

# Kingdoms Fall; But God's City Will Never Perish

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Some people have termed today's world as a cancel culture. What they mean is that if you don't fit into the desired social peg hole a crowd of people will call for your immediate demise. And you can't say cancel culture is promoted by just one political party or mindset. It's all around. If you say something that is perceived as politically incorrect you will have people calling for you to be removed from your job and publicly shamed. In some arenas making a statement for social justice causes you to be boycotted. You can stand, sit, kneel, or tweet in the wrong way and suddenly you are a target and out of a job. Cancel culture is promoted by everyone from the highest office in the lowly comments section of a YouTube Video or Facebook post. Whether you agree with cancel culture or not you have to agree that many people on both sides of hot-topic issues have been boycotted or lost their jobs because of it. Today I invite you to step with me out of the political arena to see how cancel culture has always been around and found in more than just politics. It has existed in the spiritual sphere since the beginning of time. And it will continue and actually worsen as we approach the end of time. This November is a time in which our church will be looking at the end times. We'll be taking a look the next four Sundays at four different Psalms. Today in Psalm 46 we see the clashing cancel culture between God and the kingdoms of this world.

In order to fully understand how cancel culture has existed in the spiritual realm we must delve into history. So please allow me to take some time today to overview some important history. Since we are celebrating Reformation Sunday, I'd like to take you back to the cancel culture found in the church 500 years ago. The year was 1520, exactly 500 years ago. In October of that year a Roman Catholic Priest in Germany received a document. That document was the ultimate cancel culture of his day. The document declared that the Roman Catholic Priest, Martin Luther, had tweeted some really offensive things. The document stated that if Luther did not recant what he had written within 60 days he would be declared an enemy of God and condemned to hell.

Luther responded with trembling and prayer. He even at first tried to reason that the document wasn't from the pope himself. After sixty days of waiting it became clearer that this was indeed the declaration from the Vatican. Luther and all his supporters were shaken and starting to fear what was ahead. Being the target of cancel culture is never easy. Can you imagine being the target of cancel culture over spiritual truths by the highest authority in your church? Luther had to decide between holding onto the Scriptures or letting himself be the target of this attack. In doing so he wouldn't just be declared a heretic by the papacy. A few months later the emperor would declare him an outlaw -his very life was on the line! And it was a well-known truth that previous men targeted like this were canceled by being burned alive. This was more than a cancel culture calling for someone who misspoke to be fired. This was the highest authority in the church calling for the sentence of an ugly death and eternal hell to a priest in the church who questioned his authority and teachings. Talk about a cancel culture!

You and I don't have someone seated in some church office declaring each of us as condemned to hell because we believe the Scriptures. It doesn't seem likely that you will be forced to recant your Christian faith in 60 days or face the world against you. Thankfully, we are free in our nation today from that type of cancel culture which once existed.

But don't think that you are free from the battle against your faith. There is still a cancel culture against all spiritual truths. The devil seeks to silence anyone who holds faithfully to the Word of the Lord. He has used many forces to attack the truth. It is still done today around the world. The Christian faith is still under attack from worldly powers across the globe. Just as the Pharaoh of Egypt sought to crush the those who trusted in the God of Jacob, and the wicked kings of Israel sought to kill the faithful prophets, so today there are rulers, nations, and people in power who want to crush faithful Christians. And if violence doesn't do the trick, then false teachers will work to cancel the truth. Many places have the gospel shrouded today by those who teach false doctrines. They are operating with a cancel culture mentality with the devil as the driving force.

Even in a land of religious freedom the devil works to deceive us with cunning words. False teachers abound. And the devil tries to sway us with immorality to turn aside from the Lord. And if those attacks all fail then he will directly attack us. And don't misunderstand me. I'm not talking about mere politics. I am talking about attacks against those who look to the Bible as the sole source for spiritual truth.

You only have to mention that you are a Christian to stir the pot in many circles. You only have to live your Christian faith with regular worship to be called "a foolish spreader." You only have to flee from immorality to be mocked by the world. Tell people that you are a conservative Christian who holds to the historical faith of the Christian church and you will all the more fall under suspicion. Share some of those historically true teachings from Scripture and you will feel the spiritual battles escalate. The kingdoms of this world will try to silence you and cancel you.

If you think you are ready to wage such a spiritual warfare, watch out. Don't fall into the trap of thinking you will win it by your own will or wit. You will end up like the prophet Elijah, hiding in a cave. You will see the desolation that the devil has brought upon those who worship the Lord. You will find yourself canceled by the world and you will lose.

I'm sure Luther was trembling and in turmoil 500 years ago from today when he saw where things were begun to head. He was the target of cancel culture only for wanting to speak God's Word. He only wanted to return the church back to the Scriptures. Instead the church turned on him and doubled down on lies and violence.

