

Are You Ready for a Spiritual Cease-Fire?

Trusting God in the Midst of Conflict

Scripture: Psalm 46:1-11

Not only does the world seem to be in a constant state of warfare, but far too often so does the Church. We, the church members, seem to have as much trouble getting along as do those outside the Church. Those of us in ministry are called by God to lead people to faith in Christ and then to guide them toward spiritual maturity, which we call discipleship. We understand that Christians, the redeemed of God, are set apart to be the light of the world demonstrating for society a better way to relate to God and to one another. However, we occasionally find ourselves exhausted from our efforts to guide church members toward the development of spiritual fruit in their lives. When they refuse to respond to prayer-driven sermons directed at spiritual growth and a love of ministry, we can become discouraged. When they continue to be critical of others and especially of our efforts to help them refocus their priorities, we can become totally disheartened. Sometimes, it feels as if we are fighting the battle alone. We find ourselves frantically reading the latest book on successful leadership and striving to utilize the newest paradigm of church growth. We go from activity to activity trying to find something that will finally make a difference in our church – something to bring peace.

Listen to the advice God gives us in verse 10. “Cease striving and know that I am God.” He does not expect us to carry the church on our shoulders, nor does He want us to try. Only God can make a real difference in our lives and in our churches. What He wants us to do is stop struggling and let Him be God in our world. No, it is not easily done in a complex society that prides itself on “looking out for number one.” Yet, it is simple. All we have to do is stop struggling and listen to God’s voice again and trust what He says. How do we do this?

Cease striving
and know that I
am God.

Psalm 46:10

Listen for God’s Voice

Do you remember how God spoke to Elijah during a time of discouragement? Queen Jezebel was out for his hide. He fled for his life and went on a forty day journey to mount Horeb. God spoke to him and asked what he was doing in that place. His answer was that he was all alone in faithfulness to God, and the nation’s leaders were trying to kill him. God sent Elijah to stand on the mountain before Him as He passed by. First, there was a strong wind that just about destroyed the mountain. But God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake that did even more great damage. But God was not in the earthquake. After that, there was a great fire, but God was not in the fire. God demonstrated several remarkable examples of His great power over this world. Yet, He had something surprising for Elijah in how He was going to deal with him. God then spoke to

him in the sound of a gentle wind blowing. This was not a gale, but just a whisper. It was God simply breathing His love upon the prophet. Again God asked him what he was doing there. Again Elijah stated he was alone and afraid. At that moment God instructed him to go and anoint a new king over Israel. God sent him on a new and important mission. Not only that, but God told that discouraged prophet that he was not alone. At that moment there were still 7,000 people alive in Israel who had never bowed before Baal. The remnant was alive and well. (1 Kings 19:1-18) The point is that Elijah was facing great challenges in his life and ministry. The greatest human power in the land wanted to kill him. He was ready to give up. Yet, God was in control and would not let that happen. God did not choose to speak to Elijah through some great demonstration of power. God chose to put him in a position to listen to a gentle and quiet voice. He wanted him to stop the frantic effort to hide and protect himself. God wanted him to stop and listen and trust. When we are frantically running from ministry to ministry and self-imposed obligations we have little time left to listen to God's quiet voice.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 46:1

A man once told me that he never turns the television off in his house as a deterrent to burglars. What he doesn't understand is that he may be keeping the burglars away, but he is also eliminating the quiet conditions in which God speaks to our hearts best. Examine your daily schedule. Have you arranged it so God can speak to you throughout your day? Do you have to listen to the radio every time you get in the car? How long has it been since you went a day without turning on the television? Stop striving all the time and position yourself to hear the voice of God again.

