PSALM 146: “I Will Praise the Lord As Long As I Live”

In our study of Psalms you’ve no doubt noticed that the major theme is the praise and worship of God. There are all kinds of psalms which run the gambit of human emotion depending on the mood and circumstances the psalmist is in. The psalms reflect real life – sometimes we’re filled with joy and gladness, sometimes we’re sorrowful and troubled, at times thankful, frequently questioning, occasionally angry, even at times we might be a bit woeful as we deal with our sin and regrets. But the chord that runs thru all the psalms is the praise of God. He is our focus. He is the source of our help and hope thru life. He alone is worthy of our praise.

The last 5 psalms in the Book of Psalms are hallelujah psalms. These are the “final hallelujahs,” if you will. Under divine inspiration the psalmist is preparing us, the people of God, for that which we will be doing for all eternity, which is, praising our awesome and holy God. Notice the way each of these psalms (146-150) begins and ends… Praise the Lord! By the way, that is the meaning of the Hebrew word “hallelujah” – “Give praise to Yahweh” or “Praise the Lord.” So although praising God is a major theme throughout the Psalms, these last five psalms are distinctive in that they specifically begin and end with a call to “praise the Lord!”

Psalm 146, which we’ll be looking at this morning, was written after the exile around the time that the second temple was being completed, about the same time that Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls in Jerusalem. The Septuagint attributes the authorship of this psalm to the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. So if that’s true then it is very possible that this psalm would have been sung at the dedication of the new temple.

Psalm 146: it’s relatively short, only 10 verses, so let’s begin by reading it through one time and then we’ll go back and discuss it more detail. READ Psalm 146:1-10.

The psalm begins with a call to all the people of God collectively to praise the Lord. He says, v 1, “Praise the Lord!” But then the psalmist follows that up with a call to praise the Lord personally – “Praise the Lord, O my soul!” So here we see that praising God is to be done both corporately (as the body of Christ meeting together) and individually. Both aspects are indicated here.

READ Psalm 146:2

“I resolve, I am determined that I will praise God as long as I live.” That’s quite a statement. Can I be honest with you? There are times, situations in my own life, things that happen, when frankly I don’t feel much like praising God. Life can be tough, unfair, cruel, painful, as many of you can attest. Sometimes our worries and concerns just seem to throw a wet blanket on our ability to praise God. But the psalmist is adamant. He states, “I will praise the Lord as long as I live” – no matter what!

Habakkuk is one of those Minor Prophets that we don’t study very often. In that book God tells the prophet Habakkuk that soon the evil Babylonians are going to come and strike violently against God’s people, the nation of Judah. God’s judgment against the ungodliness of Judah will be to have an even more ungodly nation conquer them, killing many and taking many more captive. It’s not the kind of news Habakkuk wants to hear. In fact it’s terrible news! The future appears bleak. But Habakkuk refuses to focus on the circumstances around him and instead he focuses on the good and holy character of God – the God who saves, the God who strengthens. He prays the following prayer in Habakkuk Chap 3 after being told all this bad news…

READ Habakkuk 3:17-19.

“No matter what happens, no matter how bad things may get, I will praise the Lord. As long as there is breath in me, I will praise the Lord!” Can you say that today? Not knowing what tomorrow holds, you might even be a bit pessimistic, can you say that? It takes a personal resolve to do that.

READ Psalm 146:3-4

We are to place our trust in the Lord God alone and not in mere men, or women, or other nations, no matter how powerful they may be. This was a real problem in Israel’s history – they failed time and again to put their trust in God. Instead they relied on alliances with Egypt and Assyria and others. That term “son of man” in v 3 is not a Messianic reference in this case. It simply means a human being. What the psalmist is saying, what God is saying to us is “Don’t place your trust in human beings in whom there is no salvation.” In case you haven’t noticed, v 4, we’re all going to die some day and that includes all those powerful world leaders out there. They may have power for a season, but eventually they will step down, or be forced out or die. And then someone else will take their place and rise to power. And on and on it goes. No human being remains in power for long. No world leader can save us. Only God.

News flash – Donald Trump is not the one who we should be relying on to make America great again. No, God is the One who makes nations great. God is the only One who can make America great. Like the song says, God has “shed His grace” on our nation. And it will only be by God’s sovereign hand that America or any other nation achieves greatness. Man may fail us, presidents, congressmen, pastors, other leaders, but God will never fail us. So, put your trust in God. He never dies. He never vacates His throne. His plans never fail. They will be fulfilled in God’s time, God’s way.

READ Psalm 146:5

OK, question: Who is the God of Jacob? The Lord, Yahweh, the one true and living God. Is He your God? I sure hope so! He is the One who provides our help and hope.

At this point some skeptic or agnostic, some antagonist may step up and ask us, those of us who truly do have faith in God: “What is your God like?” And at this point we had better have good, sound biblical theology to answer them. And Psalm 146 is a great place to start because in v 6-10 we are given several important character descriptions of God. These show us the very heart of God.

READ Psalm 146:6

* God is the Creator of everything. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1) “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” (Heb 11:3) “For by him (Jesus, the second person of the godhead) all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1:16-17)
* God keeps faith forever. The NIV says, “He remains faithful forever.” That sounds a whole lot like last week’s lesson, the refrain that was repeated 26 times in Ps 136: “For His steadfast love endures forever.” You can trust Him. You can place your faith in God’s enduring love, mercy, faithfulness, and goodness.

