

MY HOPE IS IN THE LORD

Hallelujah Psalms Series, Part #2

Psalm 146

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As we go through this series on Psalms 146-150—“The Hallelujah Psalms”—we see that each of these psalms begins and ends with the word “Hallelujah!” In the English Bible we’re using today it says, “Praise the Lord,” which is what the word hallelujah means. *Halal* means praise, and *Yahh* is the name of God, Yahweh. As you scan this psalm, you’ll see the word LORD used 11 times, which is the Hebrew name for our God, Jehovah.

Let me read Psalm 146, and then we’ll begin to unpack it this morning.

¹ Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! ² I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

³ Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. ⁴ When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.

⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, ⁶ who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; ⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free; ⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD LIFTS up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. ⁹ The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!

Opening and closing with “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!” shows us that the main purpose of these psalms is to evoke in us hearts of worship for our God. Patrick mentioned last week that all of us are worshipping something. I think it’s also true that all of us have many different things which are vying for our worship, and we need to recognize, “Yes, I’m tempted to give my life to these things: family, money, fun and the list goes on.

But here we’re reminded and encouraged to praise the Lord, even called to preach to ourselves—which is actually what the psalmist does. He speaks to himself, “Oh, my soul. I need

to praise the Lord.” Sometimes the feelings aren’t there. Sometimes the emotions aren’t there, but mentally we need to capture our thoughts and imagination, remembering that there is One Who is worthy of our worship. He says, *“I will praise the Lord as long as I live.”* So he’s broadening this out. It’s not just that God deserves every part of me now, but as long as I have breath, as long as I am alive, I will praise the Lord. And then he says, *“I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.”*

Do you ever wonder why we come and gather every week, with singing as part of our routine? It can feel like a strange thing. I love to sing, but some of you maybe don’t, so for you it feels even stranger. Maybe this was new to for some who walked into this gathering. Maybe you’ve been to a church service before, but it still feels odd to walk in with a group of 350 people and just start to sing together.

Music is something God has created and has commanded for us. There are places throughout God’s Scripture where He calls us to sing. It has an effect on us, even if in the moment we don’t feel like singing, or we think we can’t sing. Or maybe when you try to sing, people turn around and look at you, because you’re that one who just isn’t singing quite the same thing other people are singing. That’s okay.

There’s just something about followers of God that is urging us to at least have a song in our hearts. I don’t mean every moment of every day. You walk into a service and at first you just don’t feel it. I’ve been there. Or maybe it’s a certain song that just doesn’t resonate with you. Or perhaps you actually feel like you worship better and can think about the words better if you just stand and listen. There are times and places for that.

But if you never sing, you’re missing something God has made you for. You’re missing something God’s commanded from you. So as we’re looking at these psalms of worship—these psalms of hallelujah—let me just encourage you to try to sing. I know many of you love that, but for others it just doesn’t come as naturally. Try to engage in that, and with your voice sing praises to our God. We’re called to do that.

Ultimately what the psalmist is doing here is lifting God up, saying, “He is worthy of our praise.” The structure of this psalm is very simple. Praising the Lord is the main theme, but he goes on to highlight some of the things about our God that should evoke in us a desire to worship Him.

He starts by saying, “Don’t put your trust anywhere else. Everything else will fail you. Put your hope in God. He is faithful.” That’s the flow of what I want us to look at. In verses three and four he says, *“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.*

When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.” Don’t put your trust in princes.

You can just imagine the scene here. Perhaps there is a king who is not ruling in the way you might want. Perhaps he is oppressive or in one way or another is not fulfilling your dreams—what you were hoping for in a king. Yet this king has a son, a prince, and there’s a glimmer of hope for that son. Maybe when this prince is king, he will restore us. Maybe this next leader will. There’s always a hope for another leader.

There is debate as to who wrote this psalm. Some think it was David, and others think it was later in the history of Israel. But we see this pattern throughout the Old Testament where God’s people longed for a king. “If we just had a king, it would make us a stronger people.” Then Saul became king and failed them. Then there was hope for David—maybe he was the one. Then David failed. This his son, Solomon, failed. The kingdom was divided, and king after king after king came—some of them better than others. But eventually even the good ones died.

That’s what the psalmist is saying here: don’t put your trust in princes, in the son of man in whom there is no salvation. I don’t think this is speaking of our soul’s salvation, but rather of a general hope for the people. There is no hope that these leaders could make things right. Even with the good ones, verse four tells us, *“when his breath departs he returns to the earth, and on that very day his plans perish.”*

Maybe Trump is your guy, and from your perspective, he will make this nation great again. But even he eventually might mess up and say something offensive. Even he ultimately won’t bring true salvation to this country. Maybe Hillary is who you think will continue the progress. But even she, at some point, might get into some temptation and do something dishonest.