We can change our hectic lifestyle if we are serious about it. Psalm 46 was written in a time of warfare. God's command to "cease striving" was directed to the nations who were at war. His command rings just as true for individuals at war with others – physically and spiritually. As you read the passage, notice what God has to say about Himself and what He will do for those who trust in Him. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." (v. 1) Did you hear Him speak as you read these words? Do you believe them? He is your refuge. He is your strength. You can't do this for yourself. Even if you flee to the mountains, you will not escape your problems. Yet, wherever you are, God is there. He alone is the power and protection for your life. The downward spiral of society seems to be as permanent as a mountain made of granite. You may think your life of ministry makes little difference. But, God can tear down those insurmountable mountains. When He speaks, the world quakes. Good news, you are one of His spokesmen. (vs. 2-3)

Sink Deep Roots

Why must we set aside our fear of failure and our drift toward discouragement? In 2011 much of the Texas landscape was on fire for weeks. In 2012, the drought moved to the mountains near Colorado Springs,

Colorado. The lack of rain has brought much destruction. The news media is reporting the worst drought in decades is covering much of our country. Yet, our hearts need not become so dry that we fear the dreaded burn-out so many in ministry experience. Rejoice! We possess the living water that Christ provides. This water is our strength, refreshment and peace. When we trust in Him, our souls are restored. He is like a river that never runs dry (v. 4). This may be a picture of the new age to come. It certainly is a message of encouragement for us today as we serve our risen Savior.

We have two creeks on our farm here at Shepherd's Rest. These creeks are lined with trees. There are trees on top of the hill behind our house and all along the drive from the road to our house as well. In the summer of 2011 during the extended drought and extreme heat the creek went dry and stayed that way for months. Finally, in the fall the heat broke and the rains came. I speculated that we would lose many trees. When the greening of spring came I was amazed that we lost none of the trees on our hill or along our drive. They had sunk deep roots over the years to withstand times of drought. However, along the creek we lost a number of trees. This was due to their shallow roots that depended upon the regular flow of water in the creek. When the creek went dry, and stayed that way, they died. Think of times in the past when you have been tested and how your deep trust in God is what brought you through. When we begin to trust in the world for our spiritual strength and methods of ministry, we will eventually run dry. That is because society is constantly changing and those who follow popular standards put down shallow spiritual roots. Those who trust in God put down deep roots that reach to the foundation of eternal life. When we put our trust in the Living Water, that never stops flowing, our strength is endless. It is endless because God is our refuge and strength. He is our stronghold. He is what keeps us going (vs. 5-7).

Remember What God Has Done

God calls upon us to look for Him. Look for Him in His Word and in His history of involvement in our lives. Remember, He keeps all His promises. See the things He has done. (vs. 8-9). He is the only one who can bring lasting peace to the world and to our hearts. Can you remember times you have seen Him at work in your life? I remember one Sunday when I was 10 year old. The pastor's sermon seemed to be spoken directly to me – personally. During the following week my parents helped me understand what was happening. The next Sunday I put my trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior. No matter what struggles I have in my life, that memory is there as an anchor for me. It is a deep, deep root. His Holy Spirit is in my life to guide and correct and empower. I know God saves, because He saved me. What about you? Has He saved you? Then what more proof do you need that He can do anything? God promises to be our refuge and strength. He will be exalted in the earth.

This passage in Psalms is a wonderful message of hope in a troubled world. Your personal world may be in turmoil. However, if you will stop trying to conquer your enemies on your own, you will have taken the

first step toward victory. You once trusted in God for your salvation. Now, trust Him with your ministry. Earthly success does not matter. What matters is that you trust Him with your life and efforts. To follow Him you must listen to Him. Once, the Israelites went into battle with the choir out in front, in place of the warriors, so God could show them that He is the one to bring the victory (2 Chronicles 20:21). When you go into battle for God, who is in the lead? When the spiritual battle for men's souls is being fought in your ministry, who is in control? Maybe for today, your battle is with yourself. Maybe you are to stop striving and just know that God is God. He is the great, "I Am". You know you can trust Him with your life and ministry. Know also that part of that trust involves taking the time to listen as well when He speaks. Turn off the world's loud speakers for a few moments and hear the quiet gentle voice as it whispers in your heart. The result will be a peace that defies any earthly challenge.

Written by Randy A. Hughes, July, 2012