



Psalm 146 - Praise for God's Help

Introduction

The first and last phrase of this psalm and Psalms 147-150 <<***Praise the Lord***>>, Hebrew *hallelujah*, makes it plain that this hymn calls God's people to praise him. The theme is that the Lord's reign makes him a sure hope for God's suffering people. This final series of five psalms are generally known as 'the Hallelujah Psalms.' James Montgomery Boice commented, "In the earlier psalms, we have studied the writers' griefs, shames, sins, doubts, and fears. We have witnessed the people of God in their defeats and victories, their ups and downs in life. We have encountered rebellious words and struggling faith. All this is behind us now. In these final psalms every word is praise."

Psalm 146:1-2 - I Will Always Praise the Lord.

The opening verses set the tone for the whole psalm: the whole congregation receives the invitation to <<***Praise the Lord***>>, and then each member applies it to himself, i.e. <<***Praise the Lord, O my soul***>>. Joining in this song, as long as I live, is the best occupation for a human being.

- 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 all my life long.

Psalm 146:1-2

Praise the Lord! The psalmist meant this, i.e. Hallelujah! as both a declaration of his own praise to God and as an exhortation to praise. He called upon his own soul to give Yahweh praise, and others as well. Boice explained, "Hallelujah is a compound word made up of two Hebrew words: *hallel* (an imperative verb

meaning 'praise') and *jah* (a contraction of the name for God, Jehovah). So hallelujah means 'Praise the Lord (or Jehovah).'"

I will praise the Lord as long as I live. This is much the same as: <<*I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being*>> (Psalm 104:33), declaring a determination to praise God with one's entire life and being. Adam Clarke commented, "In my continuance, in my progression, my eternal existence. This is very expressive." And Charles Spurgeon added, "We cannot be too firm in the holy resolve to praise God, for it is the chief end of our living and being that we should glorify God and enjoy him for ever."

Psalm 146:3-4 - Do Not Trust in Mere Princes.

This section acts as a foil for the section that follows: in contrast to the Lord, the true God, it is vain to put one's trust in princes, who are mere mortals. Governments and armies have their proper place, but their merely human power is not ultimately decisive in the world that God rules; refer to the comments made on Psalm 20:7, 118:8-9 and 147:10.

- ³ Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
- ⁴ When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.

Psalm 146:3-4

Do not put your trust in princes. While Yahweh is to be praised, man is to be questioned. Even the highest of among men - princes, the modern equivalent being political leaders and others of influence - are not worthy of confidence for they are mere mortals. People are sure to be disappointed when they trust **in whom there is no help**; refer to the comments made on Psalm 20:1-5 for just some of the help that God gives.

Derek Kidner commented, "The word princes may seem to remove this advice from the plane of ordinary folk and their needs; but a modern equivalent would be 'the influential', whose backing may well seem more solid and practical than God's." Maclaren observed, "However high his state, he is but a 'son of Adam' (the earth born), and inherits the feebleness and fleetingness which deprive him of ability to help. 'He has no salvation' is the literal rendering of the last words of Psalm 146:3b."

When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. The Hebrew term *Ruach* means wind, breath or Spirit. The greatest among men are only men, and subject to death. Ashes turn to ashes and dust to

dust: <<*By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return*>> (Genesis 3:19), and: <<*All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again*>> (Ecclesiastes 3:20), and even the brilliant plans of men perish. These are reasons to set confidence in God alone and not in man.

Spurgeon commented, “This is the narrow estate of man, his breath, his earth, and his thoughts; and this is his threefold climax therein, – his breath goes forth, to his earth he returns, and his thoughts perish. Is this a being to be relied upon? Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. To trust it would be a still greater vanity.”

Psalm 146:5-9 - Blessed Is He Whose Trust Is in the Real God.

Yahweh, the God of Jacob, is the very one who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them. His power is unlimited; and he has the character that keeps faith forever. Verses 7-9 list groups of weak people (the oppressed, hungry, prisoners, the blind, those brought low, foreigners, widows and orphans), probably God’s own faithful, for whom God shows his power and faithfulness in providing the relief they need. When God’s people sing these words in faith, they will own these qualities as virtues toward which they too will strive.

- ⁵ Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
- ⁶ who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;
- ^{7a} who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

Psalm 146:5-7a

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob. Princes among men often fail, but God never disappoints the one who hopes in him. The psalmist has abruptly transitioned from negative to positive. Maclaren commented, “His negative teaching, if it stood alone, would be a gospel of despair, the reduction of life to a torturing cheat; but taken as the prelude to the revelation of one whom it is safe to trust, there is nothing sad in it.” Spurgeon added, “We have here a statement which we have personally tried and proved: resting in the Lord, we know a happiness which is beyond description, beyond comparison, beyond conception.”

Happy or, more commonly, **blessed** translates the Hebrew word *esher* meaning also contentment. The truly happy person is happy because God showers him with favour and blessing. Jesus uses the Greek equivalent in Matthew 5:3-11; as confirmed by: <<**Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him**>> (James 1:12). The Latin translation, *beatus*, is the source of the word beatitude.