Maybe you have someone else—a third or fourth party—and you think, “If we could just get someone different—not one of these parties—that would make our country great. Maybe even if we could write in David Sunday and get enough people to vote for him...” Even David would ultimately fail us. And even if he perfectly led his country, still he can’t bring true saving hope, and he will eventually die.

The psalmist here is, I think rightly, directing our hope. Look at the words he uses. In verse three he says, “trust.” In verse five he says, “help...hope.” I think this is what we’re talking about. I’m not suggesting that we don’t care about politics, or we don’t care about our country, or we don’t care about what happens, simply becoming apathetic—“Nothing can get better, so why try?”

But if we place our ultimate trust, hope and help in thinking, “This is what I’m living for,” it will always, always fail. It’s not just leaders in a governing sense, but it’s the same with anyone placing ultimate hope, idolatrous hope, in another person. Maybe you think, “If I just had a different spouse, then my life would be better.” Your spouse will fail. People will always fail. They can’t be our ultimate saving hope.

Or maybe as a kid or teen, you hope in a parent. No, your parents will fail. Your parents aren’t perfect. While you should honor and love and obey them, recognize that the people in your life are human. Church leadership? We are sinners, too. You can’t place ultimate hope in any person. Rather, you must find and anchor your hope in your God.

Let’s move on to the question, “Why place hope in God?” Verse five says, “*Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.*” This is where true hope must be. The psalmist goes on to delight in some things about our God which prove—in complete contrast to person after person who will fail us—that God will not fail. This is why we can hope in Him; why we can trust in Him.

Beginning in verse six, he says this God “*made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them.*” The first characteristic of our God being elevated here is that this is the God Who made you. This is the God Who made everything. He’s powerful. He’s omnipotent. He’s ruling over His creation. From the very beginning, we’re seeing something about our God that is different from men and women. He is powerful, able to create heaven and earth, the sea and everything that’s in them.

The psalmist follows this by saying He is a God “*who keeps faith forever.*” He’s faithful. Contrast that with what he just said about princes: “*When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.*” But God is faithful forever. He’s eternally there for you, eternally faithful to His promises. He “*keeps faith forever.*”

Next, he describes God as a God of justice. I think this next sentence summarizes everything that follows: “*[He] executes justice for the oppressed.*” Normally when we think of God as a God of justice, what types of things come to our mind? Usually, the first thing is His wrath which is certainly part of His justice. (The psalmist gets to that near the end of the psalm.) We think of His justice as being rightly angry at and punishing sin.

But there’s more to His justice. He also “*executes justice for the oppressed.*” This shows us something about His character, how this God of power—this Creator—directs that power toward the weak, the vulnerable and the oppressed. It says He “*gives food to the hungry.*” Throughout history, He’s providing food. I want to stop for a moment and think about how

sometimes when we read these words, we ask, “Is He doing that? Where is He doing that?” (I want to talk about that toward the end.)

“*The Lord sets the prisoners free.*” I don’t think this is encouraging us to believe there shouldn’t be prisoners. He’s not saying God will ignore crime or that our God thinks all prisoners should go free. But here again he’s speaking about the oppressed, and throughout history many have been wrongfully imprisoned. Many have been wrongfully enslaved. The Lord is setting those people free. “*The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.*” He cares for the sick. He cares for those with disabilities, those who are weak in physical ways.

“*The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.*” This refers to those who are burdened and kept under some kind of oppressive burden. Maybe it’s just psychological or emotional weight. The Lord lifts those up.

“*The Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners.*” These are the strangers or foreigners or immigrants. The Lord is watching them. He’s guarding them. He’s caring for them.

“*He upholds the widow and the fatherless.*”

Again, in each of these categories he’s referring to people in vulnerable, weak or oppressed states; people who—if left in these conditions—would be helpless. God is caring for those who are weak, working to right the wrong, executing His sovereign plan to bring justice for the oppressed.

The psalmist then says, “*...but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*” There are two sides to God’s justice:

- the justice where God will rightly condemn and punish evil, bringing vengeance against it
- the justice where He is concerned for the weak, the vulnerable and the oppressed

Finally he says, “*The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations.*” So God is Creator, He is faithful, He’s bringing justice, and here we see He is eternally sovereign, eternally reigning. This is why we can run to Him as our hope and our help. If we just go through this list, it’s obvious that no earthly ruler has brought this. No president, no king, no congress, no parliament, no queen, no ruler has brought this kind of true social justice.

As I was reading through this, though, I’m trying to think what objections there would be to this. What about this is difficult to understand? I realize there are still injustices happening—so is God even doing these things? There are still the oppressed. There are still the hungry. There are still those wrongfully enslaved. There are still those who are blind or suffering in other

physical ways. There are those who are under heavy weights and burdens. There are those who are abused as immigrants or refugees. There are those who are suffering as widows or orphans.

