

Sermon preached by Phillip Jensen, Dean of Sydney at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney  
On Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2006. Reading Psalm 46  
Topic: "The Lord of Hosts Is With Us"

46 years is a long time but what should I preach upon tonight? I decided in a moment of fun to look at the 46th Psalm and looking at the Psalm thought there could be nothing better. Are you an Optimist or a Pessimist?

### **1. Optimists and Pessimists**

**Optimists** who are always confident hopeful expecting good outcomes. Pessimists who are always fearful negative expecting bad outcomes, half full vs half empty. Martin Seligman - Optimists are winners in all areas of life, **Pessimists** are losers in all areas of life, except one. They are the realists.

They have a better sense of reality. **Optimists** tend to be dreamers out of touch with reality. Optimists are irrational possibility thinkers. **Pessimists** are rational depressive planners, but because it is better to be an optimist Seligman teaches courses on "Learned Optimism". True in health, the optimists have better outcomes in health, better results - though the pessimists are more in touch with reality, worse results. If you want to know the facts become a pessimist, if you want to increase your chance of recovery become an optimist. The advice of the Psychologists is necessary because we all come to -

### **2. Times of Trouble**

I know that is a pessimist's view, an optimist would never plan for difficulties because he does not believe that they will come, but the realist in us knows that there will always be times of trouble, it can be in our relationships - family feud, neighbourhood spat, office politics, divorce or parental fighting as teenagers, or in old age. It frequently is in our health, as all manner of minor illnesses come upon us, or as significant life threatening problems arise. It can be in business or work, as we find the going getting tough. Lose our job or our competitors put pressure upon us, or government regulations and paper work overwhelm us. The bills keep coming but not the income. It can be in the national news that worries us, the apparent rise in crime, the war on drugs and on terrorism.

For a variety of reasons we can feel stressed and despairing. Stress is one of those modern words that describe our life and with stress come all manner of diseases and illness. Our resistance is lowered and we seem to come into all manner of sickness. The Psalmist knows of trouble. He knows of the sense of the earth giving way, the mountains shaking, the tumult of the sea (Verses 1,2,3). But while acknowledging this trouble, the Psalmist is really singing about.

### **3. God our Refuge and Strength**

For the Psalmist looks at trouble differently, knowing that God is present with him and God is our strength, God is our refuge, God is our help. This knowledge of God is essential in the times of trouble, whatever they may be. For knowing that God is for us, then who can be against us.

I remember being bullied after school in the local park, the bully knew I had a brother Peter, but he was older than Peter and bullied him as well. What the bully did not know is that I have another brother, eight years older still, so when he had me up a tree and with a group of friends, stood at the base shaking it, my brother Peter did what our mother always told us to do - run for help. He ran and got my older brother who came down the park like the whirlwind of God with power and might and majesty.

He entered into the fray and sent the pack of bullies fleeing down the road.

It was a great rescue, it gave me great courage - even bravado, because I had on my side, somebody who was a refuge and strength. But unfortunately he was not always present. I

still had to negotiate the bullies at school the next day without my big brother. Yet God is always present, he is well proven ever present help in trouble.

For –

**4. God is in the Midst** of his city, so that she will not be moved. God brings to the city a river that makes her heart glad that provides all the water of life that the city needs, though the nations of the world rage against the city of God. The river of life in the midst of the city will gently flow on bringing life and health and safety to all her citizens. For God in the midst of his city, in the midst of his people will only but speak and his voice will melt away all opposition.(Verses 4-7)

Here is the experience of God's people down the ages, when the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem in the eighth century BC. All looked lost but the prophet Isaiah encouraged them to do nothing but trust God.

And God worked a great miracle and rescued the city. The Assyrians just gave up, packed bags and went home. But repeatedly people can tell how God touched their lives. When all looked black and bleak (e.g. the woman with the flow of blood - for 12 years lost all her money, an outcast in Israel a hopeless case, reached out and touched Jesus coat and power went from him. She felt the healing come into her body. The father Jairus, whose little child lay dying felt the heartache and agony of a parent seeing their little one dying, having the whole community come to mourn her passing. The hopelessness. Do not trouble the preacher any more, she is dead and Jesus came into the room and said to the little girl Talitha cumi - "Little girl I say to you arise" and she arose and started eating. In all the troubles of the world the Psalmist sees -

#### **5. God will be Exalted**

For the works of God will tell of his greatness (Verses 8-11). Not just the works of creation will tell of the greatness of God, but also his continued works of ruling the world, will tell of the greatness of God.

For God continues to rule over the world now through his son whom he raised from the dead and who has sent his Spirit into the world to put his kingdom into effect in the lives of his people. The living water is ours now in the pouring out of the Spirit of the risen Christ .

As we see the overthrow of evil, as we see the rescue of God's people out of the troubles of this world, so we see the hand of God at work in our world. So at that lowest of all times when the nations of the world had risen up against the Lord and his Christ betraying, arresting, beating, condemning and crucifying him at the lowest of all times.

Our Lord did not lose his faith in God who would rescue, who would raise him up victorious over all his foes, who would defeat Satan and death, but paying for the sin of the world. At the lowest blackest moment of trouble that any person ever faced or the world ever faced.

The Lord Jesus knew that God was on his side even as he laid on him the iniquity of us all. Knowing that God was on his side he knew that God would be glorified in his death and all the nations would glorify God. So friends what is to be -

#### **6. Our Response to this Psalm?**

Look at the responses in the Psalm itself v2” *Therefore we will not fear*” v10 “*Be still, and know that I am God*”. No Fear t-shirt brand to which somebody put out an addition No Fear - No Brains. That is the pessimist he is right. The person without fear is person with no brains. Of course we should fear.

Are you ill, are you sick? Has it been a long term illness? Of course you fear. It is only right, reasonable and natural to be worried about the future. But the Psalmist is saying “*therefore we shall not fear though the earth gives way though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea*”

But his is not an irrational optimism. His is a rational reasonable conclusion. *God is our refuge and strength therefore we will not fear. God is a very present help in trouble therefore we will not fear*

As NT puts it *“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things”*. (Rom 8:31-32)

That is why the second response in the Psalm is v10 *“Be still and know that I am God”* We need to slow down the worry and the stress. We need to stop and think about it. God the almighty - who did not spare his own Son - but gave him for us. God is with us God the almighty is with us. He is our help and strength.

We have reason to be optimistic. We have God the almighty - the refuge and strength. The psychologists know that optimism is good for us, but they have no reason to be optimistic. Because on all reasonable evidence - trouble awaits us on all fronts. But we have reason to be optimistic, we know the God who can do the impossible and he is on our side. So let us be still and join in prayer to him that we may face whatever trial of this life we are facing now.