

Psalms for a Summer Season: Psalm 146

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[0 : 00] Put not your trust in princes. It's not a word we use much these days, but there are some people who we may call polymaths.

! To be a polymath is to be good at everything. They aren't jack of all trades and master of none. They are masters of all trades.

The Free Church of Scotland had one. He was a man from Cromartie, like Hamish, called Hugh Miller, who as well as being a stonemason, was a scientist, journalist, churchman, author, and political commentator. Hugh Miller was the public face of the disruption of 1843, which led to the formation of the Free Church of Scotland.

But great men and great women often have great character faults, and Miller was no different. While on the outside he was a model of intellectual power and physical strength, on the inside he was tormented. In 1853, he withdrew into his Edinburgh flat and shot himself. He could master everything, but he couldn't master himself. He could master the science of life on earth, but he could not master his own life. 250 years earlier, there was an archbishop, Anglican archbishop, with a fabulous name, Lancelot Andrews. Now, Lancelot Andrews was one of the closest confidants of King James I.

Again, Andrews was a polymath, a brilliant scholar, writer, churchman, politician, and pastor. Andrews wielded significant power in the court of the king. He had everything going for him in life.

[2 : 02] That is until King James forced Andrews against his conscience to support an immoral decree concerning the divorce of one of his military and financial aides. Andrews never recovered from what he saw as his own moral failure to stand up to the king. Later, in a little book he wrote called Personal Devotions, he wrote these words, Lord, save me from making a god of the king. Lord, save me from making a god of the king.

Andrews died soon after, a deeply sorrowful man who felt he'd made a mess of his life. Tens of thousands of people looked up to Hugh Miller to guide them through the troubled days of the disruption. Tens of thousands of people looked up to Andrews to lead them in their devotion to God.

But great men and great women often have great character faults, and both Miller and Andrews were no different. Besides which, both men, though they may have mastered much, are no longer with us.

Their breath has departed, and they have returned to the dust from which they came. The message is simple. Lord, save me from making a god of the great and the good of this world.

The powerful and persuasive. The influential and the rich. Is there anyone of whom you are making a god today? You hang on every word, they say.

[3 : 40] You trust them implicitly to tell you the truth. Internet influencers, sports superstars, politicians, princes. Who? The problem is that, as we read in Psalm 146, verse 3, there's no salvation in them.

They cannot save themselves, never mind anyone else. Look at this verse, Psalm 146, verse 3, where the writer calls them a son of man. The word Adam means humankind, but it also means dust.

By putting our trust in other people, we are putting our trust in dust. The same dust to which that human being will return when his life departs.

Don't put your trust in a perishing creature of the dust. No matter whether that dust be formed into the image of a Hugh Miller or a Lancelot Andrews, they cannot even save themselves from death.

But if we cannot put our trust in the great of this world, in whom can we trust? That's the question Psalm 146 answers, and why I've chosen it as our final psalm for the summer season.

[5 : 03] If we cannot put our trust in the polymaths of this world, in whom can we trust? And to whom can we turn for help when we're oppressed and hungry and imprisoned and blind, anxious and depressed?

In a messed up world, where can we find stability, reliability, truth? The writer answers, Blessed is he whose help is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.

God alone is worthy of our hope and trust. The Lord, our God, the God of Jacob. In him, and in him alone, can we place our faith and never be disappointed?

We dare not place it in the great of this world. Lord, save me from making a God of the King. The writer of Psalm 146 invites us today to place our faith in the divine polymath and find our help and hope in him.

For he is no son of the dust. He is no frail human being who can master many things but not himself. He is the Lord of heaven and earth, the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable King of kings and Lord of lords.

[6 : 30] In him we trust, and we find him never to fail. From verses 5 through 9, we are given four reasons why we may trust God, hope in God, and find our help in God.

He is the covenant God, the cosmic God, the Christ-like God, and the kingly God.

Lord, save me from making a God of any human being, whoever that may be. Yes, even if it's my wife or my husband.

Lord, save me for yourself. The first reason we can trust God is he is the covenant God, the covenant God.

Verse 5 reads, Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob. Whose hope is in the Lord, his God. The writer draws our attention to the history of God's people.

[7 : 35] Jacob was one of the fathers of the nation of Israel, as Irene spoke to us about earlier. He was the immediate father of the twelve tribes of Israel, which, having been rescued from their slavery in Egypt, made their home in the promised land.

God entered into a covenant with Jacob, in which he promised Jacob and his family a glorious future. Of blessing and belonging. Amen. Trace the history of God's care for Jacob and his descendants of the Old Testament, and you discover a God who, though he is often ignored and sinned against, remains absolutely committed to the good of his people.

God has promised, and shall never break his promise. The God of his people. And though they may try to wrestle themselves from his loving grip, he will never let them go.

He is the covenant God of promise, absolutely committed to his people. We know, of course, that the word Lord, in capital letters, refers to the covenant name of God, the name Yahweh or Jehovah.

