

Praise the Lord, God our Father

Psalm 146

Sermon for June 4, 2023

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Today is the last sermon in our series called: "How the Psalms Teach us to Pray."

Next week, Clement Tendo will be back in town and he will preach a sermon about peacemaking.

And then on June 18 we will begin a new sermon series in Acts.

For this last sermon about the Psalms, I want to focus on why we pray.

We pray because God is our Father, and he loves to hear his children pray.

Psalm 146 is a prayer and a song of worship.

The first and last words of this song are Hallelujah!

That's the Hebrew word translated Praise the Lord!

I am going to read Psalm 146, and then together we can discover what the Holy Spirit wants to communicate to our hearts.

Psalm 146

1 Praise the Lord! [Hallelujah!]

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!

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Please pray with me.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth.
Jesus, we worship because you are full of mercy and love.
Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God, amen.

Before the author says anything else, he shouts "Hallelujah!"

We speak many languages in this church.

But words like "Amen" and "Hallelujah" are Hebrew words we all say.

I love that, because we can praise and pray with one voice using these same words.

Why does the author begin his song with "Hallelujah"?

Think about the map application on your phone you use for directions.

Sometimes you make an unexpected turn, and the disoriented app says: "recalculating route."

My friends, there are many things in the world that demand the attention of our hearts and minds.

We get disoriented easily.

But worship helps our hearts recalculate the route back to our Father.

Verses 1-2a do that for us.

To reorient our hearts back to the Lord, we can pray:

1 "Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

2a I will praise the Lord as long as I live;"

All our life, our words and our deeds and our thoughts, are to be devoted to God's praise.

We need worship to reorient us when the world knocks us off course.

Worship also protects us when we are tempted to praise or trust anyone other than God.

Look at the warning in verse 3:

3 "Put not your trust in princes,

in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation."

"Princes" in verse 3 might also be translated "the influential."

Famous men and women today receive praise for their good looks, or great talent, or power, or wisdom.

But there's no salvation available from them.

It is tempting in a difficult situation to think, "who can I call?"

What man or woman can help me out of this problem?"

Who do you call first when you have a problem?

Verse 4 reminds us not to put our trust in any human being because:

4 "When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;
on that very day his plans perish."

Whether that person plans to do good or evil for you, when he dies, his plans die.

That's why the only the prince you can truly trust is the Prince of Peace, Jesus our Lord and Savior.

The Prince of Peace died, but on the day He died, HIS plans did not perish.

Jesus died on Good Friday, and rose again to everlasting life on Easter Sunday.

His resurrection made everlasting life possible for us.

Because that was His plan.

His plan was to give you new spiritual life when you repent and trust in him.

When you die one day, his plans for you will not perish.

He will bring you into His Father's house.

There you will shout "Hallelujah--Praise the Lord!" for eternity as a child of the King.

If you've been a Christian for awhile, you have heard these things before.

But we forget them.

That's why we study the Word of God, to reorient our hearts back to the Lord.

Now let's look at verse 5:

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

Blessed is an important word in the psalms.

It's the first word of the first Psalm.

Psalm 1 begins:

"1 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked..."

A blessed person experiences well-being in every area of life, because he trusts in God the Father.

Your Father cares about your soul, and also your physical, mental, and emotional health.

Therefore the Body of Christ should also care for human beings in all those ways.

But before we can offer love to anyone on earth, we have to receive love from heaven.

Look with me at the active verbs in verses 7 to 9.

See how comprehensive the loving care of God is for his children.

Our God is the one...

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,"

Psalm 146 says that it is God who does these things.

Hundreds of years later, Jesus of Nazareth claimed to do these things, too.

That is why people wanted to kill Jesus from the very start of his ministry, to throw him off a cliff.

You can read in Luke chapter 4 that people were angry with Jesus for two reasons:

He said that God's message of salvation was not only for the Jews, but also for the entire world.

Jesus came to save men and women, lepers and tax collectors, princes and the poor, from every corner of the earth.

People in power often find that message threatening.

The other reason the religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus was that he claimed to do things only God can do.

In Luke 4, Jesus stood up in the synagogue and read scripture from Isaiah 61.

Then he applied those verses to himself.

Jesus said He had come to earth to do the same things God does in Psalm 146:7-9.

Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 4:18-19.

18 "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,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

The ministry of the Son of God reflected the heart of the Father.

God's love became tangible when Jesus walked around healing, feeding, and helping people.

That's why our ministry as the Body of Christ should reflect the heart of the Father and Son.

As the hands and feet of Jesus, we are his physical presence on earth.

We have the privilege of making the love of God tangible to the poor, blind, and oppressed.

Verse 9 says:

"The Lord watches over the sojourners;

he upholds the widow and the fatherless,"

In English "orphan" refers to a child with no living parent at all.

But the Hebrew word in today's text means "fatherless."

50 times in the Old Testament we find "widow" and "fatherless" together in one sentence.

In Israel 3,000 years ago, only Jewish men could own land.

Therefore the widow, the fatherless, and the immigrant did not have financial security.

