

“Rejoice, The Lord is King!”

Psalm 46

Dr. Richard J. Alberta

Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church

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Text: (NIV) 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 the works of the Lord, 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 "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.

What a marvelous truth is found in this Psalm...this ancient prayer of Israel! He says: **“...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...”** How appropriate for us today...this day...this week...when the whole world seems to be coming undone with violence and war and earthquakes and famine and weather patterns that are shocking...with debt ceilings and politics and accusations and bond ratings...and we are, humanly speaking, about as insecure as we can be...the earth is giving way and the mountains are falling into the sea...Biblical imagery for terrible times perhaps even the end times...**but ...we will not fear!** God be praised! We will not fear! And for good reason! Because God is near and an ever-present help in times of trouble! Let us pray.

The title of the message today is “Rejoice! The Lord is King!” In other words, “Stay calm! God is in control!” Amen? We will trust God with childlike faith with childlike faith for the present and the future! But before we proceed, let me go back to last week when we spoke of being a child of God and that wonderful provision given by God himself...childlike faith. A number of interesting questions came up and I think it might be wise for me to address the main one. In short, a couple of people politely said “Pastor...when you use the illustration of your five year old Granddaughter believing your impossible story about a talking chipmunk...it seems to me that you are suggesting that faith in the Biblical miracles is childish and like the little girl...when we grow up, we will simply dismiss it as nice but certainly not true. So, doesn’t the absurdity of your little game with a child actually suggest that only naive children would believe in the unbelievable...including the Gospel?”

I said “Yes. On one level, that is true. But in my sermon, I pointed out that if I were God and I could make a talking chipmunk and I could convince Madison that it was true and that she could believe it not just wishful thinking...but because I supernaturally convinced her it was true...then her childlike faith would be validated!” This is the point: when the Holy Spirit moves into a person who comes to Christ, God gives to that Christian a supernatural certainty that the Gospel is true and God transforms that person into a genuine childlike Christian! We are as Christians....childlike in many ways because we believe the unbelievable. Why? Because of wishful thinking? No. Because God has shown us the truth thru His Holy Spirit. That is why unbelievers think we are foolish and self-deceived. They may even think we are “childish!” Let this be clear: the genuine Christian does not just believe and hope the Gospel is true; the genuine Christian believes and knows the Gospel is true! The childlike part comes in the humility needed to trust God and love the Gospel even though it leaves many unanswered questions. J.R.R. Tolkein said the world insists we believe in myths similar to those in other ancient literature. And we do but as he said “It turns out that Christianity is the **TRUE MYTH!**”

Worldly people say things like this: “Since this world is so brutal and the God you believe in allows so much suffering and misery, how can you still believe in a loving and all-powerful God?” It’s a fair question. I always respond this way: “God called me to Himself and gave me the gift of childlike faith...and part of that faith means trusting him as my Heavenly Father even though I do not understand him or all that He does and allows.” For the unsaved person, it sounds totally silly to have childlike faith.

Take this further. Paul explained to the Corinthian Church exactly why so many people were writing them off as crazy. The explanation lies in the presence or the absence of the Holy Spirit given by Jesus. Paul says:

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV) ¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Where Paul says the man without the Spirit considers our faith “foolish” he is using the Greek word “morai” from which we get the words “moron” or “moronic.” So, when you have someone tell you that you’d have to be childish or a moron to believe the Gospel, you might say “What you call moronic, I consider childlike....because God has supernaturally given me a childlike faith.”

OK. But...there is one other question that has not been asked. It would be this...think about it please. Back to little Madison and the talking chipmunk. Why *would* a five year get such delight out of believing even for a moment that a squirrel could talk? Why do we all somehow feel drawn to fairy tales and stories of the unseen world? Why does our highly material, unbelieving culture produce

so much entertainment that touches on the supernatural? The unseen? The hidden? Why the incredible success of “Harry Potter” or “The Hobbit” or the movie “Tangled?” Why the fascination with series like “Lost” or movies like “Sourcecode” or that amazingly strange movie “Inception?” These stories are filled with time changes....supernatural beings...heroes and devils....all of them attempting to portray a world beyond our senses. What is happening with man that he cannot stop trying to see beyond the material and known world? The answer is that man knows that there *is* something more “out there” That there is more to life than what we can see and feel and have.

It is like that scene in the movie “**Bucket List.**” Two older guys are dying and they decide to do the things that are on their list before they die. One guy is a billionaire so he can cover it all...and off they go. One scene shows Morgan Freeman who is religious and perhaps a believer in Christ on an airplane with his unbelieving friend played by Jack Nicholson. And they’re looking out the window at the beauty of the Arctic Circle and Freeman says “Doesn’t that just make you believe in something...someone...who did all of this?” And Nicholson says “No...but I wish it did!” That’s interesting! Why does he “wish” it did? Because he wants to believe! We human beings know there is something more. And God has revealed a good deal more about that something by taking on flesh in Jesus. So...if you have the gift of childlike faith, thank God for it!

