

Song of Praise

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. Well, it's said that there are three words that are understood in every language on the face of the globe.

Hallelujah, amen, and Coca-Cola. And despite the marketing hype that always surrounds Coke, it's the first of these three words that is the most powerful call to action, isn't it?

Hallelujah. Despite how it can be used, hallelujah isn't a Christian slogan or a jingle. It's a call to action, a call to praise.

Hallelujah, praise the Lord. As a Hebrew word, it's what students of grammar would call an imperative. That is, it's not so much a statement about what someone is doing, I praise the Lord, but rather it's a command, a directive.

As it used to be expressed in the old English, praise ye the Lord. Or perhaps as we might say it today, come on guys, any of you who can hear me, give the Lord praise.

[1 : 12] Come on, praise him. Hallelujah is a powerful call to praise. But when we look at the word even more closely, we can see that hallelujah is not only a powerful call to praise, it's a powerful call to personal praise.

It's not simply praise God or praise him. It's hallelujah, praise Yah, praise Yahweh, the personal distinctive name of God, preciously revealed to his people Israel via Moses.

So hallelujah says, come on, praise the God of Israel, the God of the scriptures, the God whose name is I am, the everlasting one, the one who was and is and is to come.

Don't praise just any old so-called God. Praise the one true living God who knows you and who can be known.

Hallelujah is a powerful call to personal praise. So it's fitting then that the book of Psalms, a great collection of the songs of the people of God we've been looking at over the past month or so, that this book ends with five great hallelujah psalms.

[2 : 39] Psalms 146 to 150, a little hallelujah chorus if you like. Each one of these psalms begins and ends with the powerful call to personal praise.

Hallelujah. And the body of each psalm gives substance and motivation for the praise, who God is and what he has done.

So it's like the worshippers who are using the book of Psalms, those who we read in Psalms 1 and 2 need to be people who don't walk, sit or stand with the way of the wicked, but delight in the law of the Lord, take refuge in his anointed, the Messiah who kissed the son.

These worshippers are having their faith once again refueled at the end of the book of Psalms to live a life of praise.

And all the ups and downs of life have been expressed in between these two bookends of Psalms 1 and 2 and Psalms 146 to 150, haven't they?

[3 : 52] We've walked through the psalm writers through joy, through redemption, but also very much through the dark times, through the trials, the threats from without, the feelings of abandonment from within.

These emotions that come to all believers at varying times. And if you haven't been here for much of this series, I just encourage you to borrow or buy some of the CDs to maybe even yourself decide to take a journey through the book of Psalms this week and see just the amazing range of human emotion expressed in the book of Psalms.

There's no glossing over the pain and confusion that life, even a life of faith, can bring, but instead there's a continual bringing of that pain, even that darkness, to the God of the universe in trust that he is still in control.

And so as the book comes to an end, we have the revelation of God through the human editors, through those that shaped this book, that God is ultimately worthy of all praise and it's our greatest privilege, highest calling to give him that praise.

So let's look in more detail at Psalm 146. You might want to have your Bible open as we go through. Let's begin with verse 1.

[5 : 34] Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord, O my soul. I remember some years ago reading about the spirituality of the Puritans, those Christians who lived from the middle of the 16th century to the end of the 17th century and who were characterized by their deep love for the word of God and for their seriousness about being holy, but also their seriousness about enjoying God's presence in all of life.

They were known to be great preachers, great pastors, men like John Owen, Richard Baxter, writers like John Bunyan.

But what struck me as I was reading about them was their practice not of preaching to their congregations, which they did well and with passion. We just learned so much for our preaching from them.

But not so much that, but their practice of preaching to themselves, of holding soliloquies with their own soul. You see, the Puritans recognized that the Christian life was much more than just an intellectual head knowledge response to God.

It was heart work, heart work, the whole soul's response to God. So for themselves to make sure that their Bible knowledge made the journey from head to heart, they would preach to themselves.

[7 : 14] They would take what they knew about God, they would meditate on it, and they would speak it quite literally, out loud sometimes, to themselves, exhorting themselves, explaining to themselves, encouraging, reminding, rebuking themselves, calling all that was within them to respond rightly to the revelation of God and his word, to trust his promises, to flee from sin, to praise God.

And even though I was struck by this practice, the Puritans were really only acting in line with a very ancient tradition, weren't they?

Because that's exactly what we see the psalmist doing here in Psalm 146 in verse 1. Praise the Lord, O my soul!

The psalmist wants to be the first to answer the call of the hallelujah, and he wants to do it with heart work. He knows that God deserves praise, and so he's prodding himself, and prompting, and urging himself, and stirring himself up to praise him.

It's an exhortation for his soul to do what he knows is right, rather than to let the praiseworthiness of God stay as an intellectual idea, an objective truth, out there that can be held at arm's length.

[8 : 44] No. He wants his soul to praise God. And I don't know about you, but I know there are many times when I need to do the same, when I need to speak to my soul, and prod my soul, and say, hey, you know that stuff you know up here?

Make it true in your heart. Do it. And so in verse 2, you can see the soul awaken, and the scope of praise grow.