They did not have a protector, a teacher, or a provider.

Here's my point:

God cares about children with no parents, single mothers with their children, and children in foster care.

God also wants us to care for these vulnerable ones.

I recently found an old newspaper article that breaks my heart.

The article is about advertisements for children in foster care.

The Family Court of Washington DC seeks temporary parents for fatherless children.

But before the children can be given to foster parents, the government is required to post these public notices.

This is what the Washington Post article says:

"In a windowless corner of Washington DC's Superior Court, the Family Court bulletin board hangs.

It is covered with public postings that no one sees.

Each document provides a glimpse into the lives of children in foster care.

The postings must stay up for two weeks, but they often linger much longer.

On the bulletin board, as in life, children in foster care remain invisible and easily forgotten.

These are the notices found on the bulletin board on a recent Thursday:

Unknown Father, you have a 6-month-old girl born HIV-positive with cocaine in her veins.

Her mother has abandoned her.

Unknown Father, you have a newborn son whose schizophrenic mother left him at the hospital and moved into a motel.

Unknown Father, your 1-year-old has been found with an ankle burn.

She was so hungry that when she was finally fed, she did not stop to chew.

Unknown Father, your child's mother told social workers that she forgets where she leaves her baby.

Unknown Father, you have a baby girl born seven weeks premature.

When your daughter was 2 days old, her mother left, and did not come back.

Unknown Father, you have a 1-week-old daughter.

Unknown Father, you have a 13-year-old son.

Unknown Father, you have a newborn baby girl."

Each of these children, abandoned by their human fathers, was made in the image of God.

They are not unknown to God the Father.

Imagine if one of those children was yours.

Imagine that she was lost, or taken from you.

You would do anything and everything to rescue that child, right?

That's how God the Father felt about you, my brothers and sisters.

We were spiritual orphans before we were adopted into God's family.

We were enslaved by sin and Satan.

We were helpless, and our only one hope was that someone would come to rescue us!

That's why God the Father and God the Son made a rescue plan.

Jesus came to earth to redeem you from enslavement, and bring you into the Father's home.

Your Father is not unknown!

But before we could know him, Jesus had to die to wash away our guilt and shame.

Love compelled Him to suffer the punishment we deserve.

Through faith in Christ, we can become a son, a daughter, an heir!

Listen to how the apostle Paul describes it in Galatians 4:4-7.

4 "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts--

the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

7 So you are no longer a slave, but God's child;

and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."

God our Father adopted us so we can pray "Our Father, who is heaven."

That prayer reminds that we are brothers and sisters.

Listen to these verses from Galatians 3:26-28.

26 "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith,

27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free;
nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

I love the variety of people God is bringing together in our new church family.

So many beautiful skin colors and accents in this room.

We look different, but we are all relatives, because we have the same Father.

Through sanctification, the Holy Spirit is molding us all to resemble our Father in Heaven.

People should look at our lives and think:

"They remind me of their Father!

They have their Father's heart!"

Psalm 68:5-6a says:

5 "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.

6a God sets the lonely in families,"

God IS "Father of the fatherless..."

That's how he describes Himself.

When I say "Kashif is a banker" or "Sana is a teacher" I describe what they do.

Their title describes their activity.

Our God describes himself as a father to the fatherless, and a defender of widows.

He sets the lonely in families.

How does God defend widows and set the lonely in families?

With our hands, with our help, with our love.

The church is called the Body of Christ because we are his hands and feet.

How we respond to the widow, the fatherless, and the stranger is a spiritual litmus test.

When you care for the needy, who cannot pay you anything, it reveals something about the condition of your heart.

Grateful people, grace-filled people, are generous people.

But before you can be generous to others, you have to receive God's generous love for you.

I am going to paraphrase Psalm 146:7-9, applying those verses to you as a reminder of God's work in your life:

The Lord executes justice for you when you are oppressed.

He gives food to you when you're hungry.

The Lord set your imprisoned heart free;

The Lord opened the eyes of your blind mind.

The Lord lifts you up when you are bowed down.

the Lord loves the righteousness of Christ and makes you righteous.

The Lord watches over all of you refugees and immigrants.

He upholds the widows, and the single mothers,

the orphans and the fatherless, and he blesses them.

We pray psalms like this one to remember how much our Father loves us.

The all-powerful, all-holy, all-knowing God invites us to call him "Father."

It is His love for us that motivates our love for the widow, fatherless, and stranger with the same love we have received.

Let's pray now, brothers and sisters, to our Father in heaven:

Father, we did not choose you, but you chose us.

You paid a terrible price, the death of your Son for our sin, so we could be your children.

And as your children, our lives should reflect our Father's heart.

Help us, Holy Spirit, to imitate our older brother, Jesus.

He came to rescue the slave, heal the sick, give sight to the blind.

He came to set the lonely in families, to care for the fatherless, and to welcome the stranger.

Help us, as the Body of Christ, to love others the way you love us.

Please do this for our own sanctification and joy, and for your glory.

We pray in Jesus' name, amen.