So how is God doing these things? How is He bringing about this kind of justice? I think if we were to brainstorm these questions, we could think of many examples of ways God is doing this.

I want us to turn to Luke 4. As I was studying Psalm 146, other writers pointed to what Jesus said that's recorded in Luke 4. He unrolled the scroll and found the place that we now know as Isaiah 61:1-2. Luke 4:18-19 says:

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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Then "*he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down.*" Everyone is looking at Him. Verse 21, "*He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'*" Jesus at this point is the ultimate fulfillment of these promises that come out of the character of Who God is, and He's righting these wrongs. Even when Jesus was here, we see the fulfillment of what He's proclaiming beginning to happen—good news to the poor, liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. His ministry here on earth was bringing in the firstfruits of this Kingdom of God, where God is making things right again in this world. But it's also pointing toward something.

Not too many weeks ago we were reading in Romans 8 about how the earth is still groaning, and we are still groaning for God to come and make all things right, for all of these oppressions to cease.

I was listening to a message by Tim Keller, in which he pointed out the fact that Jesus stopped here. He didn't finish what it says in Isaiah 61: "*To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God.*" Tim Keller said Jesus wasn't trying to avoid offense, just focusing on the positive side of God's justice. But when Jesus came to this earth, He didn't come to bring God's vengeance—but to bear it. In His first coming, He was here to begin to show what God's Kingdom is like. In His preaching and teaching, He taught about how we should love our neighbors as ourselves, and how that begins to show what God's good rule is like. But ultimately Jesus was here to bear our punishment.

As we think about the implications of Psalm 146, it's important for us to see ourselves in this text as people who are oppressed and in need of God's rescue, people who need somewhere to run with our hope and our help and our trust. But it's also important for us to see ourselves as

part of the problem, part of the cause of these types of injustices and to see ourselves in need of God's saving redemption.

So application number one. The psalmist doesn't tell us to apply it this way, but I think the broader understanding of Scripture is that, as His followers, we look at the character of our God and we should reflect that character. So our first application is that we, as God's followers, should care about what God cares about.

Jesus told us, "The greatest command is to love God, and the second is like unto it—to love your neighbor as yourself." They ask Him to explain what He means, "Who is my neighbor?" So He tells the story of the Good Samaritan, basically asking, "Who is acting like a neighbor?" Well, it was the one who was passing by a guy on the street he doesn't even know and then caring for him.

What Jesus is saying is that at the heart of being a follower of God, the greatest command is to love God, but then to let that pour out into love for others in this world. To ignore them or pretend these injustices don't exist is not reflecting our God's character.

I'm not suggesting or offering solutions about how to right these things, and I don't think there are ways that you as an individual—or even we as a church—can go and ultimately right all of these wrongs. But we are called, as God's people, to begin now to reflect what life will be like in His Kingdom. By the way we live and the way we love, we're beginning to show, "This is what our God is like."

He cares for those who are hungry. He cares for those who are enslaved. He cares for those who have physical needs, who are blind. He cares for those who are under emotional burdens or weighed down with life. He cares for those who are immigrants and refugees, wanting to guard and care for them. He cares for widows and orphans, and others who are in weak and vulnerable positions.

And we too should care. We too should seek to show love. James 1:27 tells us, "*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.*" In the first chapters of James, we begin to see a lot of these same social-issue concerns calling us. What does it look like, then, to love our neighbor as ourselves? James says in James 2:8-9, "*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin.*" I don't think it's a stretch for us to look at Psalm 146, and to look at the way God cares for the oppressed, and then to think He cares about His people accomplishing these things as well.

Application number two, though, is directly stated: to put your hope and trust in Him alone. If everyone else fails us—if in this country we don't get the leader we want, if our liberties begin to shrink—it's going to be okay. Our ultimate hope is not in people. Our ultimate hope is not in government. Our ultimate hope is in God. We can trust in Him. He is enough.

As we broaden out even further, I think a third application comes from how the psalmist begins and ends this psalm: "Praise the Lord!" These truths about God should evoke in us a desire to reflect His character. They should remind us that His arms are the only place to which we should run for help and hope. But ultimately these truths should cause us to worship and stand in awe of Him. He wouldn't have to be like this. Those who are powerful like to associate with others who are powerful. Looking at humanity as a whole, none of us seem powerful to Him, but God doesn't only care about those who can do the most for Him, or who can accomplish the most, or who are the most successful. Something about the character of our God that should cause us to stand back and worship Him is that our powerful Creator cares. He cares for each one of us. He cares for us in our weakness. He cares for those who are least able to accomplish great things for Him. It should cause us to fall on our knees and worship Him, to praise the Lord as long as we live, to sing praises to our God while we have our being.

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