New Year’s Day (2024)

**“BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.”**

Psalm 46:1-11

Key Verse: 46:10

“He says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.’”

According to the Chinese Zodiac, 2024 is the year of the dragon. The dragon is unique because it is the only mythical creature of all the animals in the Chinese Zodiac. Interestingly, more babies are born in the year of the dragon than in other animal years. Is anyone born in the year of the dragon? If your birth year falls in 2012, 2000, 1988, 1976, 1964, 1952, or 1940, you are considered to have been in the year of the dragon. The dragon symbolizes good luck, strength, and health, associated with positive qualities. We are not here to delve into the intricacies of the Chinese zodiac, but we still want to express our hope that 2024 fulfills your hopes and dreams.

 I already gave the New Year’s message yesterday. But this morning, it seems fit to reflect on Psalm 46. I like Psalm 46 mainly because of the phrase, “Be still, and know that I am God.” (10). This expression extends an open invitation for all of us to cultivate a personal connection with God as we enter the New Year.

 Psalm 46 is composed by the sons of Korah, the Levites who served in the musical aspect of worship in the temple, just like our praise worship team. Interestingly, this psalm was composed during a significant distress in Jerusalem, primarily due to invasions by foreign powers, including the Assyrian Empire and the Northern Kingdom of Israel. (Pic#1-2) *How would you feel if you were in the war zone?*

 One typical wish exchange on New Year's Day is “*I hope that nothing bad will happen to you in the New Year.”* However, we know 2024 will not be devoid of challenges. Psalm 46 doesn’t offer false assurances either. Instead, it teaches us that we can find proper security and hope in God alone in all circumstances.

Read verse 1. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” This opening statement encourages us to seek refuge in God in times of trouble.

 If we take a close look at the text of Psalm 46, we notice a repetition found in verse 1 and then again in verses 7 and 11. The Psalmist opens with the declaration in verse 1, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” Likewise, in verses 7 and 11, “The Lord Almighty is with us,
the God of Jacob is our fortress.” I particularly like the phrase, **“God is an ever-present help in trouble.”**

Our firm faith is that God our Father is not indifferent to our troubles; he deeply cares, and his assistance is always available, even when we may not be aware.

Read verses 2 and 3; we encounter the words, “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way, and the mountains fall into the hearts of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.” These verses vividly portray diverse life challenges and trials, illustrating natural disasters that can evoke fear, anxiety, and even panic.

However, the central message of this extensive statement is summarized in the key phrase, “***Therefore, we will not fear.”*** This declaration signifies that there is no need for fear because God serves as our refuge and strength, an ever-present source of assistance in times of trouble.

Nevertheless, fear and panic can still infiltrate our minds despite the comforting assurance. When anxiety takes hold, it often manifests physically, with increased heart rate, sweating, elevated blood pressure, and heightened tension. These bodily reactions may prompt us to take premature actions to regain control. Fear, when present, tends to magnify minor issues, leading to overreactions that can worsen the situation.

Fear is a potent and negative emotion. While the devil may not have the power to destroy us directly, he utilizes fear as a power weapon. Once fear takes hold of us, it can drive us toward self-destructive behaviors.

Hence, the initial step in overcoming fear involves recognizing and acknowledging its presence. In other words, we must consciously expose the darkness of fear hidden underneath our consciousness. C.G. Jung aptly said, *“Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life, and you will call it fate.”* The opposite of faith is fear. The scripture reinforces this, emphasizing that God has not given us a spirit of fear but power, love, and self-discipline. (2 Tim. 1:7)

The next step is to seek refuge in the assurance that “God is our refuge and strength.” Why do we take refuge in God? Because God provides us with security in times of trouble. It resonates with what Jesus said to his fearful disciples, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” (Mt. 14:27)

 Look at verses 4-7. “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most-High dwells. God is within her; she will not fall; God will help her at the break of the day. Nations are in uproar; kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, and the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.” In these verses, the psalmist expresses hope for God’s protection over Jerusalem, facing imminent threats from the Assyrian empire and the Northern kingdom of Israel. The psalmist was sure that God would protect the city of God because of his firm belief that Jerusalem was God’s chosen dwelling place.