Whose hope is in the Lord their God. Spurgeon commented, “We never praise God better than by exercising faith in him! Quiet trust is among the sweetest music that reaches the heart of God; and when we put our trust in man, we rob God of his glory; we are giving to others the confidence which belongs alone to him.” Not giving the due glory to God for his position in life directly led to the early and painful death of King Herod Antipas: <<**And immediately, because he had not given the glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died**>> (Acts 12:23). Josephus supports Luke’s account in Jewish Antiquities 19:343-350.

Who made heaven and earth. The singer provides even more reasons for confidence in God. When someone trusts in the Lord as the creator of all things, they realise he has power to help and deliver that even the greatest people do not possess. The words are probably taken from Exodus 20:11, reflecting Genesis Chapter 1.

Who keeps faith for ever. God can also be trusted because he is a moral, upright God. Yahweh is unchangingly true, and the champion of justice for the oppressed. The God of such creating power would be a monster without his passion for faith or truth and justice. Spurgeon remarked, “He is true to his own nature, true to the relationships which he has assumed, true to his covenant, true to his Word, true to his Son. He keeps true, and is the keeper of all that is true.”

Who gives food to the hungry. God also cares for those who lack the essentials for life. For the hungry he provides food and for prisoners he provides freedom (v.7b). In all this a God of power, holiness, and love is revealed. This is a God who can be trusted with confidence. Maclaren commented, “The hungry hearts of men, who are all full of needs and longing, may turn to this mighty, faithful, righteous Jehovah, and be sure that he never sends mouths but he sends meat to fill them. All our various kinds of hunger are doors for God to come into our spirits.” Spurgeon added, “Thus he completes the triple blessing: justice, bread, and liberty.”

^{7b} 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 strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Psalm 146:7b-9

The Lord sets the prisoners free. This is as much a reference to spiritual freedom and the freedom from the guilt and ravages of sin that Jesus released his followers from as it is to anything else: <<*So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed*>> (John 8:36).

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The psalmist here began a marvellous description of Yahweh as a God of power, care, justice, and compassion. The psalmist seems delighted to describe Yahweh in his great works of love and power. Maclaren commented, “All these classes of afflicted persons are meant to be regarded literally, but all may have a wider meaning and be intended to hint at spiritual bondage, blindness, and abjectness.”

All these gracious gifts can be immediately attributed to Jesus:

- Jesus opened the eyes of the blind: <<*As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David!’ When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to him, ‘Yes, Lord.’ Then he touched their eyes and said, ‘According to your faith let it be done to you’>> (Matthew 9:27-29), and: <<*Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind’>> (John 9:39).**
- Jesus lifted up those who are bowed down: <<*And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God>> (Luke 13:11-13).*
- Jesus loved the righteous: <<*Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!>> (Matthew 13:43), <<*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life>> (Matthew 25:46).**
- Jesus watched over the strangers: <<*When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, ‘Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed, in terrible distress.’ And he said to him, ‘I*

will come and cure him.’ The centurion answered, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, “Go”, and he goes, and to another, “Come”, and he comes, and to my slave, “Do this”, and the slave does it.’ When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, ‘Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith’>> (Matthew 8:5-10).

- Jesus upheld the orphan and the widow: <<As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother’s only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’ Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, rise!’ The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother>> (Luke 7:12-15).
- Jesus brought the way of the wicked to ruin: <<In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a market-place!’>> (John 2:14-17).

Derek Kidner commented, “Like Father, like Son. For us, these lines may bring to mind the oracle of Isaiah 61 by which Jesus announced his mission, and the further clues to his identity which he sent back to John the Baptist (Luke 4:18f.; 7:21f.).” The logical conclusion is that Jesus is Yahweh, the Lord.

But the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. God shows great love and compassion to the poor, afflicted, and needy. Yet the Lord also brings justice against the wicked, promising to turn their way upside down. However, Jesus also demonstrated grace to sinners, as he did to the woman caught in adultery: <<Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again’>> (John 8:10-11). Maclaren observed, “That aspect of God’s government is lightly handled in one clause, as befits the purpose of the psalm. However, it could not be left out. A true likeness must have shadows. God were not a God for men to rely on, unless the trend of his reign was to crush evil and thwart the designs of sinners.”

Psalm 146:10 - Praise the Lord Forever!

Because the Lord will reign forever: <<The Lord will reign for ever and ever>> (Exodus 15:18), <<The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits

enthroned as king for ever>> (Psalm 29:10), and: <<*His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed>>* (Daniel 7:14b), God's faithful should praise him now in hope of everlasting praise: <<*My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless his holy name for ever and ever>>* (Psalm 145:21); refer also to the associated comment.

¹⁰ The Lord will reign for ever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord!

The Lord will reign for ever. The psalmist was happy to declare this, because God's power and might are expressed in such love and compassion, the Lord will reign for ever, even to all generations. Clarke commented, "Therefore he can never fail; and he is thy God, O Zion. Hitherto he has helped you and your fathers; and has extended that help from generation to generation. Therefore trust in him and bless the Lord."

Praise the Lord! Psalm 146 ends as it began - with a declaration of praise to Yahweh, the proclamation of Hallelujah!