

HALLELUJAH!
(SUNDAY, AUGUST 9, 2020)

Scripture reading – Matthew 6:25-34; Ps. 146

INTRODUCTION

Roy Clements is a pastor of a Baptist church in Cambridge, England.

In a sermon he stated that there are three words that can be understood by every language on earth.

What three words would you say?

His list: amen, Coca Cola, and hallelujah.¹

Unfortunately, the precious word hallelujah is very often used in vain.

Hallelu is a command that means to give praise.

Jah is a shortened form of the covenant name Yahweh.

Our Psalm begins and ends with the command – **Praise the LORD or Hallelujah.**

Notice how the last 5 Psalms in the Book of Psalms all begin and end with this most precious and important command – Hallelujah, Praise the LORD.

The Book of Psalms probably more than any other book in the Bible deals with what we might call the problem of evil.

So, it is not that we ignore evil or just think happy thoughts.

But we do rejoice that God's purposes will not be frustrated.

No matter how dark the situation seems, God is in control.

We might wonder or cry out to God, why do you not act on behalf of your people who are attacked and imprisoned?

¹ Cited by Boice, 1258.

If salvation, O God, comes only through your work, then why are not more being saved now when it is most needed?

We can't always give simple answers, but we know God's truth in all situations.

Let your soul be filled with the truth of God and praise to God.

Make the LORD the focus of your praise!

We will look at Psalm 146 in three parts: verses 1-2, 3-5, and 5-10.

[1] VERSES 1-2: PRAISE THE LORD WITH ALL YOU ARE

As I pointed out, this Psalm begins and ends with the same command – Praise the LORD.

This command is found at least 50 times in the OT, with all but two found in the Psalms.

In terms of a command, I think we would have to say this is one of the most repeated commands in the Bible.

Can you think of a command that might be found as often?

The only other command in Scripture maybe used as often would be the similar command **to rejoice!**

The command to praise is not something you are to do with gritted teeth.

This is not a command to take out the smelly bag of garbage.

This is a command of joy even in the midst of trial and difficulty.

Listen to the beautiful words that open Romans 5.

Rom. 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2** through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and **rejoice** in hope of the glory of God. **3** And not only *that*, but we also **glory**² in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; **4** and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

² Same verb as the verb rejoice.

Think about this.

This command to praise the LORD can only be obeyed if you have been first saved by God's grace.

Only a believer can respond to God in true thanksgiving and praise.

We see in the second half of verse 1 and verse 2 that the Psalmist gives a command to **himself** to praise the LORD and expresses his determination to **obey** this command.

James Boice in his commentary notes that worship is work!³

A significant problem for the church today is spiritual laziness.

Oh, may the Lord always keep us from turning this precious duty into drudgery.

Hear the command of God's Word to praise and glorify Him.

The word **soul** in verse 1 does not mean here the spiritual aspect of who we are.

The word soul here speaks of all that God has created us and redeemed us to be.

We observe that with these final five Psalms that no author is listed.

Maybe these Psalms were written later in the history of Israel as the Septuagint suggests.⁴

What is important to see is that these Psalms were not written to impress other people.

They were written and inspired by the Holy Spirit to direct God's people.

Here we have a testimony of faith.

This is what you are called to do now and determine that you will do as long as God gives you life.

³ Boice, 1259.

⁴ Boice, 1257. Boice does not think that there is any evidence for this idea.

Does your life show forth a pattern of praise?

Are you obedient to this command of Scripture?

[2] VERSES 3-5: DON'T WORSHIP MEN

Notice the overall focus of this Psalm is on the praise that God deserves and the mighty works of the Lord.

So, verses 3 and 4 stand out don't they?

But they have an important place in this Psalm.

These verses provide a contrast that we will later see in verse 5.

These two verses are also a reminder of two unhappy realities.

We often value *others* more than we value God.

We often value *ourselves* more than we value God.⁵

The verb **trust** in verse 3 is a common verb in the OT, used over 100 times.

It is interesting that the first time this word is used in the OT is in the judgment portion of Deut. 28.

Deut. 28:52 "They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you **trust**, come down throughout all your land; and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the LORD your God has given you.

Otherwise, very often the verb trust is used for the LORD.

2Kings 18:5 He [Hezekiah] **trusted** in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him.

Psa. 4:5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,

⁵ Boice, 1260.

And put your **trust** in the LORD.

Psa. 118:9 It is better to **trust** in the LORD Than to put confidence in **princes**.

Notice the end of verse 3. It could more literally read: **In a son of Adam there is no salvation.**

After Saul and David, there were 40 kings who ruled over Israel and Judah.

Out of those 40 kings only a handful were truly faithful to the LORD.

The majority of them were a total disappointment even though they were called to be a picture of Christ.

In a son of Adam there is no salvation.

Verse 4 joins with verse 3 with a play on words.

The word **earth** is very similar to the word **man** – Adam and Adamah.

Verse 3 is a very important truth. Let me share just a few points of reflection on it.

First, although we know this is true, we still need the reminder, because we naturally have a tendency to look to men and women in ways that are not appropriate.

Second, we can say, don't look too closely at any man or women. You will always find sin. You are always going to find something disappointing.

Third, we do rightfully feel disappointment when we see moral failure demonstrated by pastors, teachers, or others in authority.

This verse does not justify or cover over the failure of those who are called to live lives that are above reproach.

So we don't trust, but this doesn't mean we still are not often filled with sorrow.

In contrast then with verses 3 and 4, we have the beautiful statement of verse 5.

Happy or **blessed** is he who has the God of Jacob for His help, whose hope is in the LORD his God.

The word **happy** is the same word that begins the book of Psalms.