Verse 2, I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God all my life long. You see, there's something about worship, something about praise that is expansive.

There are impulses within it that want to be ever widening and stretching and swelling and increasing and enlarging and snowballing. It begins, of course, with God's initiative.

He reveals who he is, what he is like. But then, by his grace, we grasp that revelation and we're stirred to respond. We grasp it in past benefits and wonders.

[9 : 54] We grasp it in present mercies. We grasp it in future promises. But there's always a sense of shortfall, isn't there, between what we've grasped of the greatness of God and what we can offer in worship.

We know that God is so great and yet we can offer only so little. And that's why in the Psalms we read things like, all that is within me, bless his holy name, and everything that has breath, praise the Lord.

Once we get a vision of how awesome God is, how glorious, how worthy of praise, we know that one act of worship, one word of prayer, one hymn, is never enough.

We want all of creation to sing and we ourselves want to commit to a whole life of praise. Praising our maker for as long as we have breath to do it.

And I don't know about you, but I need to have that expanded vision and I need to make that lifelong commitment every day. Well, in verses 3 and 4, knowing that lifelong praise is God's due leads the psalm writer to remind his own soul as well as the congregation to keep away from the number one praise killer.

[11 : 29] Misplaced trust. Verses 3 and 4. Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs, they return to the earth. On that very day, their plans perish. When we put our trust for help and deliverance in things other than God, we begin to stifle and silence our praise.

Because we're saying to our own soul that actually we believe that there is a greater power than God. Something other than God that is better able to solve our problems.

It's likely that this psalm was written after both northern and southern kingdoms of Israel had been conquered and their peoples taken into exile.

And as the threat of each invasion loomed, we read in the scriptures that the Israelites turned every which way for help except to the Lord their God.

[12 : 42] This very people of God turned to pagan nations for political alliances, for protection. The prophet Isaiah in chapter 30 of his book spoke these words.

Woe to the obstinate children, declares the Lord, to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance but not by my spirit, heaping sin upon sin, who go down to Egypt without consulting me, who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge.

Everyone will be put to shame because of a people useless to them, who bring neither help nor advantage, but only shame and disgrace. And these words were exactly true.

The southern kingdom's trust in princes, in this case making an alliance with Egypt, came to nothing when Babylon eventually invaded, killing and plundering, and taking many into exile to live as prisoners in a foreign land.

Now of course, in the centuries and millennia that have followed, many political, royal, ideological rulers have arisen to capture the hearts of millions across the globe.

[14 : 10] and people who've put their hope in them for deliverance. Marx, Martin Luther King, Che Guevara, but at the end, they each face death just as we ordinary folks do.

Mortal help is simply that. Mortal, limited, and ultimately futile. The language used by the psalmist here echoes that of Genesis 3, 19.

Rulers, he says, are men of dust who will return to the dust. And we could add that their dusty plans will go with them.

Their plans have no staying power. Their promises of salvation, deliverance, help, have no authority.

They can't be relied on at the end because such leaders have no control over even whether they'll be alive tomorrow to see through their plans, to fulfill their promises.

[15 : 25] Misplaced trust in rulers, in institutions, in political systems, in banks, credit cards, university education, even in Christian leaders, or our great hope at this time, a godly archbishop.

Trust in any of these things instead of trusting, looking to God for help will lead to disappointment and the stifling, the killing of praise because God isn't being acknowledged for his true worth.

I don't know about you, but I need to constantly check my allegiances and my alliances as I navigate through the pressures of life.

And I need to constantly ask myself, where is my trust? trust? To whom, to what, am I first turning for help?

Well, in contrast to the disappointment and the stifling of praise inherent in misplaced trust, verses 5-7 tell us that praise will flow from the satisfaction that comes from trusting in the Lord of the universe.

[16 : 48] Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry.

You may have read or heard that phrase coined by Christian author, pastor, John Piper, who writes, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. And the psalmist is saying exactly that here. Unlike the princes and rulers of this world, the God of Jacob, the God who revealed

himself to the patriarchs, who made those promises to Abraham and fulfilled them partially through what he did in Isaac and Jacob's life, this God can and will satisfy.

And so the people who will be able to answer the hallelujah call are those who are happy because they rely on the Lord their God, because they put their hope in him.

He will do what we turn to leaders or political systems to do. He will execute justice for the oppressed. He will give food to the hungry.

[18 : 17] Because in contrast to the rulers, this God is in control of everything. He is the creator of all things and he alone has the power to fulfill his word to us.

Therefore, when we put our trust in this God, we are able to be joyful, happy, satisfied and therefore live lives overflowing with praise for the goodness of what God has done for us.

in Acts chapter 4, the apostles quote verse 6 of Psalm 146 as they pray for God to consider the threats of the Jews against them, to enable them to keep speaking God's word with all boldness.

They want to spread the call of God to praise him through Christ far and wide despite persecution.

And so, they appeal to the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them.

That's the words that they use. Why? Because this God has promised to be with them, to give them the words to say, to give them power, to be his witnesses, to protect them from being sifted by the evil one.

[19 : 42] All those great promises we read in the New Testament. And because he is the creator of all things, heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them, he alone can keep such promises.

