

"The Blessedness of True Hope" Psalm 146

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[0:00] The reading this morning is Psalm 146. 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. 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. There's maybe a little-known Jim Carrey movie from 1999. Not so much a comedy, although he definitely is comedic in it. It's called Man on the Moon, and it's a movie really about Andy Kaufman.

If you are slightly older than me, you'd have heard of Andy Kaufman, whether or not you like him.

He's a bit of a, I don't know, he's an interesting guy. To put it lightly.

[1:31] Jim Carrey, the perfect cast of it. And at the end of the movie, Andy Kaufman is diagnosed with cancer. He exhausts every possible treatment for his cancer.

It's terminal. And he decides that he's going to go to Asia and seek out a psychic healer. And he gets on the table. He's gaunt.

His head's shaved. His eyes are sunken in. And he sees and notices the sleight of hand of this healer, who is essentially a charlatan and fakes the whole thing.

Pretends like he's pulling out hunks of cancer out of a stomach. But really it's cow's blood and some cut up liver, kidneys, or fat of an animal.

And he puts his head back and he starts chuckling. And then it transitions to his body in a casket at his funeral. His last best hope for being cured of terminal cancer turned out to be a sham performed by a charlatan.

[2:47] It's actually a very, very sad scene. But there's something remarkable about it because it shows that there's nothing worse than misplaced hope.

Hope in something that is false. Promises that are believed that are to illicit trust but are nothing more than lies and deception.

Christine and I were discussing this week what's worse, having no hope at all? Or having your hope in something that completely lets you down? And I don't know if it's one or the other.

Maybe one leads to another. But it is something terribly tragic. When you put your hope into something or someone only to be let down in the biggest kind of way. We're in Psalm 146 this morning.

We're coming near to the end of the Psalter. To the end of our series this summer in the Psalms.

And we see a Psalm that speaks to this grave problem of false or misplaced hope.

[3:52] But more importantly, it's a Psalm that speaks to and provides a definition of what real hope looks like. And how it is a blessing.

I mean, the text in our English says blessing. But that almost falls short. It is the greatest possible thing we could ever hope for. To have our hope in. The greatest possible experience we could ever have.

So if you have a Bible, it would help me out if you turn to Psalm 146. We'll break the Psalm up into two parts. We'll look first at the folly and tragedy of misplaced hope.

And then we'll look at the joy of hope realized. The folly or tragedy of misplaced hope. And the joy of hope realized. We'll get right into it.

Look with me at verse three. Put not your trust in princes. In whom there is no salvation. You know, history is full of strongmen.

[4:55] Towering figures whose mere presence could bolster the confidence of an army or a team. We think about Alexander the Great.

Or Lord Nelson. For you Anglophiles. For sports, you can think of Wayne Gretzky or Michael Jordan. If you're of my age range, there's a character in a movie called, his name is Benny the Jet Rodriguez.

You have him on your team, you're winning. It's remarkable with what one man or what one woman can do to turn the tide in a battle or a game.

Most of us, though, we're not going to look to a figure to lead us into battle. None of us are going to war. I was reminded very clearly this week that my little maybe .1% hope that maybe one day I will play some significant basketball was shattered when going for a walk resulted in a foot issue.

But here's the thing. None of us are going pro, right? Still, still, we look to princes all the time.

[6:10] I mean, princes is what is used in the Psalter, but maybe sub-out princes and sub-in influencers. Okay? Health gurus. Those that are modern sages, economists, futurists.

Those that have rightly, and oftentimes very rightly, have pinpointed and diagnosed a real problem that we might have or societally we might have.

And they offer a solution that may be more than just a principle to live by, but borders a claim on salvation itself.

A salvific leader, a messiah of some sorts. Maybe it's not even that. Maybe there's some influencers that are just really down-to-earth people.

They're not claiming to be anything more than just an expert in one specific field. But we are the ones who look to them in an ultimate way.

[7:17] Our focus upon their teaching is inordinate to what it should be. Nevertheless, we put our hope and trust in people or things all the time.

This is what we do. And it's a bit of a problem in our day. I think people more than in a past generation understand that they are lacking and that they are hungry to find answers.

And that they are looking rightly outside of themselves, but looking in the wrong direction to the wrong people. Young men in particular are struggling.

Again, I'm speaking generally, okay? So not all young men, but speaking generally. They can look to macho masculinity that ultimately speaks very ill of women and elevates carnal things as the very things to pursue.

And there's a whole segment of young men that are going after these things. It's a very terrible thing. But in the end, whether they're macho masculinity men or, you know, people that are just giving wonderful tips on how to optimize one's house or to make efficient your workflow.