This is the blessing of salvation, justification, and union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word hope used in verse 5 is not the common word for hope in the OT. It is a word used only one other time in Psalm 119:116.

There is a related verb that is used more often which expresses the idea of waiting for the LORD.

Charles Spurgeon wrote:

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. O how blessed a thing it is to know that God is our present help, and our eternal hope. Full assurance is more than heaven in the bud, the flower has begun to open.⁶

[3] TWELVE REASONS TO PRAISE THE LORD, vv. 6-10

We observe that this is clearly a psalm of praise and significantly the focus is on specific attributes or actions of the LORD that call for a response of praise.

Here we learn a very important lesson.

When you think of your duty to praise the LORD, you know that **often your praise of the LORD is very weak.**

So, turn to His Word to help you.

You don't have to come up with your own ideas.

In fact, it often is very difficult to praise the Lord without the guidance of His Word.

⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), paragraph 29509.

I have counted a list of 12 points of praise in verses 6-10.

Why should we praise God with everything that is in us?

Here are 12 reasons:

1) God is the creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything that fills what God has made.

If this were the only reason, we would have sufficient and endless reason to praise God and be humbled before Him.

This is why we study science and should want to know as much as possible about our world and universe.

Out of nothing God created.

By His power He continues to sustain and rule over all that He has made.

Think often of God's power displayed in creation.

It will remind you that God can certainly make provision for you in all that you are facing.

2) Who keeps truth forever.

This is an interesting expression.

I think this is the only time this exact expression is found in the OT.

The verb **keep** can mean to watch over or guard something.

God guards truth or faithfulness forever.

Isn't this such an important thing in our age where truth has been absolutely denied?

We are told today that everything in reality is just a matter of perspective.

Two plus two is a western construct.

There are 70 genders or whatever the number is now.

God keeps truth forever.

3) Our Triune God executes justice for the oppressed.

The verb **executes** is the same verb used in verse 6 translated as **made**.

Just as God made heaven and earth so we can say definitively that God brings justice for the oppressed.

Now this truth is not open for debate.

There is no denying that this is what God does.

However, as we see in the Psalms, it doesn't always seem that this true.

We struggle at times to believe this fully.

And notice that this verse recognizes that there are those who are treated wickedly and unfairly by others with power.

We should care about those who are abused and unfairly treated.

God cares even more.

4) Our Lord gives food to the hungry.

Again, this Psalm recognizes that there are those who do not have enough. There are those who are hungry.

In many cases the worst hunger is connected with wicked governments.

In 1932-33 Joseph Stalin starved nearly 4 million people to death in Ukraine through his wicked policies and changes.⁷

Sadly, this pales to the Great Chinese Famine caused by Mao in the late 1950's and early 1960's with a death count of 15-55 million.⁸

But again, we say that God is still the ultimate provider for the hungry.

⁷ <https://www.history.com/news/ukrainian-famine-stalin>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Chinese_Famine Another article to consider:
<https://www.newsweek.com/maos-great-famine-72301>

And my friends, how incredibly thankful we should be that we have never faced anything even close to situations like this.

5) The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners.

We proclaim this truth knowing full well that there are still many believers who are imprisoned this day in countries all over the world.

And yet we also consider how many are given freedom in God's perfect timing and work.

And this is our hope as we pray for those who are still suffering.

6) and 7) The LORD opens the eyes of the blind and raises those who are bowed down.

We know there is a unity in Scripture.

But can you think of examples in the OT where blind people were healed like you find in the miracles of Jesus?

The fact that Jesus worked this miracle a number of times I think is a testimony that this was God's mighty work in the Old Testament also.

We also understand this in terms of spiritual sight also.

With John Newton we also sing, was blind but now I see.

My friend, Samuel, who is hoping to get asylum in the US speaks of the blindness that affects most of the people in China who do not see or understand what is taking place in their country.

He testifies to how God opened his eyes to understand these things.

John Calvin commented on verse 8 saying:

So when he is said *to raise up the bowed down*, we are taught to take courage when weary and groaning under any burden. Nor is it merely that God would here have his

praises celebrated; he in a manner stretches out his hand to the blind, the captives, and the afflicted, that they may cast their griefs and cares upon him.⁹

8) The LORD loves the righteous.

What a precious truth again testifying of God's grace.

For we know that apart from God's grace, there is no one who is righteous.

Praise God that He has determined to set His love upon us and bring us in union with our beloved Savior.

Eph. 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **15** from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, **16** that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, **17** that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height – **19** to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

9-11) The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down.

Verse 9 lists three of the most vulnerable groups in a society.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

The LORD watches and gives relief and help.

In great contrast, the LORD turns upside down the way of the wicked!

No timetable is given here. It is not that we always see it when we think we should see it; this is the truth of God's Word.

12) The LORD shall reign forever - Your God, O Zion, to all generations!

We know that ultimately there are two religions.

⁹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 16954.

There is the worship of the true and living God or there is the worship of creation and man.

There is either a world that is ruled over by the sovereign God and creator or there is a world of ultimate chance and meaningless.

Why do so many embrace a world of meaningless?

The answer is that man in his rebellion chooses destruction and chaos over truth because men and women in rebellion do not want to be accountable to a holy, just, and sovereign God.

In the end, it is not a battle over evidence and facts.

It is a spiritual issue.

And so, as we come to the end of this great Psalm, we say, Lord if I can truly obey the call of this Psalm, it is only because of your saving grace.

I would never praise you based on my own choice or goodness.

It is all of grace.

May all the praise, glory, and honor be given to you!

Continue to direct me according to the truth of your word.

Keep me from consuming self-centeredness.

Let my life be filled with praise to you the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Make the LORD the focus of your praise!

Prayer

Closing Hymn: 53

BENEDICTION - 1 COR. 15:57-58

But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.