

Advent 2019

*“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! “May they be secure who love you!””
(Psalm 122:6 ESV)*

*“May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice!”
(Psalm 72:2 ESV)*

*“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.”
(Psalm 146:3 ESV)*

*“Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!”
(Psalm 80:19 ESV)*

A Song For The End Of The Age

December 15th, 2019

Psalm 146

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Introduction:

Good morning church! So good to see you. Open your Bibles please to Psalm 146; that’s on page 525 in your pew Bibles. This is now the third Sunday in Advent and we have been looking at the Advent Psalms. As you’ve heard me say now many times, the word “advent” means “coming” – so we have been looking at Psalms that reflect upon the coming of the King. This Psalm is one of the last 5 Psalms in the Bible. If you have your Bible open now look at the Psalm that comes before it – Psalm 145. The ascription to Psalm 145 reads as follows:

A SONG OF PRAISE. OF DAVID. (Psalm 145:0 ESV)

Now look at the first line of every Psalm that follows that.

Psalm 146:1 says:

“Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!” (Psalm 146:1 ESV)

Psalm 147:1 says:

“Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.” (Psalm 147:1 ESV)

Psalm 148:1 says:

“Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!”
(Psalm 148:1 ESV)

Psalm 149:1 says:

“Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the
godly!” (Psalm 149:1 ESV)

Psalm 150:1 says:

Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!
(Psalm 150:1 ESV)

Are you picking up the theme? These 5 Psalms are Psalms of praise. We presume written by David and they were gathered and collected and put here at the end of the Book of Psalms FOR A REASON.

Derek Kidner puts it this way:

“Five joyous psalms of praise, each of them beginning and ending with Hallelujah, bring the Psalter to a close. So in this respect as in many others, the Psalms are a miniature of our story as a whole, which will end in unbroken blessing and delight.”¹

Praise the Lord!

Do you see that?

¹Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 16 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 520.

We tend to read the Psalms as individual bits – and they can be read that way – but it is also important to ZOOM OUT every once in a while in order to observe and appreciate the whole. The Book of Psalms is like a library for life contained between TWO BOOKENDS. Psalms 1 and 2 provide the introduction. Psalm 1 says that there are two roads – two paths – and two predictable outcomes. You know it. The Psalmist says:

¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:1–3 ESV)

So that's the FIRST ROAD – that's the GOOD ROAD – that's the road that leads to life.

But there is a BAD ROAD TOO and it ought to be avoided.

⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1:4–6 ESV)

So there is a road that leads to life and a road that leads to death. That's Psalm 1. In Psalm 2 we learn that the road that leads to life is the road that leads to Zion - the Mountain of Messiah.

Psalm 2:6 says:

“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” (Psalm 2:6 ESV)

And so WISDOM in this world is all about being in right relationship to this King. Psalm 2 ends by saying:

¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.

¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:10–12 ESV)

So that's the message of the Book of Psalms as a whole.

There are two roads.

One road leads to death and ruin.

One road leads to life and salvation.

If you take the right road then you will be singing the Songs of Zion forever.

But if you take the wrong road then you are going to be singing a very different tune indeed. You aren't going to be singing Psalm 146 on the Last Day – you are going to be singing the song recorded in Revelation 6:16-17. You are going to be calling out to the rocks and the mountains saying:

“Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Revelation 6:16–17 ESV)

So that's what you see when you ZOOM OUT just a little bit.

These 5 Psalms are Psalms for the end of the age. These are songs for the coming of the King.

Will you be singing them when Messiah comes again?

That is the question we will be wrestling with together this morning.

Hopefully you have your Bible open by now to Psalm 146. Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 1:

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! (Psalm 146:1–10 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Now, of course you can sing this song every day – but the arrangement does suggest that it will be particularly appropriate on the last day. This is a good song to sing when you see the coming of the King.

So – who is going to be singing this song on that day?

There are many clues within the text and many clues within the Book of Psalms as a whole. The first thing we can say with confidence is that this song will be sung by the people who have put their trust in the Lord.

Who Will Sing This Song At The End Of The Age?

1. The people who trust in the Lord

We see that in verse 3:

“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.”
(Psalm 146:3 ESV)

Here we learn that everyone in this world is trusting in something – and someone for their salvation – however that may be defined. You may define salvation in terms of security. You may define it in terms of peace in this life and the next. But however you define it you are trusting in someone to deliver it.

The people on the road that leads to death and destruction are trusting in human leaders – IN WHOM THERE IS NO SALVATION.

The Bible says that it is foolish to trust in human leaders and the great men and women of this earth because when they die their plans and their programs DIE WITH THEM. One human life is simply too short to make any significant changes. And human beings in general are too selfish to carry on and finish the work and initiatives of others. Therefore – it is foolish to expect that any human leader is going to make this world substantially better than it is.