[8:37] We have the propensity to treat them as more than just an expert, but as a type of prince. Someone that we're going to put our hope and trust in.

This is our default. This is a problem. And here's the big problem with it. Whether they are truly charlatans or we are treating them as a savior, they are mortal people like us.

Mortal men and women. They can't promise us, they can promise us all they want, but they can't provide us with salvation. Because ultimately salvation, it looks to transcending the difficulties and ills of this life, this mortal life.

It always looks to eternity. But every earthly prince, every earthly influencer suffers the same fate. They go to the dust. Read with me. Verse 10. When his breath departs, he returns. On that very day, his plan perishes. Here's the honest truth.

[9:46] We're drawn to these princes. We want to be led to have some kind of perfect health. We want increasing amounts of wealth.

Complete optimization. We want to enjoy what heaven promises. So we can find ourselves often elated to stumble upon a new influencer, a new book, something that promises us what we want. It's a problem in politics. It's a problem in the self-help industry. There are a lot of messiah figures. And our default setting is to follow them.

So you think that someone, an earthly person, a mortal person, to solve our ultimate longings for salvation, to put our hopes in.

We would see it for what it is. How on earth can a mortal person help us to achieve immortality? But this is the problem for us because the God of the universe offers us his hand.

[11:01] He extends to us his charity and his love and his benevolence. The eternal God. Say, there is a way to salvation. And we, instead of getting elated like we may do when we stumble upon a new influencer or a new guru or a new self-optimizer, a promised earthly messiah, instead we shy away from God.

Maybe it's because God is not like other human beings. We cannot see him. Maybe that's the issue at hand. Maybe the issue at hand is that God, he promises us eternal life.

But sometimes following the Lord in this life does not result in the heavenly utopic vision, but rather results in more difficulty.

Okay? It doesn't result in more money, better health. You know, we just continue on in this life. Or maybe, you know, we suffer because we're following Christ.

Nevertheless, what we have here is a call. A call to follow our hopes towards the only person that can extend to us what we need.

[12:25] The only one that himself needs no deliverance, but offers it freely and generously. But it's easier said than done. And I mentioned it is our default setting to look elsewhere, apart from God.

So this is why we see the psalmist in verses 1 and 2. He is rousing his soul not to put his hope elsewhere. His desire is, yes, to worship God, but he also recognizes that his default setting is to look everywhere else but above.

He's stubbornly set to find a false savior no matter the cost. So opening, the opening verses, they, on one hand, they read, and they are a declaration of the psalmist to praise the Lord.

But it's also itself a cry for help. Read with me verses 1 to 2. And especially verse 1. It says, praise the Lord. You see, the psalmist here is saying, praise the Lord, oh my soul.

It's as if there's this internal dialogue that's happening with the psalmist and his soul. Saying, listen, soul, praise the Lord. The soul is like, I want to praise the Lord.

[13:42] The body is saying, I don't want to praise the Lord. And there's this tension. But really, there's something of a bit of a prayer here. St. Augustine, in his commentary on Psalm 146, he picks this up in a very profound way.

And this is what he says. The soul itself gives itself counsel from the light of God by the reasonable mind, whereby it conceives the wisdom fixed in the everlasting nature of its capital A author.

Yet, the soul has not the strength to abide there. Therefore, it gathers itself, as it were, into a sound state and cries out, praise the Lord, oh my soul.

The psalmist is saying, what this is, in verse 1, it is a cry for God's mercy. It's a cry to God that if I put my hope in you, you have to come through.

You have to come through. It is a recognition that there is no other hope that will satisfy the human longing apart from the Lord himself. It is a cry of a desperate person that does not want to be hopeless, and does not want to suffer the tragedy of yet another failure in trust.

[15:02] But can the Lord come through? He's asking a lot of God. Again, theoretically, we can say, okay, God is strong.

He has created everything. But when it comes down to brass tacks, it is the question we ask, will God actually come through if I put my trust in him? Will he do it?

Because, I mean, things that are happening in my heart and in my world, they're difficult and they're tough. Will he come through? There are real cycles of oppression and injustice, hunger, ignorance, that persist daily in the cities, but across the world.

To comprehend them would be our undoing. They are everywhere. Every day we encounter them. And if there are no leaders or social programs, no aid agencies or the like that can bring us this real hope, can we truly trust in the Lord who we cannot see?

It's a big question. It's worth asking. And this leads us to our second point. The joy of hope realized. Read with me verse 5. And we're going to park it on verse 5 for a brief moment.

[16:18] Verse 5. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God. You see, this verse, it frames the entirety of Psalm 146.

