

# “We Will Not Fear...”

## Psalm 46

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SERMON 1947

by Michael David Henson

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Our sermon text is from Psalm 46:1-3, “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. 2Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**There are two kinds of fear. There is a good and godly fear, and then there is an improper fear which needs to be removed. The improper fear is that of the devil.** 1 Peter 5:8b says, “...your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” The devil’s roaring are his lies and murderous threats. He desires to lead you into fear so that he makes you his slave.

**First**, the devil seeks to convince you that **God is a tyrant who needs to be feared.** He says that your God does not have your best interests in mind, but you need to fear that your God would harm you, or in the very least withhold good things from you. Satan told Adam and Eve, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

His first defense is to teach you to run away from God and disobey Him. Satan tells you to **disobey this selfish and jealous God, who only wants to enslave you.** But then you will need to fear His wrath and punishment. God punishes those who don’t follow his rules. Satan leads you to disobey because God’s actions of enslavement need to be feared. God doesn’t want you to be free.

**Second**, if you feel the need to continue to listen to God. Then fine, satan will spur you on to **work to make yourself righteous** by keeping his rules. At the same time, satan will stir up a fear that you have never pleased God. Work harder and you might. Next satan **waves suffering and death before your eyes.** If you think that you may want to trust in Christ, then it is the fear of death that will make you think twice. You can’t love your neighbor and give stuff away, you might need that stuff. God is not going to take care of you. You can’t go to church and miss out on work or fun stuff to do. You will get behind and not have all that you need. You only go around once, you better get all that you can now. If someone wrongs you, get revenge now. Things will not work out in the end.

Furthermore, your sins are terrible and great, you need to fear the punishment of hell. There is no such thing as a free lunch, much less salvation. You are not saved. Just look at yourself, you are not holy. You need to get your own righteousness. That suffering you are going through means God hates you. And no one has ever come back from death, Be scared!

In response to these lies and threats, our merciful and loving God has not been

silent. **The Lord has left us a record which teaches us the saving truth.** The Lord has even responded to these false satanic claims so that we might be saved and set free.

**Before our fall into sin,** the Lord sought to warn us and keep us from these disastrous consequences. He told Adam, "...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). We did not listen.

**Now that sin has entered into the world** and death through sin, our God desires to be our refuge and strength. He has provided for us a solution. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He {God} Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." **Our loving God took on our humanity** that He might destroy the power of death. In the person of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our God paid the penalty which we deserved. The devil claims that we ought to fear the power of death, which He imposed upon us through our fall into sin. But Jesus released us from the fear of death.

As for satan's claim that our God simply wants to make us slaves, Romans 8:15 says, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" Through the forgiveness of sins given in our baptism, we have become adopted children of God, not slaves! Our God does not desire our slavish works, He desires to change our hearts so that we give Him our love and thankfulness. He does not desire to be our master, but our Father who art in heaven.

The holy record of the prophets and apostles, the old and new testaments seek to present us with the truth concerning these **two contradictory claims of fear.** Our Lord Jesus said in Luke 12:4-5, "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

The believer in Christ need not fear the devil. Christ has defeated death, and promised to give eternal life to all believe in Christ. There is a resurrection from the dead. When satan roars and threatens, we must call his bluff. Though satan may kill our body, he cannot ultimately do us any harm. Only God has the power to cast us into hell and that very God is on our side. Psalm 46:1-3 says, "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. 2Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling." Roar all that you like, satan, but I will not fear.

When the priest Zechariah heard about the promise of the birth of the Savior, He confidently declared His Christian faith with the words of the Benedictus. Jesus Christ is the "horn of salvation... to grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, **Might serve Him without fear,** In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life" (Luke 1:74-75). Jesus has freed us from the fear of our enemies—the devil, the temptation to sin, and the fear of death. We will not fear. Do we serve God? Yes, but without fear of punishment. We serve God in love and thanksgiving.

