph, hurting his other sons something awful.

God in Psalm 46 calls himself: The God of Jacob. That one? Deceiver? Root of such grief and strife to those close to him. The one with these failures.

Let's connect ourselves now. Think of a time you have failed. Not missing a turn, getting your family lost. Not a bad day at work that caused everyone to have to stay late, to work extra to fix up your flub. Go to a time, call to mind an example of one of your failures in your life as a child of God: where you knew what was good, and right, and God-pleasing, and instead you did the opposite, straying into sin.

Now how many of you would want that to be typed out in a detailed account, and have it published, for others to read, study, and learn from? Well, that's what we have with Jacob's life. And we learn something from seeing his name in this Psalm.

The exercise of having you think of one of your failures was to connect how: we share the same story with Jacob, as far as our relationship with God and our standing with God. Jacob trusted in the Lord's Promise: to take away his sin, to rescue him from sin's guilt and punishment, to make him right and holy before our God, and to bring him peace with God.

What an amazing comfort that God describes himself, for us, as the God of Jacob! "The God of Jacob is our fortress. The LORD Almighty is with us. God for us!"

Yes, He is God almighty who uses that power in our behalf. He was willing to go to war for you and me. He came down from heaven for that very purpose. God the Son came. In Vs.7 & 11 the Hebrew for the phrase "with us" is "Immanu." If that sounds familiar, it is because it is the first two-thirds of one of the names for Jesus: "Immanuel." God with us. Why did God take on flesh, become like us, and live among

us? To go to war against temptation in our place. He faced every kind that we face, but He lived without falling – without sin. The battle Plan to conquer sin and death led him on to the cross for you and me. He faced sins punishment; he took it all there. All out of love for you and me. Just like his love for Jacob.

Our God has fought for you, to gift you a right standing with Him, which you and I could have had in no other way. He tells us: trust in me, my saving work completed for you. “Everyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.” That’s you. Then, “Be still,” the Lord says to you, “You have my peace. Dear child, be at rest. You’re safe in me.”

And when you face death, you need not fear it.

Jesus, during Holy Week, taught about the fact that there is life after death for His people. He referred back in the Old Testament to where He calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Those were references after they had died. He explained then: He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

This Psalm was recorded long after Jacob’s death. But the Lord calls Himself still the God of Jacob. What does that mean? Jacob was living on, his soul with God in heaven. Hell did not claim him. And the grave on the last day will not hold in his body either. Because Jesus will raise it, just like He had power to rise Himself – leaving death in the dust.

That’s the assurance you have too, dear child of God, through faith in Jesus.

Though the devil will go right on accusing you in life, he cannot take away the peace you have in Jesus.

- Sins forgiven through Jesus
- You are at peace with God.
- Be still in that assurance.

And be still in the assurance that the same One, who loves you that much, will care for you and hold you through all that the world throws at you in life.

We still face troubles and enemies in life. Some of the troubles come even from holding on to Jesus. But we need not fear. The Lord is ever-present. He is right here. Not distant. By our side. Holding us in His hand. “Be still.”

Jude vs24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you faultless in the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and to all eternity. Amen.