This is why brothers and sisters, we should not be AS INVESTED in the political process as our unsaved friends and neighbours. Now hear me carefully – we should be invested – just not AS INVESTED. Because we understand that bad politicians are not ultimately to blame for the brokenness of the world and GOOD politicians are not ultimately to be trusted for the salvation of the world. Because we know that – we ought not to be AS OUTRAGED as our neighbours or as HOPEFUL AS OUR NEIGHBOURS come election time.

That is not where our hopes comes from. Our hope comes from the Lord.

Psalm 146:5 says:

“Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Psalm 146:5–6 ESV)

By the way, that's why Christmas is such Good News – because the One who comes to save us is GOD HIMSELF!

Matthew 1:23 says:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). (Matthew 1:23 ESV)

Do you see that?

Only Immanuel can save us! Only the Seed of the Woman who is the Son of God can save us! Blessed are all those who take refuge in him.

So if that's you – if you have taken refuge in the person and work of Christ then you are going to be singing this song on Judgment Day. Those are the people who will be BLESSED FOREVER AND EVER AMEN. Those are the people who are going to be REJOICING when they hear the trumpet sound! When they see the Lord descend! When they feel the earth shake and tremble and they behold the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven as a Bride prepared for her husband.

Lift up your faces on THAT DAY brothers and sisters – and PRAISE THE LORD!

And you can use Psalm 146 to do that - Hallelujah!

The words of the text open in front of us also incline us to believe that this Psalm will be sung in particular by the poor, the oppressed and the needy.

2. The poor, the oppressed and the needy

Look at verses 5-8 – this is the heart of the Psalm:

⁵Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,

⁶who 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. (Psalm 146:5–8 ESV)

Scholars tell us that Psalm 146:5 is the LAST BEATITUDE in the Psalter – the last statement about who will be BLESSED in the Kingdom of the Lord. That’s what a beatitude is and this one reminds us an awful lot of the beatitudes spoken by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. In Luke 6:20-26 Jesus said:

²⁰ “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

²² “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

²⁵ “Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

²⁶ “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:20–26 ESV)

Here Jesus seems to be saying that if you are poor, hungry, oppressed and persecuted then you are almost certainly on the road to Mount Zion. You are almost certainly on the road that leads to eternal life – therefore you should be happy! You should be singing this song now because you are going to be singing this song forever.

But on the contrary, if you are rich now, if you are full now, if you are happy now – if you are living your best life now – then woe unto you! How sad for you! How unfortunate – for you are almost certainly on the road that leads to death, hell and eternal damnation.

What an incredibly odd thing to say!!

And completely counter intuitive!

Don't we tend to assume that we are MORE LIKELY the people of God if we are rich, healthy and happy?

But here Jesus says that if we ARE rich, healthy and happy then we are in terrible danger. That should be a huge red flag. We have almost certainly chosen the road that leads to death.

So what does he know that we don't?

Or rather what does he know that we've forgotten?

The answer comes at the very beginning of the Gospel story. In Genesis 3:15 God said to the devil in the hearing of the man and the woman:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

Did you hear that brothers and sisters?

Perpetual enmity.

Never ending warfare.

Between the offspring of the devil and the children of promise.

That's why things are harder on the road that leads to Zion.

Because the DEVIL IS AT WAR WITH YOU!

This WAY is HARDER because there are bandits on the side of the road!

The devil does not lay ambushes over there for the people on the road to hell – they are already going where he wants them to go – so he saves all his weapons and deploys all his forces over here. He harasses the people who are on their way to the celestial city.

That's why Jesus says – blessed are you if are poor!

Blessed are you if you are hungry!

Blessed are you if you are persecuted!

Those are the devil's arrows! If he's shooting at you then you must be headed in the right direction.

Now he's not saying that all poor people go to heaven and he's not saying that all rich people go to hell. He's just saying narrow is the road that leads to eternal life. Steep is the path that leads to glory - but BLESSED ARE YOU IF YOU ARE ON IT.

You see being God's people is kind of a “good news/bad news” kind of story in the Bible. It's good news because of where we're going. We're going to Zion! We're are going to the Everlasting Kingdom! We're going to the City that has foundations whose architect and builder is the LORD.

That's the good news.

Jesus gives us the bad news:

“In the world you will have tribulation.” (John 16:33a ESV)

But even the bad news comes with a word of comfort. Jesus finishes that verse by saying:

“But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 ESV)

Do you see that? Jesus was always saying stuff like. In Matthew 11:12 he said:

“the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.” (Matthew 11:12 NKJV)

If you are on the Kingdom road in this world then you are under assault. But the true sons and daughters of the Kingdom PRESS THROUGH.