It's the name by which God wants to be known. And again, it refers to the committedness of God to his people. He's the God who mightily and lovingly rescued them from their slavery in Egypt.

[8 : 59] He's the God who remains faithful forevermore because of his absolute commitment to his people. He is the Lord. He is no creature of the dust, whose plans perish when his breath departs.

He is the Lord whose everlasting determination to bless his people endures through generation after generation. He is the God of Jacob.

He is the Lord. And he is his God. He's the God of all those who put their trust and faith in him. Here's a person.

Here's a person who finds all his help in God. And has placed his trust in him. To such a person, God is infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably committed.

That person has entered into his own covenant with God. And though he may break that covenant by his own personal sin and unfaithfulness, God will never break that covenant.

[10 : 02] He resolves to be our God and to be with us always for our good. Even death shall not separate us from his love, but shall only serve to fulfill all his glorious plans for us.

This is the God in whom we find our help and in whom we can hope. He is not the changeable King James who forced Lancelot Andrews to bruise his conscience.

He's not of the same order as the great and good of this world, who although they may master much, cannot master themselves. I recently officiated at the marriage of my nephew.

He and his now wife repeated the marriage vows, the last of which, of course, is till death us do part. It was a wonderful day.

But sadly, there shall come a future day when that happy couple will part. But death shall never separate us from God. He shall be with us always and we shall be with him.

[11 : 08] He shall never leave us, nor if all the world and those we love the most should abandon us. He never will. The word help in verse 5 is significant.

Another translation puts it like this. Who helps us in our weakness? Who helps us in our weakness? We are frail and weak. But this God helps us in our weakness.

He loves us not for what we can give him, but for what strength and help and comfort he can give us. In him we place our hope.

If you're anything like me, you've often had your hope in someone disappointed. Those to whom I looked up in ministry have proved themselves to be unreliable. Those whom I thought were my friends proved themselves false, especially when times got tough.

But not, I'm never the Lord. There are no great people in this world. There are only people. There is, however, one in whom we can trust.

[12 : 19] The covenant-keeping God who promises to love us freely in all the ups and downs of our lives, who is always committed to us and always will be. Do we suppose the great of this world are committed to us as individuals?

I think not. To them we are consumers whose only role is to build their empires, but not God. From him comes help in our weakness and hope in our despair.

For though you were the only person on planet Earth and you weren't a very good one at that, he loved you just as much as he does today. He is the covenant God.

And for that reason we can trust him. Well, secondly, he's the cosmic God. He's the cosmic God. Human beings create nothing.

We only make things from what has already been created. Only God has the wisdom and power necessary to create.

[13:24] We read of him in verse 6, he made the heaven and earth, the sea and all that's in them. The creative power of God is a constant theme in the book of Psalms.

We've encountered it in Psalm 8, Psalm 111. We encountered it again here. To which of the great and good of this world can we attribute the creation of the sun?

Who could ever have conceived of a universe so complicated, so vast, so diverse? As a human race, we do not even know 99%, we don't even know 1% of all that's out there in the cosmos, let alone understand it.

But with just a few words the psalm writer tells us of our God, oh, he made the heavens, the earth and the seas. We think we know everything about the land and the oceans, but in reality we know so little.

Until relatively recently, in the lifetimes of many of us here, we knew nothing about quantum physics or DNA. We're like infants playing with plastic toys in the creche through there.

[14:37] Compared to us, the covenant Lord made the heavens and the earth, the seas and all that's in them, the mighty whales, the luminescent colors of deep sea anglerfish, the billions of phytoplankton in a single drop of seawater, and God created it all.

In the context of this psalm, the writer wants us to understand two things. First, he wants us to understand the infinite power of God, the God who made the dust from which we humans were created and to which we shall return.

And this power is contrasted with the emptiness of human power. We cannot even keep ourselves from death, let alone create a universe.

But the second thing the writer wants us to understand is that God created all these things for us. He created the universe as the theater of His saving love and sovereign glory.

He did not populate it with a race of angels, but with human beings. He made everything for us to provide us with our daily bread and all we need for life and health.

[15:53] My nephew's wedding, of which I've already spoken, took place in the Free Church in Gosport, and afterwards we went up to my mother's garden for the reception. The day before, we had set up a marquee in my mother's garden, and that marquee was really heavy.

To lift it up to the steps of my mother's garden took me, Jonathan, where are you, Jonathan? No. And my two brothers. Even then, we struggled.

Now, as much as I'm sure she would have loved to have helped, I would not have asked my 88-year-old frail mother to help. She can barely lift herself up off a chair, never mind lift a heavy marquee up steps.

Why put our trust in human beings who care nothing for us? Why not put it in the Lord who, because He loved us, created the heavens and the earth for us?

Why put our trust in another human being who is entirely as powerless as we are? Why not put our faith in the Lord who, because of His infinite power, created the sea and all that's in them?

