

Followers of the Way

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Be still, and know that I am God

Psalm 46

It doesn't take a genius to work out that there's a spiritual battle raging over the earth. We see sin all around, and a growing rejection of God. According to a recent YouGov report, entitled *How religious are British people?*, only 27% of Britons today say they believe in God at all, with a further 16% saying they believe in the existence of 'a higher spiritual power', but not of God. And, specifically amongst Christians, YouGov reports that only 56% say they actually believe in the existence of God, with that persistent 16% again saying they believe in a higher power - and an amazing 10% (of supposed Christians, this is, don't forget) saying they don't believe in either (<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/philosophy/articles-reports/2020/12/29/how-religious-are-british-people>). Makes you wonder why they call themselves Christians, really, doesn't it? But don't get too depressed, because all these findings depend on who's canvassed, and results of these kinds of polls differ wildly. And of course the Office for National Statistics – which is perhaps more reliable than some random YouGov poll – is still reporting the 51% of the population of England and Wales self-identify as Christian. Down, but still significant.

But the point remains, a lot of people in the UK these days seem to be following a different 'faith', which worships not God, but Self. So things such as sexual licence and promiscuity are exulted, along with the unchallenged *right* to abort the unborn, and, increasingly these days, a growing tendency to end the lives of those whose quality of life is deemed a burden, or of no value. As believers, we know that all these things are, to God, an abomination, and bring us under judgment – something which seems borne out by Covid and the chaos of the last couple of years. And we know that if we're to have any chance of deliverance, in both this life and the world to come, that men and women need urgently to repent.

But it's all too easy, when we're faced with what feels to be confusion and crisis, to get caught up in what's going on and run round a bit like headless chickens. We feel we've got to do something, and we can panic, because we're frightened – and then we can get drawn into all sorts of 'worthy' endeavours and campaigns, because they seem to hold out promise of an answer. But actually, because God's not in them, they end up deepening the mess.

Climate change, for instance, is a good example of this. The ice cap is melting, people say. It's getting unseasonably warm in Siberia and sea levels are rising. Our existence is being threatened by soaring temperatures and extreme weather events. But if we can only control human behaviour, we can reverse what's happening and save the planet! And hey presto, before you know it, we've got a 'new' religion, with high priestess Greta Thunberg telling us to stop flying and buying new clothes, so that we reduce global emissions. Now you may agree with some of her recommendations. We all of us tend to waste money on things we don't need. But, with respect, these kind of arguments entirely miss the point. They don't even come near to addressing the real problem, but simply divert, and so at every level things get worse.

Well, this is where Psalm 46 comes in. It's often read simply as a psalm of assurance in times of trouble. V.1 begins, 'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.' But actually that's only about 10% of the point that's being made here. Clearly, the people to whom it's addressed were facing difficult – even horrendous – times. There's real anguish here. From verse 6 we learn that they're under attack, the nations all around are in uproar, kingdoms are falling ... the earth is melting. And in response, the psalmist reminds them that their God is a God of real power, and that they can trust Him. V.7 He is their strong fortress. Their deliverer.

But having reminded the people of God's might, 'He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; He breaks the bow and shatters the spear, He burns the shields with fire', the mood suddenly changes tack, and God Himself speaks. V.10, He says,

'Be still and know that I am God; I will be exulted among the nations, I will be exulted in the earth.'

Are these just words of comfort, telling the people to trust? No, they're not. They're actually saying something far more profound, and we need to take note.

The direct address seems almost to come out of nowhere. We already know, from what's been said in the preceding verses, that God is in absolute control, and that He can be trusted. But now, when God Himself finally speaks, He doesn't add some kind of reassurance, though that's often how the words are read. He doesn't say, 'Don't worry, I'm here ... I've got this.' Instead, He gives the hearers an *active* command, 'Be still ... and know that I am God.'

And that is precisely what God says to each one of us today. When we're faced with what looks like disaster, and we're frantic to do something – or, even better, for God to do something – He simply says, **be still**. Stop thrashing round. Even stop battering the gates of heaven in prayer... and just be still.

This is not an encouragement to do nothing and just trust. Rather, it's a command to enter into the presence of God. Because it's there, under the shadow of His wing, that we find what we need – strength, power, understanding, insight, clarity, healing ... whatever. The *stillness* is a place of transformation, where we find wholeness, empowerment – and in the shadow of His wing, nothing can touch us. We are hidden in that stillness, with God. And so it's there, in the quiet, that God can begin His deepest

work. It's there – when we stop even trying to listen and just let His presence surround and enfold us – that we really begin to hear.

All work done in our own strength will fail. But work carried out in the strength of God, at His command, has a power unknown on earth, and cannot be withstood. At the same time, all of us in this life have things we need to learn, as well as healing for past hurts and wounds. And we need to be taught, so that we can become fully what the Lord has made and intends us to be. We cannot do any of this by ourselves, in our own strength.

But God doesn't just stop with the command to be still. He tells us, when we do this, what the result will be. 'I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth'. In other words, when we're *still* in His presence, there's no need for **us** to do anything because, from that place, we begin to reflect Him, and we give the Spirit free rein, so that He can work through us.

There are no bounds to God's power, but because He has given men and women free will and the gift of choice, and so as not to override that and compel us, He chooses (most of the time) to work through human agency. **Self**, no matter how well intentioned, can block the way, which of course is why, in Luke 9:23, Jesus says, 'If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'

It's in that place of stillness, under the shadow of God's wing, that we don't simply find our deepest fulfilment and meaning and are made whole – where we start to become *conformed* to Christ – but where we become channels for God's power.

There are many, many problems facing the world today – most of which are because men and women have lost connection with God. For us who know Christ, we can see the problems, and we know that mankind needs urgently to repent. That that indeed is our only hope of deliverance. God knows that too – far better than us – and the good news is that He's calling out to humanity in love. The Lord will return – maybe very soon – and when He does, He will deal with Satan and all those who have given their allegiance to evil, finally and forever. For this moment, He has a plan to save as many men and women as possible, and we are part of that plan. Our call is to carry His light and truth, in love, out into a world steeped in darkness.

We cannot, and we must not, seek to do that in our own strength. To every one of us God says, 'Be still and know that I am God' ... and then, and only then, 'I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exulted in the earth.'

What a promise!

