

## **Sermon Draft**

### **Text: Psalm 46**

**Sermon:** God Is Our Refuge and Strength (Reformation 2023)

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On November 10, 1483, a woman in Eisleben, Germany, gave birth to her and her husband's first child—a son. The next day that child was taken to the basement chapel of St. Peter's Church in Eisleben to be baptized. Because it was St. Martin of Tours day, these new parents, Hans and Margaret Luther, proceeded to name this, their firstborn child, Martin—Martin Luther.

However, as they held this new baby boy in their arms, little did Hans and Margaret Luther realize the tremendous impact he would have, not only on the history of Germany, but also on the history of the whole world. Little did they know the role this child would play in restoring to the church of his day the truth of God's Word and retaining that truth for believers still today.

Little did they realize that, 540 years later, all over the world, men, women, and children would be assembling in special worship services such as the one we are holding here today to say, “Thank you, God, for the birth, life, and work of Dr. Martin Luther, and for the Reformation of the church.”

There are many facets of the life of Martin Luther on which we could focus our attention on this Reformation Sunday. For instance, moving through his life from Eisleben to Mansfield, from Magdeburg to Eisenach to Erfurt and finally to Wittenberg—we could well focus our attention on those events surrounding Luther’s nailing of the 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Those ninety-five theses declared: You cannot earn or buy forgiveness from God. Rather, in Jesus Christ you have complete and full forgiveness. Believe it and be saved. Or looking in a slightly different direction, we could focus our attention on the three basic truths that became for Luther the hallmarks of the Reformation: Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone.

But the specific emphasis that we are focusing on in this Reformation Sunday is the truth that Luther found in Psalm 46. It is that same message and truth which served as the basis for his hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” The theme of our sermon today is the words from Psalm 46: God is our refuge and strength.

Psalm 46 was one of Luther’s favorite psalms. It is not very long, only 11 verses. Written under the inspiration of God, it celebrated a miraculous victory of the children of Israel during the days when King Jehoshaphat was on the throne of David. Briefly, the circumstances surrounding the psalm were this. The nomadic tribes of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites were gathered together in siege against the children of Israel. And to say the least, things looked very dismal for the children of Israel. In fact, only a miracle of God could save them, and they knew it. So, Jehoshaphat turned to the Lord. God responded through his prophet Jahaziel, “***Do not be afraid or discouraged . . . the battle is not yours, but God’s***” (2 Chronicles 20:15).

The armies of Moab and Ammon and Seir were filled with confusion and began to fight with one another. The battle was fierce and the outcome devastating. They ended up literally destroying one another. And when the morning hours arrived and the children of Israel saw what had happened, they immediately knew that this victory was not theirs, but God's.

Moved by the Spirit of God, the sons of Korah, hymnists of the children of Israel, penned this 46th psalm—a psalm which says, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. . . . The Lord Almighty is with us. . . . Come and see the works of the Lord. . . . Be still and know that I am God” (vs 1–2, 7a, 10a).

Luther recognized the close parallel between what he saw here in the lives of the children of Israel and what he saw in his own life and the unfolding of the Reformation.

He picked up the emphasis of this psalm, and in his hymn “*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*” spoke both to himself and to his fellow believers down through the ages: Don’t ever forget that ours is a mighty, saving God. Yes, God is truly and always will be the believer’s refuge and strength.

Whenever we think things are getting a little tough—whenever questions begin to arise in our minds as to whether God really is aware of us and our problems remember that ours is a God about whom we can boldly say: God is our refuge and strength. Yes, a mighty fortress is our God. He was then. He is today. And he will ever be such a God to the ends of time. Yes, God truly is our refuge and our strength.

It really doesn’t take all that much examination of the life of Luther to see what an impact this divine spiritual truth had upon him. At the beginning of his work as a pastor and professor, in the middle of the Reformation, and at the end of his life, to Luther God was again and again a mighty fortress, his refuge and strength, an ever-present help in time of need.