[17:13] The God who helps us in our weakness, the hope of our lives. Look at the world in which we live. It's our Father's world and He loves us.

Third, He is the Christ-like God. The Christ-like God. The more we read Psalm 146 from the perspective of the whole Bible, the more these verses, verses 7 through 9, should set off alarm bells in our minds.

All these words spoken about the cosmic and covenant God fit perfectly into the Bible's portrait of Jesus. Some of them seem to be direct lifts from the prophet Isaiah.

For example, in Isaiah 61, verse 1, we read, The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good use to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of prison to those who are bound. Again, Isaiah 42, I am the Lord.

[18 : 25] I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and keep you. I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison, those who sit in darkness.

To whom do Isaiah's prophecies point? Well, we know they point to Jesus. In Luke 4, 18, in his sermon in the synagogue, Jesus applies these prophecies to himself.

He 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 captive and recovery of sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

And so we ask, who is this covenant and cosmic God, the God who is so lovingly committed to his people, he created a universe for them?

He is the God whose face we see in Jesus Christ. That's who you find in Psalm 146. He's the God who spat some dirt onto one of his hands and he touched a blind man's eyes and he said to him, Be opened and see.

[19 : 45] He's the God who released a man called Legion from the demonic jail in which he was being held captive. He's the God who fed 5,000 people with just five loaves and two fish.

The God who touched the untouchable, loved the unlovable, reached the unreachable, healed the unhealable. It is therefore incredible that we find Jesus Christ dying upon a cross.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them.

What was Jesus, the cosmic and covenant God, doing on the cross if it was not dying to take away the sins of his people? Dying the death they deserve to die, setting the prisoners free by himself becoming a prisoner, lifting those who were bowed down by himself being bowed down, opening the eyes of the blind by himself being blinded.

We would never expect, not in a million years, to find any of the great and good of this world dying on a Roman cross, but we find the Lord of Lords there. The Son of God became a son of the dust because of his great love for us, and being a son of the dust, he humbled himself unto death on the cross.

[21 : 21] He did it all to save us from our sin and our misery. The God we worship in Psalm 146 is the Christ-like God.

Why put our trust in another sinful being who needs his own sin taken away before he may take ours away? Why not put our faith and trust in the God who on the cross won our forgiveness, freedom, and eternal life?

The God who forgives our sins and is the hope of our lives. Look at the cross on which Jesus died. This is the supreme demonstration of his love for us and why we need to put our faith and trust in him today.

Today. Well, finally, he's the covenant God, the cosmic God, the Christ-like God, and finally, the kingly God, the kingly God.

Psalm 146 was written late in Israel's history. So the writer had the benefit of looking back well over a thousand years at the story of how God had cared for his people.

[22 : 35] And from that perspective, he wrote, the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The Lord will reign forever. The writer's looking back, you see, at the history of Israel.

And he's remembering how the Pharaoh of Egypt enslaved the Israelites. But God frustrated Pharaoh's ambitions and miraculously released his people.

And he's thinking of how during the days of the judges and Joshua and so on, foreign powers attacked Israel with massive armies, but on each occasion, God brought these foreign armies to ruin.

And then he's thinking, perhaps, of the greatest of all deliverances. During their captivity in Babylon, an evil man called Haman planned on the destruction of the entire Israelite race.

He wanted to kill every single Jew on planet Earth. He nearly succeeded until Queen Esther, together with her faithful advisor, Mordecai, changed the emperor's mind.

[23 : 44] The Jews were rescued and Haman was executed himself. God brought the way of Haman to ruin.

That's what our caving covenant Christ-like God does. He reigns forevermore, which means he brings the way of wicked men to ruin.

Think of Herod, the king who tried to kill Jesus as an infant. His ideas came to ruin. Then think of his nephew, another man called Herod, who presided over Jesus' death and then tried to destroy the early church.

Again, God brought him to ruin. But then, then the greatest of them all, Saul of Tarsus.

By any stretch of the imagination, Saul was a polymath. Brilliantly intelligent, highly religious, he was the greatest of all men in his day.

[24 : 48] But he was also the greatest of sinners, whose religious zeal for Jewish legalism led him to trying to exterminate the early Christian church. However, on the road to Damascus, God brought his way to ruin.

The risen Lord Jesus appeared to him and changed his life around. Saul the Pharisee became Paul the Apostle. And all because God brings the way of the wicked to ruin.

In one way, whether by judgment or by conversion, the Lord will reign forever. The dictators of this world have and shall fall one by one as the Lord extends his reign to the proclamation of his life-giving gospel.

The only true polymath is the divine polymath. And he will reign forever as our Christ-like cosmic covenant king.

Psalm 146 exalts him high. It is where he belongs to be. All that's left for us at the end of this series and psalms for a summer season is to bow our knees before him.

[26 : 18] The God who we see in the face of Christ to follow him, to worship him, to love him, and to trust him.

Will you do that today? Amen.