And really, it could be said that this is like a theme verse of maybe the entire Bible. This idea of blessedness, it is throughout the Psalter.

And we see it in the first Psalm. If the opening verse, if the opening refrain to the Psalter will dictate the rest of the hymn book of the Bible, Psalm 1 does a great job laying out the prominence of blessing.

Six verses in Psalm 1. I'll read three of them. It's well worth, if you are Bible memorizers, this is a perfect chapter to memorize. And this is what it says. Blessed is the man or woman who walks not in the council, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

But his or her delight is in the law of the Lord. And on his law he or she meditates day and night. He or she is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season.

[17:36] And its leaf does not wither. In all that he or she does, he or she prospers. You see, the blessing of Psalm 1 and also the blessing of Psalm 146 comes from putting trust and hope in the salvation of the Lord by faith.

Because inherent in Psalm 1 and Psalm 146 is not simply just putting our faith in the God we do not see, but it means to turn away from false hope.

Not putting our hope, not putting our trust in things that cannot possibly deliver us. Faith is always a turning to God, but also a turning away from false gods.

It's always that. It means trusting that God is able to do what he promises, that he makes promises that he keeps.

We'll see just in a moment, Psalm 146, it's 10 verses, 11 times within the Psalm, in our English translation, it will have the Lord all capitalized.

[18:54] Now, I'm sure some of you who have gone to church for some time would know this already, but it's worth repeating. That is a translation decision to take the covenant name of God, the name that God gives himself to Moses, but really we see this name whenever God is making a covenant with his people.

It is, I am who I am. It is God essentially saying that I am the highest power. I swear by no higher power, but myself. What I say will come to pass no matter what.

I am him. I am God. It really encapsulates a term that we would call in theology called covenant, that God makes covenants with us, a promise, but not like a promise like we make promises, a promise whereby he will see it through, an agreement of sorts that even if we fail, he will not fail.

God is a covenant-making, covenant-keeping, promise-making, promise-keeping God. So, returning back to the text, 11 times, in the context of the blessed life of putting our hope and trust in God, God's covenant name is just marbled throughout.

From verse 5 to 9, seven times it is mentioned. God, the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God, he is the God we are to put our faith and trust into.

[20:33] And really, verse 5 being the thesis statement or the verse that frames the rest of the text, then is bolstered by verses 6, 7, 8, and 9.

What kind of God gives blessing? What kind of God is worthy of our trust and our hope? What kind of God? I'll tell you. And the psalmist will highlight God as creator.

Father, okay? This is the God that you're going to put your hope into. Okay? He's going to say also, the God who executes justice perfectly, that's the God you're going to put your hope and trust into. And then finally, the God who redeems. He is the God who you're going to put your hope and trust into. And by the way, again, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, I am does this, I am does this, I am does this, which is to say, everything that will come about is as sure, as sure, as the grass is green and the sky is blue.

It is a guarantee. So, let's take a bit of time to go through each of those. God as creator, God as executor of justice, and then God as redeemer.

[21:48] Look with me at verse 6. I'll read verse 5 as well. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.

Verse 6. Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever. You see, the psalmist is saying, listen, God is powerful.

There's a lot of powerful people and beings that exist. There is none that is the creator of all. The uncreated one, the first mover, the one who is not contingent on anything, but everything is contingent upon him.

He gives breath. He is the one who spoke the world into existence. And then there's that little bit at the end of verse 6, where it says, who keeps faith forever. Now, that might seem out of place, because we're talking about God as creator.

And then there's this mention of God keeping faith forever. But it actually is very, very important to not disconnect the idea of God as faithful one and God as creator, because God is creating everything.

[22:57] Okay? And if you read chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis, he creates, and then he says what? It is good. And he creates, and he says, it is good. And after every aspect of his creation, what does he say?

It is good. It is good. It is good. He gets to mankind. He says, it is very good. Okay? Very good. Which is to say that when God creates, he does so with intention. He creates, not as a plan B, or he doesn't create because there's some kind of cosmic battle, and this is a bit of an afterthought, or the residue of some kind of cosmic happening.

God creates with intention, and baked in there is order. And beauty and goodness. Because God is a God of order and beauty and goodness.

So he creates, not because he needs to create, but because he delights in creation. So when we see, again, remembering that Lord is this term that proclaims the promises of God, that he will never break his promises, and that he will never deny himself.

When it says here, he keeps faith forever. It's to say that the psalmist is saying, this God who creates, he will not abandon his creation. Even though it is bent because of sin and pride, and brokenness and exploitation and all the like, he will not hit the reset button.