Repeatedly we see this in the various aspects of Luther's life. And repeatedly you see the power, the strength, and the courage which this truth, again and again, gave to him, as step by step he moved from one phase to still another of his life.

For instance, one cannot help but think of Luther's own personal faith-life and that which he says concerning it. The God which Luther first had come to know and believe in was not a God who loved him and wanted to save him. If anything, he was a God who was just waiting to throw Luther into eternal damnation.

The only reason Luther wanted to become a monk was because he wanted peace with God. But even after he entered the monastery, the harder he tried to make peace with God, the further he felt himself drifting from God. Finally, writing to a friend, Luther made this statement: "I daily find myself approaching closer and still closer to hell." And he signed this letter, "an exiled son of Adam."

But then, thanks be to God, Luther began to study the Scriptures with greater intensity. And he came across one passage after another in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians that pointed him to the fact that he could not earn peace and forgiveness from God, but that peace and forgiveness have already been earned for us through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is a free gift from God to all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. And as this truth more and more began to take possession of Luther's life, Luther could see in it a God who was truly his refuge and strength, first of all when it came to his own salvation.

Turning to still another segment of Luther's life, what we see and find in Luther's personal faith-life we also find in his work as a reformer of the church, and in his dealings with his family. Early in the Reformation Luther was summoned to a Diet at Worms, there to defend his faith and the truth of God's Word. All of Luther's friends and associates advised him not to go. They were convinced that if he went, he would be put to death.

But Luther's reply was, "Even if there are more devils on the rooftops than the clay shingles, I will still go to Worms and defend the truth of God's Word." For Luther, God was his refuge and his strength.

Regarding his family life, who can ever forget Luther, the father, as he sat in the upper room of their home in Wittenberg, holding in his arms his dying child, Magdalena, his little girl whom he loved so much? With tears flowing from his eyes, Luther said, "Oh, how it hurts to lose my little Maggie. But God wants her and she is his. Therefore I release her into the hands of a gracious and loving God." God is our refuge and strength!

Turning to the end of Luther's life, we find Luther going to Eisleben to mediate a dispute that had arisen between two princes. The trip was difficult. Luther was not well. But once again, he went working to the very end. We are told of the severe chest pains he had, and he knew the end was approaching. We are told of his standing at the window and praying, "The pain is so severe, God, but I am ready to come home to you, Father." And shortly before his death, when he was asked, "Brother Martin, are you willing to die in that faith which you have proclaimed?"



Luther could say with much gusto, “Yes, yes.” A little later he fell asleep in the Lord—in the hands of a God who was again showing him that he truly is his refuge and strength.

Again and again, as we view the life of Luther from almost any aspect or angle, clearly Luther had come to see that in Jesus Christ we have full and free forgiveness from God. We can see the impact which this truth had, not only upon Luther, but also upon the entire Reformation. To Luther, whether it was in his hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” or in his preaching, his teaching, his defense of the Gospel, his dealing with his family, his life, and his death—Luther had learned to say with the psalmist here in Psalm 46, ***“God is truly our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”***

And by the fantastic grace of God, that same conviction, that same dynamic truth which Luther found in these words of the psalter, are also yours and mine. Like Luther, we are not unaware of our sins and transgressions before God. We know that daily we sin much, and we deserve nothing but God’s wrath and damnation.

We also know that if God were to deal with us according to his justice, there would be but one thing that he would have to say to us. It would be the words, ***“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”*** (Matthew 25:41).

But thanks be to God, like Luther, you and I have also come to know a God who not only sent his Son into this world to keep the Law perfectly in our stead, but who then went to the cross and rose victorious for our sins and the sins of all mankind. Through faith in that saving God in Christ, we, too, have come to recognize that God truly is for us when it comes to our sins and eternity a refuge and an unending strength.

Yes, on this Reformation Sunday, 2023, thanks be to God, both now and forever, that truly ours is a God about whom the psalmist could say, ***“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.***

***Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea . . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”*** Thanks be to God for this great assurance through his almighty, Spirit-filled Word.

Amen