He will keep faith forever. Or as the old Isaac Watts hymn puts it, none will find his promise vain. I don't know about you, but I need to preach God's faithfulness to my soul so that I'm more satisfied in him, so that I can trust him above all earthly powers and I can praise him all my life long.

Well, as if God's power as creator wasn't enough foundation for trust and praise, the psalmist now reminds himself and anybody listening of God's gracious acts in human history in redemption.

He sets free, He opens eyes, He lifts up, He loves, He watches, He upholds, He brings the wicked to ruin.

Take a look at verses 7 to 9. The Lord sets the prisoners free, the Lord opens the eyes of the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous, righteous, the Lord watches over the strangers, He upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked He brings to ruin.

[21 : 19] We spoke earlier about the Jews being taken into exile because of their sinful ways, but we know that after a time, the Lord in His mercy brought back a remnant from exile to Jerusalem.

He set the captives free, just as He had done centuries earlier in the exodus of the Jewish slaves from Egypt.

And in light of these two events, the exodus and the exile, we could say with confidence that these statements in verses 7 to 9 are historically accurate, they're proven, they're not just wishful thinking, they're not just nice things to say.

God does actually work this way in history. You can see that also in other little individual stories in the Old Testament. But we know that this 6th century BC fulfillment was only a shadow of what was to come in the work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Isaiah wrote, speaking the words that the Messiah would say, the spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.

[22 : 42] He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God.

far beyond what God would do in the return from exile, God would do through his son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, when he came to proclaim the year, the time, when people could be acceptable to God through the work of Christ, when they would no longer be oppressed by their own rebelliousness, no longer be captive to their sin, no longer be in a spiritual prison awaiting God's ultimate judgment and death.

This was the ultimate work of God in history and it's accomplished now in full by Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.

So when Jesus was handed the book of the scroll of Isaiah, when he was teaching in the synagogue, it was absolutely right and perfect for him to take these words from the prophet as his own because they were written for him.

And of course, when the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and said, are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another? Jesus rightly answered them, go and tell John what you have seen and heard.

[24 : 23] The blind received their sight. the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them, and blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.

Jesus Christ has personally and powerfully fulfilled this psalm of praise for those who trust in him. And when he returns, there will be no discordance between the spiritual and physical fulfillment of these claims.

Literally, no one will be blind. Literally, there will be no poor, no oppressed. all will be made new, all will be set right.

The righteous who trust in him will be lifted up, and the wicked, simply those who have refused to turn to him in trust and praise, will be brought to ruin.

And that truth is something that we each need to hold on to so that praise might flow, that the evil we see around us in wars, in murder, in fraud, in inequality and resources, in divorce, abortion, abuse, this evil will be dealt with as God brings his sovereign rule to bear over every part of creation and makes it new again.

[25 : 55] And I don't know about you, but I need to keep preaching to my soul the work of Christ, that he sets free, he opens eyes, he lifts up, he loves, he watches, he upholds, and he will bring the wicked to ruin so that I can trust him and praise him.

Well, finally then, the psalmist concludes his call to praise by making a declaration of God's kingly rule over all generations and calling others to praise him.

Verse 10, the Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord. I wonder if you noticed the movement throughout the psalm in the personal pronouns attached to God.

In verse 2, I will sing praises to my God. In verse 3, happy are they whose hope is in the Lord their God. God. Or in the NIV like the Hebrew, blessed is the man whose hope is in the Lord, his God. There's a first person claim, my God, then a third person description, his God, their God. But now, as the psalm draws to a close, it's a second person exhortation, your God, O Zion, will reign.

[27 : 20] And this is the movement of praise always, isn't it? I think of the emails that I often get from friends who've just had new babies.

It's kind of, you know, my stage of life. Every second day, there's a new email with some lovely photos of a new baby. And they're usually taken by the doting dad, aren't they?

The new dad. And even before the babies had a chance to draw its first breath, dad's got out the digital camera and he's taking the snaps and by some magic of technology, a Bluetooth, something or other, it's up on the web, you know, before the babies had its first meal.

And dad is doing this because he wants to share his joy, his just pride in this new baby, new son or daughter.

And it's like he's saying, you are beautiful. Isn't she beautiful? And we say, yes, she's beautiful.

[28 : 33] It's the movement of praise. Praise of God begins with ourselves. It begins with our own response to God, our own commitment in relationship with the creator.

But it has to move to calling others to praise him as well. We can't help as we fuel our own faith on the truths of God to call others to fuel their faith, to rekindle praise.

What the psalmist is doing in verse 10, the Lord will reign forever and he's your God. God, all of you who are the people of God from 5th century BC to 21st century AD and beyond, he's your God and he has done and will do and has been and will be all that you need.

And for that and simply for who he is, the God of heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them, deserves your praise.

So, forget Coca-Cola. Hallelujah is it, friends. Let's preach it to our own souls.

[30 : 00] Let's turn from earthly powers to trust in God, to be satisfied in his goodness to us. and let's call others to do the same so that at the end of time, just as in the end of the book of Psalms, we can say along with Psalm 150 verse 6, let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.