Where did he find his refuge? He found it in the God of Jacob, the Lord of Armies. He found in Psalm 46 comfort against the cancel culture which stood opposed to the Word of God. Luther found assurances which removed his fears. And these words still remove all of ours: *Kingdoms fall; but God's city will never perish.*

Psalm 46 makes clear that we do not find our strength from political mandates, party platforms, popular opinion, or viral video posts. *"God is our refuge and strength."* And no matter how long the battle against his Church rages God is *"a helper who can always be found in times of trouble."* *"Therefore we will not fear."* No matter what happens in this world we have no reason to fear. God remains our refuge, our strength, and our helper, even if the earth's mountains start to shake and fall into the heart of the sea. God will not fail those under his protection and in his refuge.

This world might roar and toss against us, but we remain at peace in God's city. The middle of this Psalm talks about the gladness and peace we have in *"the city of God."* This city of God is not merely the city we call Jerusalem. For one thing, there is no real river flowing through that city. Rather, the river flowing through the city of God is the water of life. It still flows through God's Church today. It is in strong contrast to the waters of this world which rage and foam and bring destruction. Ideologies, philosophies, and rulers of this world will bring despair and war. Drink the waters of this world and you will die in your sin and raging against the Lord of Armies. But the waters of life found in Scripture bring unshakable peace. Those waters make us glad. They are the same waters which are pictured in the heavenly Jerusalem at the end of the book of Revelation. The Church is supplied with all it needs from God.

I can tell you that the city of Jerusalem has fallen many times in history. But the Church of God, his city, has never perished. *"God is within her. She cannot fall."* There were still 7000 in Elijah's time and there have always been believers safely in God's kingdom. God rules in the hearts of his people. We are his temple. His Church consists in all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. That Church cannot fail or perish.

*"Nations are in uproar. Kingdoms Fall."* We've seen this throughout history. There has never been a nation which has lasted forever. They all fall. *"He lifts his voice, the earth melts."* God is in control of history. When he determines that a nation has opposed him for too long, he destroys that nation and humbles it as it crumbles to the earth and melts. The Psalm invites us to contemplate history and our future. *"Come, look at the works of the Lord. What a wasteland he has made of the earth! He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He shatters the bow. He cuts up the spear. He burns the carts with fire."* He has done this in history over and over again. And he will do it to every nation when the final day comes. At the dawn of the final day he will bring every war to an end. All who oppose him will fail.

So what is everyone left to do? He says, *"Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted."* The word for be still is related to the idea of withdrawing your weapons. It means the fight is over. If you are outside of the city of God you must lay down your arms because the battle is lost. If you are inside the city of God, his church, you rejoice at his victory with peace. The battle is won! God will be exalted. He will be lifted up and honored by all as they bow before him. Either a person will bow in joy as they see their Savior, or in shame as they see their holy judge.

The repeating refrain of this Psalm is the source of our comfort. *"The Lord of Armies is with us, the God of Jacob is a fortress for us."* The expression "Lord of Armies is with us" has the same truth within it as the word "Emmanuel" which means "God is with us". God came to be with us as he took on human flesh. Jesus Christ, the Lord of Armies, came down to earth. He lowered himself to be with us and to be found as our helper. He faced a cancel culture as the religious authorities tried to silence him. In order to cancel him they had him crucified and declared a heretic.

But there is a river which makes glad the city of God. Jesus could not remain in death. He rose to life in victory. He won the battle. He established his church, the city of God, as those redeemed from their sins. He is with us in Word and Sacrament. And he will bring us to be with him forever in his everlasting kingdom.

Then, when Jesus returns in glory, he will cancel all wars. He will silence all the lies of the devil. And all the earth will have to be still and see him as the exalted over all the earth. By the power of the Word of the Lord the battle is won.

God cannot be canceled. As the Word of the Lord is proclaimed the gates of hell come crashing down. His voice is still lifted today as we carry his gospel to the world. It cancels sin. It defeats death. And it will put an end to all the fighting and all wars. God cancels all evil as he comes in exalted glory! He is Lord. He is our fortress, and our strength. Through faith in the God of Jacob we find a lasting refuge which not even death can defeat. He cancels our sin and declares us not guilty. This is all ours as a gift, by grace. We receive it as gift through faith as we find refuge in God.

When the sixty days were over, Luther could not bring himself to burn his works as the papacy demanded. Instead, he burned the decree that sought to cancel him. The efforts to cancel God's proclamation in Scripture that "we are justified by grace alone" would not be silenced. God protected Luther in the following years, and many found gladness and peace in the city of God. The Church still does find that gladness today in the gospel. It will never fall. Therefore, we will not fear. The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.