I love what Matthew Henry says here, he says:

*“The violent take it by force. They who will have an interest in the great salvation are carried out towards it with a strong desire, will have it upon any terms, and not think them hard, nor quit their hold without a blessing”*²

Remember they are worshipping the God of Jacob – and Jacob was a fighter. Jacob wrestled with God and would not let go until he had the blessing.

We used to talk about how the Christian life is a fight. Do you remember that scene early on in Pilgrim’s Progress where Christian comes to the House of Interpreter and is shown a series of visions that are intended to help him on his coming journey? In one of these visions he sees a beautiful castle on a hill and he sees people walking around in the castle clothed all in gold and glorious raiment. Christian asked Interpreter – “can we go there – I want to go and live in that glorious castle.” But Interpreter took him over to a long line of men who thought to enter the castle. He saw there that the way to the palace was guarded by a gauntlet of soldiers bearing arms and wearing armour. The other men in line held back for fear of these terrible opponents but then finally one brave, stout man came forward, took up a sword and a shield and began to hack and cut his way through the gauntlet. He took many painful wounds but he won his way safely through. Christian saw him met by God and heard a voice from inside the castle which sang:

Come in, Come in; Eternal Glory thou shalt win.

That is how we used to talk about the Christian journey.

²Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Unabridged)*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), paragraph 29228.

We understood that it was a slog! It was a war! It was a battle! We wouldn't have been given Spiritual Armor if the Christian journey were not a FIGHT THROUGH HOSTILE TERRITORY!

But it is.

So rejoice because after the battle comes the blessing. That's what it means to worship the God of Jacob. It means you walk with a limp – but you walk in HOPE because you are on your way to the celestial city.

Thanks be to God!

Thirdly then we notice that this is a song for people who are playing the long game.

3. The people who are playing the long game

Look at verses 9-10:

“The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 146:9–10 ESV)

Again – this latter bracket is consistent with the former bracket. In Psalm 1 the man on the right path – the wise path is like a tree planted by streams of water – his leaves do not wither. But:

“The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” (Psalm 1:4–6 ESV)

Are you seeing that?

That is the message of the Bible in a nutshell!

There is a path that is HAPPY NOW and SAD LATER – and only the fool is walking on that path because LATER lasts for eternity.

But there is another path – a path that is HARD NOW and STEEP NOW but that is happy and blessed for all eternity.

That’s what the Psalter is saying – and that’s what the Savior is saying. Jesus said this sort of thing all the time. In Mark 8:34-38 he said:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:34–38 ESV)

A cross now – and GLORY LATER – that is the call of the Kingdom. That is the road to ZION – are you on it?

Are you bearing the slings and the arrows for the sake of the Son of Man in whom there is salvation? Or are you ashamed? Are you taking the easy road that leads to destruction? Which road are you on friend? Which song will you be singing?

That’s the question that we’ve been wrestling with today.

And you have to decide – you have to WILL A WAY. Now don’t get all Reformed on me – don’t talk to me about how God wills before we will – I know that very well. But I also know what I see in this Psalm. I see a man – I see a Psalmist who has willed. Look at the opening verses of this Psalm:

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. (Psalm 146:1–2 ESV)

This is a man who has WILLED to walk this road. He is commanding his soul to stay the course. I WILL PRAISE the LORD as long as I live! As long as the Lord gives me breath – I will give him worship. Come what may. Come hell or high water. I will praise the Lord!

That is the song of a man with hope.

That is a man who knows his God and who knows his eternal destiny.

That is a man who can sing the Songs of Zion while he walks through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Are you with him?

It's never too late to change sides, my friends. Better to be a door keeper in the house of the Lord than to perish with the wicked FOREVER.

So kiss the SON! Today! Lest he be angry and you perish in the way. Blessed are all those who take refuge in him.

To those of you who have been walking on this road for a very long time, my encouragement to you today is for you to persevere. Jesus said:

“the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matthew 10:22 ESV)

Do not be dissuaded by the many slings and arrows that come your way. Let your trials press you deeper into the arms of Christ. Let your sickness heighten your anticipation for the healing touch of Christ that will come. Keep putting one foot in front of the other.

Do not give up - the road is steepest just prior to the summit.

When the battle is fiercest – lift up your eyes to the mountains from where your help doth come.

For the Lord watches over the sojourners – he upholds the weak and the vulnerable but the way of the wicked will perish.

So stay the course, hold the road and praise the Lord!

Hallelujah!

Let's pray together.