READ Psalm 146:7

* God executes justice for the oppressed, in other words, those who are being abused by human injustice. “The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.” (Ps 103:6) There is that passage in Rev 6 where the martyrs, those righteous who are being oppressed cry out to God with a loud voice “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Well, read on in the Book of Revelation and God eventually does render His divine judgment on them. Jesus returns as King of kings and Lord of lords in Rev 19 and destroys all who oppose God.
* God gives food to the hungry. Ezekiel 18 talks about how God looks favorably and rewards the righteous and among the many descriptions of a righteous man is that he “does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment.” (Ezek 18:7) Jesus shed more light on this and how it will come to play in the final judgment: “Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” (Matt 25:37-40) It is in the very heart of God that we, His people, do what we can to meet the physical needs of those around us who are in need. We are to demonstrate Christ’s love even to people we don’t know. And when we do it, we do it as unto the Lord Himself.
* God sets the prisoners free. The Bible tells us how God freed Joseph from prison, the nation of Israel from Egypt, Jeremiah from the pit, Peter, Paul and Silas from their prison. We know that eventually God freed the Apostle John from his exile on the island of Patmos. As Psalm 102:19 declares, “He (God) looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die.” God did in these cases, but we also know that there were times when He chose not to do so. At the end of Hebrews 11 the writer talks about all those dear saints that God did not deliver: “And these all were commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised. For God had provided something better for us, so that they would be made perfect together with us.” (Heb 11:39-40) Even though not set free in this world, we know that those righteous who died were indeed set free spiritually to be forever with the Lord and to receive their heavenly reward.

READ Psalm 146:8

* God opens the eyes of the blind. He opens their eyes in a spiritual sense. Paul says, “But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.” (2 Cor 3:16) Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” (John 9:9) Those great words in the hymn Amazing Grace: “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.” And of course we see in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles how God sometimes opens physical eyes to see as well. When Jesus was reading from the Book of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth he read this part: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed…” (Luke 4:18) So the very heart of God that we see in our passage in Psalm 146, making the blind to see, both spiritually and physically, Jesus demonstrated in His life and ministry.

• God lifts up those who are bowed down. Psalm 145:14 puts it this way: “The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.” In other words He exalts the humble. He lifts up the lowly. “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6) “He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.” (1 Sam 2:8) One source I looked at asked the question, “Who is the most important person in the world today?” The correct answer is, “We don’t know.” God takes delight in using ordinary people, those who aren’t well known to do extraordinary things for Him. It may well be that in God’s eyes the most important person in the world is someone we have never heard from operating in some remote location. We may never hear about them this side of eternity. God lifts up, He exalts the lowly, the humble, the ordinary.

* God loves the righteous. Yes, God loves His children, those who are righteous, positionally, because of what Christ accomplished and our faith in Him. But I think this verse goes a step further than that. Psalm 11:7 says, “For the LORD is righteous; He loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.” God loves His people, yes, and He desires that we strive to live godly lives, to do righteous deeds, just like Jesus modeled for us. God wants us to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). )

READ Psalm 146:9

* God watches over the sojourners. Strangers and sojourners – those who dwell with you but are not one of you. Today we might say a foreigner. It wasn’t like in the O.T. God loved only the people of Israel and hated everyone else. That wasn’t it at all! God loves all people and He desires to have a relationship with all people, all tribes, all tongues. And God’s covenant people were to be the instrument by which God saved the world. That was His intent, His heart. God told His own people at Mount Sinai, “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.” (Exo 22:21-24) He reiterated that later in Lev 19 and Deut 10. Let’s bring this into N.T. terms. We Christians are the strangers and sojourners in this world. Don’t fall in love with this place too much because this is not your home. Peter is addressing his fellow believers when he says, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” (1 Peter 2:11). We’re on the way home, we’ll be there eventually, but we aren’t there yet.
* God upholds widows and orphans. “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.” (Ps 68:5) “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” (James 1:27)
* I guess no psalm would be complete without addressing the wicked. God brings to ruin the way of the wicked. He executes divine judgments against them. Read Isaiah 66 sometime and how God’s wrath falls upon godless humanity. He’s demonstrated it at different times in history but at the final judgment God will “render His anger in fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire.” There will be a final judgment and part of our job as Christians is to let people know and give them a chance to repent.

READ Psalm 146:10

• The Lord will reign forever. This is the exact opposite of what the psalmist said about human rulers in v 3-4. They won’t reign forever. The song of Moses in Exo 15: “The LORD will reign forever and ever.” (Exo 15:18) “God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.” (Ps 47:8) “But you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations.” (Lam 5:19) In Revelation 11 the seventh trumpet is blown and there is a loud voice in heaven announcing “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever!” (Rev 11:15)

One Final thought and we’ll close. Psalm 146 tells us a lot about God, but it only touches the fringes of what God has revealed to us about Himself in His holy word. What we know about God moves us, or it should move us, to praise Him. How about we sing? “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation! O my soul, praise Him, for He is your health and salvation!” We’ll sing the first and last verses of this great hymn.