

QUALITY THAT LASTS

By Rev. Will Nelken



Of all that is manufactured, here and around the world, there aren't many things these days that are built to last. If obsolescence isn't planned, surely permanence seldom is.

A great deal of that has to do with the pace of emerging technologies. What we discovered we could achieve last year is merely the foundation for something more this year.

Less than a dozen years ago, no one had even heard of an smartphone. Just fifty years ago, talking to someone through your wrist watch existed only in a cartoonist's imagination.

Yet, today's "latest thing" is already doomed for the recycler.

More importantly, human relationships are no more lasting today than they were 4,000 years ago. Faces may change, and places may change, but human nature remains the same. Apart from divine intervention, human social gains come too little, too late, and too briefly.

But—here's the wonder!—divine intervention is the specialty of Jesus Christ. His first appearance in our world was not the product of human planning or human spiritual evolution, but of divine compassion for a race of creatures bent on forceful conquest, subjugation, and self-destruction.

Into a world of oppression, abuse, neglect, and self-interest—Jesus was born. God in human form. Emmanuel, God with us. And because He came, we would never be the same again.

When He came we brought Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, which all too soon were used up and faded away. By contrast, He brought us gifts of faith, hope, and love, which have never ceased.

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

I never tire of speaking to you of these three things—faith, hope, and love—because they are always at the top of the list of our needs, and they never lose their savor, their ability to brighten our lives, to make us more productive and more satisfied.

Recently, in the course of reading through the Bible this year with The Bible Project, I came to Psalm 46. This psalm is punctuated by a songwriter's technique—something like a speaker's pregnant pause. You may read it as the untranslated Hebrew word *selah* or the English translation *interlude*. It is not part of the text, but is an aside to the reader, or an instruction to the musician. The word itself means to pause and reflect. An instrumental interlude may provide that opportunity.

Other than that, the only musical instruction I can think of that comes close is the repeat. So for years, when I have encountered *selah* in my reading, I pause and read the salient part of the preceding passage again. There's something that the writer wanted me not to miss; something that bears repeating; something that needs, not just expression, but reflection and meditation.

Psalm 46 is punctuated and divided neatly three times with *selah*. I think it is worth reading today in these three stanzas... and then reading again.

Faith

¹ *God is our refuge and strength,*

always ready to help in times of trouble.

² *So we will not fear when earthquakes come
and the mountains crumble into the sea.*

³ *Let the oceans roar and foam.*

Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!

Selah

This passage reminds us how our faith in God keeps us during times of trouble. And such times come to us all.

Fear of what might be, fear of what is, and even the lingering fears of what has been.

When things that seem by nature so stable, so enduring—the mountains and the ocean—begin to move, contrary to their nature, everything we depend on is threatened. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis can cause a great deal of destruction, loss, and pain.

These are the songwriter's symbolic images of those other things in our lives that—though they seem so stable (like our relationships, our health, and our society)—can suddenly, and without warning, churn and crumble. Circumstances will not support us, or our need for sure direction.

Where can we run? Where will we turn?

If we rely on ourselves, on our past experience, we can only fall short. We need a higher faith.

Let's pause and reflect...

¹ *God is our refuge and strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble.*

He is not a figment of your imagination, He is not a philosophy or a creed. He is God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. And He knows your name. And He feels your pain. And He is ready to help you.

He is our Refuge—our hiding place until the storm has passed.

He is our strength—when our own strength has gone.

Faith in God empowers your endurance. So we will not fear. Let the waters rise! We will stand, and remain standing.

Let the waters rise

I will stand as the oceans roar

Let the earth shake beneath me

Let the mountains fall

You are God over the storm

And I am Yours

Love

The second stanza is even better.

⁴ *A river brings joy to the city of our God,
the sacred home of the Most High.*

⁵ *God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed.
From the very break of day, God will protect it.*

⁶ *The nations are in chaos,
and their kingdoms crumble!*

*God's voice thunders,
and the earth melts!*

⁷ *The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us;
the God of Israel is our fortress.*

Selah

We have not known a time when the nations were not in chaos. Cold wars, hot wars. Occupation, oppression, enslavement. Even those of the same tribe fight for power and turf and water and resources. Love is shattered and subjugated by short-term power grabs.