**It was the fear of death that led Dr. Martin Luther to enter the monastery.**

Having visited his home in Manfeld, Luther was returning to Erfurt when a great storm came upon him. He was sure that in the midst of the lightning and thunderbolts that he was going to die. He cried out, "St. Anne, mother of Mary, save me! I promise to become a monk." Though Luther gave everything that He had to try and remove the temptation to sin and the fear of death, he could not do it. The gospel message of the free forgiveness of sins was not being proclaimed. It had been covered over with work-righteousness. Even in the monastery, Luther remained in slavery to fear.

But then, having been sent to Wittenberg to study the Word of God and preach upon it, **Luther discovered that the righteousness which God requires is the very righteousness of Christ which God freely gives.** Luther read St. Paul Epistle to the Romans, chapter 1:16-17. It says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" **That gospel message was a thunderbolt from heaven which answered the first thunderbolt.**

Luther learned that there is salvation promised for those who believe! This preaching of the gospel is God's power creating faith in our heart. Jesus Christ's perfect suffering and death is the righteousness which we need to be saved. That salvation is being revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We are saved by God's grace through faith alone as taught by the Scripture alone. God is not against us. He is for us. "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear...." Everything finally made sense to Luther. Even the Old Testament was proclaiming this gospel message. When Jesus came into Jerusalem to suffer and die, the people used Zechariah's words says, "**Fear not**, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt" (John 12:15 and Zech 9:9).

That first thunderbolt made Luther determined to enter a monastery and work for his salvation. Nevertheless, that second Gospel thunderbolt made Luther bold to preach the Gospel even in the face of death. The Gospel message changes hearts so that men professing faith in Christ, boldly enter the kingdom of heaven. In today's Holy gospel (Matthew 11:12-15), it says, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." Luther is one of those who clung to the Gospel message and refused to be deterred. Though they excommunicated him and threatened him with death, he had taken hold of salvation and would not allow it to be ripped from his hands. Luther was made fearless by the Gospel message.

It may sound funny to our ears, but this kind of bold action is described by the Holy Scriptures as "godly fear." In other words those who fear and love the gracious and merciful God of the Scriptures, need not fear anything else. Those who have a godly fear, which is nothing other than faith in Jesus Christ, will be used by God to do marvelous things. Hebrews 11:7 speaks of Noah. It says, "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." Even our Savior is said to have godly fear, so that He went to the cross for us. Hebrews 5:7 says that Jesus, "...who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries

and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His **godly fear.**”

The reason for which we have gathered this day is to give thanks for the blessings of the Reformation! We have been made bold through the restoration of the everlasting gospel, as today’s Epistle from Revelation 14 calls it. Like Luther, we have been released from the fear of death, the fear of sin, and the fear of the devil. With godly fear, we can stand up to any threat. Hebrews 13:6 says, “So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”

We have taken hold of the Gospel and we will hazard body and life for the sake of it. “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. 2Therefore we will not fear....” Should an enemy seek to turn us aside by fear, we will hold to Christ’s righteousness. Psalm 46 goes on to say, “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. 5God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.” We will not give up the refreshing river of God’s Word and Sacraments. We have learned of Christ’s righteousness which we have through faith. It is through the preaching of forgiveness for those who believe, we will take our stand. The Gospel message has driven out fear that we might have a godly fear and love of God, who is our refuge and strength.

Does that confident profession of faith sound like the church suffering violence and the violent taking it by force? Well, that’s what today Holy Gospel is speaking of. However, but it is a spiritual violence. We will not go back to a church that teaches slavery to the law and fear of punishment. The church has been restored to its former glory, which is the gospel proclamation of salvation.

#### Stanza 3 of A Mighty Fortress

“Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us;  
We tremble not, we fear no ill, They shall not overpow’r us.  
This worlds prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none,  
He’s judged the deed is done; One little word can fell him.”

Jesus.