Now, think of where you would be right now without your valid and true childlike faith in Jesus! As chaotic as our world has become reeling from uncertainty...how great is it to be saved? How great to be assured that God really is in control. Those poor folks who do not know God thru the Lord Jesus Christ can only look at the chaos and long for what they sense is out there. They're like Jack Nicholson...they want to believe in some vague sense. They’re like a five year old girl delighted at the thought of a talking chipmunk. But they soon dismiss it. Rejoice! We who have been saved by God by grace and have become His children...we are the most secure people on the planet...even now! Actually, we are the only secure people on the planet! Ah...God be praised! Thank God for the gift of genuine faith!

Let’s consider today’s text. The writer of this Psalm...this prayer...was a man with and of childlike faith. We know that because despite the circumstances of his world, he is at peace knowing God his Father will not fail him. We sometimes think that our society has more problems and more to fear than any society in history. But we need only look at history to see otherwise. True, we have the technology to vaporize the earth and there is much that is wicked taking place. But during the Middle Ages from say 500 AD to 1300 AD, there were hundreds of plagues that wiped out millions of people. In the fourteenth century alone, the “Black Death” wiped out half of the earth’s population. And I need not point out the wars that killed off whole populations from the days of Julius Caesar thru Adolph Hitler to Osama bin Laden.

When people ask me “Don't you think that we are surely in the end times?” I say “Perhaps. But during every age of the church, believers have been convinced they were in the end times.” The point is, as always, we will be in difficult times when there is much to fear...if we take our eyes off of God.

Take this Psalm for instance. As part of our hermeneutical task...remember that means reading and studying the text for its original meaning and getting behind what it says...we must ask: is this Psalm just a poem about how things might get tough now and then but God can be trusted? Or...can we learn anything about the situation in which it was written in order to understand it better? I think we can.

First, it is a Psalm written by one of the Israelite musicians for the purpose of worship. It is not possible to place it exactly in a time frame from a particular battle or challenge. Some feel it might have been written after God delivered the Israelites from the Assyrians as found in 2 Kings. But the point is that the life-setting in which it was written was one of severe stress and deep trouble. In fact, the entire history of Israel is a history of a people surrounded by enemies and always just a step away from being exterminated. The Jews from day one when God called Abram have been a people under siege. Before the birth of Christ, the Assyrians and the Babylonians and the Romans set out to dominate the Jews. When the Old Testament Assyrian King threatened to totally obliterate Israel, he did it with complete contempt for God. The year was about 700 BC and the Israelites could not stand under the siege of the Assyrians. So the evil King Sennacherib sent his messenger to say this to Israel:

2 Kings 18:28-31 (NIV) ²⁸ Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew: "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! ²⁹ This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you from my hand. ³⁰ Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Lord when he says, 'The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' ³¹ "Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me.

But God delivered Israel from Sennacherib and not long after that his own sons killed him as he was worshipping an idol. But the fear and trepidation felt by the Jews was very real. We're not sure the Psalm relates to this event but the point would be the same. God's people were always under attack. God's people were always dependent upon him for deliverance in a violent world. At the risk of being corny in the pulpit, allow me to ask: who or what is the Sennacherib in your life? Who or what is threatening to take away your security or your joy or your peace? Does your heart need to be calmed and, if so, how will you go about calming it? Consider how the Psalm writer calmed the hearts of his people by writing these words:

**¹God 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.**

It is incredible to note that no people in history has been attacked and brutalized as much as the Jews. But the larger point is that Israel has always had to rejoice over the Kingship of God. Consider these words:

¹God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Many Christians have asked me how to look forward in our present day. Is this not a time of trouble? I need not remind you of what is happening in our country and our world: the list should be unnecessary. Unemployment and deficits and debt ceilings and political stalemates and gay marriage and abortion and you know the rest. Wars and rumors of wars. Are these not times of trouble? Yet, we should not be surprised by times of trouble. A few key principles at this point:

FIRST PRINCIPLE: WE LIVE IN A WORLD FILLED WITH TROUBLE BUT JESUS CHRIST IS THE KING OF CREATION! In fact, our Lord told us to expect exactly that. We read:

John 16:31-33 (NIV) ³¹ "You believe at last!" Jesus answered. ³² "But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. ³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Jesus said to his disciples "I'm glad that you believe in me at last because you're going to need your faith! You will be scattered!" We believe in him and we have our own set of challenges. The time may come when we are persecuted...not just mocked or teased but persecuted. If we were in Canada right now and I spoke openly about the sin of homosexuality I could be arrested! In many places we would not be allowed to worship openly. The church may undergo severe persecution. Jesus knew the church would be hated!

A few summers ago, Donna and I were in Norway. A beautiful county spotlessly clean and scenic, filled with beautiful villages...with mostly closed churches. The Christian faith is almost non-existent in the Scandinavian countries and throughout Europe. For years they've claimed that without religion they are safer and more civilized. But a couple of weeks ago, a crazy man killed nearly a hundred innocent people. Heartbreaking! But how did they analyze that act in much of Europe? They said he was a "fundamentalist Christian!" That should not have surprised us because Christ is uniquely hated among unbelievers. Why do

they hate him? Because underneath it all I think they suspect that he is the Son of God! And we say “Rejoice, the Lord is King!”