 In the following verses, the psalmist takes a progressive approach. Let’s examine verses 8-9. I want us to read it in the NLT (New Living Translation). “Come, see the glorious works of the Lord: See how he brings destruction upon the world. He causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks down the bow, snaps the spear; he burns the shields with fire.” The phrase **“Come and see”** signifies an invitation to witness the magnificent works of the Lord, observing how God brings about destruction in the world.

It's crucial to note that the destruction brought by God does not involve violence. Instead, God puts an end to wars by dismantling weapons of destruction. This portrayal highlights God’s authority over conflicts and his capacity to bring peace and disarmament. However, a question arises.

 The current global situation, marked by two significant conflicts in places like Ukraine and Gaza, is undeniably distressing. We question why Almighty God, possessing power and authority, does not intervene to prevent these destructive wars. We don’t have a definitive answer to this question, but the psalmist’s depiction emphasizes that God, our heavenly Father, is not inclined toward violence; instead, he is the force that concludes wars.

How would God dismantle all weapons? It’s a tough question. But when we look at Jesus, who is described as the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of God (Heb.1:3), we have an answer. Jesus is the embodiment of non-violence. For instance, despite being the Messiah, he chose not to use his power to destroy the Roman empire or his enemies but, instead, allowed sinful individuals to crucify him. He didn't curse his enemies even during excruciating pain on the cross. Instead, he uttered the merciful words, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (LK. 23:34). Jesus on the cross reveals how God is strong and overcomes evil with good. He is the ultimate victor. This Jesus, indeed the actual image of God our Father, and his sacrificial death on the cross brought peace and God’s kingdom into our hearts and lives.

 However, the frustration persists as the world appears unchanged, caught in a cycle of violence, atrocity, injustice, and destruction. Witnessing the suffering of loved ones due to illness and the unjust killing of innocent people is heart-wrenching, prompting questions and confusion. The words of Apostle Paul in Romans 8:22-24 resonate in this struggle, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.” (Ro. 8:22-24) According to Paul, the entire creation, including ourselves, groans in the hope of ultimate redemption, the completion of God’s redemptive work. (Even though we may not be fully convinced, it’s okay. We must persist in asking, seeking, and knocking to comprehend God’s redemption fully.)

 As parents, we want to shield our children from suffering, doing everything possible to minimize their pain. Yet, we recognize that suffering is inevitable in every person’s journey. While some may endure more than others, the universal truth is that suffering is unavoidable in this life. However, the bright side is that our present suffering is a prelude to future glory. Apostle Paul’s words in Romans 8:18 attest, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Verses 10 and 11 conclude Psalm 46. Read these verses. “He says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.’ The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.” These verses urge us to find peace in God’s presence and assure us that God will be exalted worldwide.

 *In conclusion, what does* ***“be still and know that I am God****” mean to us?*

This command invites us to stop striving, rest in God’s presence, and acknowledge his supreme authority.

We tend to value *“hard work.”* Didn’t Jesus say, “Be faithful to the point of death”? Yes. While hard work is appreciated, there is a danger of becoming workaholics who neglect relaxation and self-care. In saying, “Be still, and know that I am God,” God encourages us to take a break from excessive effort and not push ourselves too hard. Jesus also told his disciples, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Mt. 11:28). We should know that we should not take control over what we cannot control. In short, God said, “***Let go, and let Me (God)!”***

Isn’t it funny that the pastor says on New Year’s Day, *“You should relax and don’t try too hard.”* Depending solely on human effort may lead to inflexibility. God is not limited and rigid but infinite and open. As Ryan said yesterday, God gave us imagination as the highest form of intelligence, which resonates with Albert Einstein's statement, *“Imagination is more important than intelligence.”*

Despite our limited understanding of the complexities of the world, we must remember that God, who possesses omniscient knowledge, is actively working for the ultimate good of his children. Therefore, we must learn to trust him in all circumstances. Regardless of the challenges 2024 may bring, let us approach the new year with confidence and optimism, recognizing each moment as a unique opportunity for learning, deepening our knowledge of God and ourselves, and growing in maturity. With this perspective, 2024 holds the promise of an exciting year. As we stand on the brink of the new year, let us embrace the timeless wisdom - “Be still, and know that I am God! Happy New Year!”