It's one thing when it's taking place on the other side of the world—we can pity, we can pray, we can send aid. But when it comes to our soil, when it threatens our cities, when it injures our people—we are shaken to the core.

When family and friends are divided in their values, their motives, their opinions—even long-standing love is challenged. Unity loses its support, and love is shredded by harsh and unfeeling designs.

What are we to do? Who can make it stop?

Let's pause and reflect...

⁴ A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High.

⁵ God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it.

God is a City of Refuge. Bigger than a storm shelter, He can care for an entire people!

And the City of God is watered by a river that flows without ceasing. Did you know that water rights have been the cause of more wars than religion? People of the same religious tradition will battle over water. Because we require it; it is necessary to our lives and productivity.

The City of God has no lack of water. God's ever-flowing river of love toward His people provides an unending supply of healing and wholeness.

Moreover, God does not simply own the City; He *dwells* there! It is His sacred home.

It cannot be destroyed, because He Himself will protect it. It is His dwelling place. And it is the dwelling place of God's people. God dwells WITH His people. Emmanuel.

God's loving presence is our security. His never-failing love shelters us with lasting peace.

The songwriter adds a tag to this stanza to emphasize that truth:

⁷ The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.

He is HERE. He is AMONG us. He is our FORTRESS.

Our faith in Him empowers us, and His loving presence among us secures our peace. Still there is more...

Hope

Here is the third and final stanza...

⁸ Come, see the glorious works of the Lord: See how he brings destruction upon the world.

⁹ He causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation.

I will be honored throughout the world."

¹¹ The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.

Selah

Justice is an instinctual expectation. We are usually shocked and incensed when it is violated, or even delayed. But this world is not a just place.

Freedoms and justice that Americans may take for granted, simply do not exist for most of the people in the world. Human rights may be discussed, but much of it is lip service.

Hearts are broken. Lives are shattered. Hope is stripped away.

We have been commanded to leave ultimate justice in the hands of God, who said, "I will repay."

But the waiting can be excruciating. *“How long, O Lord? When will we be avenged against our enemies?”*

Our generation have never seen the Red Sea part. We haven't seen water flow from a rock. We haven't found manna waiting for us every morning without fail. We haven't seen many of the recorded miracles of God. But that doesn't mean we won't!

Time is in His hands. That means that time is His servant. Time must yield up whatever God has commanded. At the right time. In the fullness of time. Hope is restored.

The works of justice and peacebringing mentioned in this stanza are not familiar scenes to us. God knows that. They have been reserved for the final stanza, just like they are being reserved for the final phase of God's plan. This is our blessed hope.

We have been studying about this on Tuesday nights as we delve into the prophetic poetry of The Revelation. No matter how the nations rage, or how many times, GOD WINS! Justice will be established. Christ will rule the world in righteousness. Our hope in Christ is sure.

So, what are we to do? How are we to bear it, while lives are brutalized and destroyed, while injustices abound?

Let's pause and reflect...

***¹⁰ “Be still, and know that I am God!
I will be honored by every nation.
I will be honored throughout the world.”***

That doesn't mean be inactive, but it does mean don't be reactive. Revisit your hope in Christ.

Still yourself, quiet your anxious or raging thoughts, and recognize the Lord, that He is God. No one is

greater than He. And in the end, He will be honored by everyone, small and great, everywhere. *“At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”*

Christ will have the victory. He will receive the honor and the praise, from everyone—those who trusted Him and those who refused Him. There is no escape from justice. It is written in the Book (read the last three chapters). And, therefore, our hope in Him is ensured.

The psalm concludes with a repeat of the tag:
*⁷ The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us;
the God of Israel is our fortress.*

He wants to remind us that the City of God is not only a home, but an armed fortress. A shelter of safety and security for those who belong to Him. Our God will dwell among us—His people, without fear of judgment, without fear of failure. This is our secure hope in Christ.

God WILL bring peace to all the world—every ethnicity, every culture, every language. For ever and ever.

Faith, love, and hope will prevail. Thoroughly. These are the qualities that last, through Jesus Christ the Lord.

Do you know HIM today?