How does the Psalmist respond to the reality of “times of trouble?” He really is asking “Who will help me in uncertain times?” We find this in Psalm 121. The prayer is this:

Psalms 121:1-2 (NIV) ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills-- where does my help come from? ² My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

We human beings are such fragile people, we are always looking for “help!” I think of that fascinating passage where the Lord Jesus sees a funeral procession go by. The dead man is the only son of a widow and now she will be totally without covering or security in the world of ancient Israel. There must have been a dozen funeral processions that day in the ancient near east but Jesus providentially breaks in on this one and he raises the man up and restores his life. But the reaction of the people is about as tender and sincere as can be. We read:

Luke 7:14-16 (NIV) ¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. ¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people."

You know why they are excited? Because God had come to help his people! Now, Jesus will not raise up every lost child or heal every one of us. But he did those few things to prove who he was and to set in place a promise. Namely, that Jesus Christ is Lord over our afflictions and heartaches! And he knows what is coming our way and he will, as these men said, help us! Consider:

SECOND PRINCIPLE: WE LIVE IN A WORLD WITH AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE BUT JESUS CHRIST IS KING OF THE FUTURE!

In my lifetime, I have never seen so much concern about the future. For millennia people lived without retirement plans or health care or any certainty beyond the next few days. But we have developed a culture of security so we can be delivered from all anxiety. But when that happens we can also be delivered from trusting in God.

Health and money and where will we live. Etc. ??? Consider that in our church many are facing employment challenges. Their futures are in question! But that is true of all of us. The other day I called the Social Security Administration because I had not received one of those summary statements in a couple of years approximating my future benefits at age 62 or 66 or 70. The gal on the phone

“Oh yes. We stopped sending those out because we are not sure what anyone’s benefits will be!” That’s interesting! In short, we have an uncertain future regarding finances and health and life and peace. These look more and more like “times of trouble!”

But the New Testament Christians were no different. In fact, we read this overlooked passage in the Book of Hebrews where the writer was speaking as a Pastor to a people in an insecure world. What did he say:

Hebrews 13:5 (NIV) ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

I know...I know. Today’s biggest question for seniors and those who will be seniors is.... “Will I have enough to live on? Will I have enough to live on?” But this, by the way, is one of the great benefits of tithing as a Christian or at least giving substantially out of your earnings. Does anyone who gives generously over many years really think they will grow old without a pleasant place to live and without food or necessities? Does anyone really think they could give to the Kingdom and serve the Lord and have Him forget what they’ve given? That Jesus will go away? No. Jesus said:

Matthew 28:20 (NIV) ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus Christ IS KING OF CREATION AND KING OF THE FUTURE AND....

THIRD PRINCIPLE: JESUS CHRIST IS KING OF EVERY SINGLE PERSON WHO EVER LIVED OR WHO LIVES OR EVER WILL LIVE...AND THEY WILL KNOW THAT HE IS KING! Remember how the Psalm ends:

¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

I think that we Christians...we who have experienced Christ suffer from two kinds of spiritual angst. First, we cannot seem to get over the fact that most of the world most of the time rejects our message! We almost act as if we are striving to somehow be more persuasive and more winsome or more angry or more sincere so maybe then people will stop and listen to what we are saying about Christ! And why do we wring our hands thinking if only we had said more or said less about Christ our kids and our friends and our neighbors would perhaps be saved? Because we forget that it is the Holy Spirit of God who does the saving of souls! We forget that the Lord Jesus Christ asked his disciples one day who people were saying that he was. They gave Jesus a menu of answers but finally Peter said to Jesus:

Matthew 16:16-17 (NIV) ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Now please listen closely. If you've ever agonized over someone you know who needs to be saved and you have told them how Jesus has been your biggest blessing but over and over they just look at you with empty eyes as if you are silent...and you've thought you must be doing something wrong...please listen closely. For Peter's sake and for your sake Jesus reminded Peter of what must happen to convince anyone that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God:

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

The Father in Heaven via the Holy Spirit shows sinners that Jesus is the Christ! God must vindicate the Risen Christ and He will in accordance with His Spirit when He wills to do so. So, we should witness but not twitch about it! The Second reason that we spiritually twitch is a little less flattering. It is this: we want to win the argument! We want in any case to have them see in the end that we were right about Christ being Lord of all! It's almost as if we worry that the lost will never know we were correct. But they will. In fact, the Word of God tells us they will! Consider:

Philippians 2:9-11 (NIV) ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Every person who ever lived will one day know that Jesus Christ is the King of Creation and King of the Future and the King over all Humanity! And we need only be trusting children of our Heavenly Father and, as Paul said, we should be anxious for nothing [Phil. 4: 4-7]. And the greatest truth of all is that the King will return to claim his Kingdom finally and fully!

Let us pray.