[24 : 23] He will not brush us into, again, a cosmic waste bin, but rather, he will redeem, he will restore. This is who God is. He will keep faith forever.

Let me ask you a question. That commitment to the goodness, and the beauty, and the creation itself. Do we find that with influencers?

Do we find that with princes? Do we find that in the gurus of our age? Perfect, perfect, perfect creativity. A commitment, a commitment to the goodness and order and intention of creation.

We do not see that. Let's look now at verses seven and nine, and see how God is the executor of justice. I'll read verse five again, because again, seven and nine, everything that follows verse five, it frames and kind of gives an explanation for this thesis statement.

Verse five, blessed is he, whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is the Lord his God. Verse seven, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry.

[25 : 36] Verse nine, the Lord watches over the sojourners. He upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The one who created will also uphold, for he is just, and he hates evil, for he is good.

The Hebrew word here for justice is used some 200 times, 200 times in the Bible, in the Old Testament. And often it's connected to, not just the judging of evil, the punishing of evil, the ending of evil, but it also pertains to the care and compassion for the marginalized.

The alien, the low caste, the orphan, the widow, those that cannot fight for themselves. This is all encapsulated in this idea of justice, God's justice being executed.

The Lord sees the pain and hears the cry of all, not of some, okay, but of all. He hears the cry of all. He will punish evil and vice.

He will end the systems and attitudes that exploit and oppress. You know, we might, you might scoff at that because it continues and persists.

[26 : 57] Why not do it now? God in his timing, I'm not sure. This specific psalm isn't speaking of God's sovereign, sovereignness over time, okay? But the promise is that it will happen.

Let me ask you a question. Do the influencers and the pseudo false messiahs, can they be as compassionate as this God? Can they alleviate all of the pain?

I mean, our best plans for aid in this world, to alleviate suffering, I mean, it works to an extent, but it can never wipe out hunger.

There are still orphans in this world. There are still people that are exploited. Slavery is still very much a thing in this world. Tens of millions of slaves exist across this earth.

There is no human being that can solve this problem. The scriptures are saying, of course not. It can only be solved by the Lord God. Finally, we're looking at, we're looking at God as redeemer.

[28 : 05] Verse eight. Again, I'll read verse five first. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.

Verse eight. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.

The Lord loves the righteous. This describes the goodness of God, how he understands that sin has, has touched and brought great ignorance and stupor to his creation, blinding and oppressing what he has created and called good.

So we see, interestingly, the justice very much connected to the, the, the redemption of God, all kind of connected to God being creator, because he creates with intent and goodness, and he loves his creation.

He won't see his creation ultimately dissolve away. But here there's an emphasis on the lifting up, the redeeming. And he is the one who seeks out those that need to be redeemed. He's the one who opens blind eyes and straightens crooked backs. Surely in, in, in a physical way, but more importantly in a, in a spiritual and social way, but especially a spiritual way. [29:19] He is the one who dispels ignorance. He is the one who uplifts the broken. And at the core of this, it's how God makes unrighteous people righteous.

When we turn and cry out in hope for salvation, he hears and he acts, and so delights in making us something that we are not, but something that we so desperately want. That is to be righteous. To be made right. To have our life turn from brokenness to wholeness. Pain to joy. So how does God make unrighteous people righteous?

Because isn't that what ultimately we want? If the Lord, this covenant making, covenant keeping God, loves the righteous, shouldn't you want to be righteous? We'll wrap up with this.

It says, in verse three and four, put not your trust in princes, in a son of man in whom there is no salvation. You see, that's the problem.

[30:24] Influencers, like I've said, they are mortals. They are sons of man. which is to say that they are human beings. They, verse four, they breathe out their last breath, and then they return to the earth.

Interesting little play on words in, in the original Hebrew that they are man, Adam, that return to the dust, Adamah. It's, they, they are dust.

They walk around for a season, but then they die, and then they go back to the dust. But there is another son of man, okay, who was a son of man, like us, mortal, but was the son of man.

And, and the son of man is this really, really, incredibly, fantastic, fantastic title, given to the Messiah himself, which, interestingly, the son of man means that he is actually the son of God.

I won't get into it right now. You'll have to take my word for it. We can talk about it afterwards. But this son of man, he also, uh, breathes out, uh, and, and, and dies.

[31:26] But he doesn't stay in the grave. Jesus Christ, he doesn't sit upon a throne up in heaven and just lob down great principles to live by.

Okay. Do this and things will go better for you. And then maybe you'll make your way up to the heavens. He doesn't. He comes down to our position. He takes up into his divinity, our humanity, remaining fully God, but can completely man.

And he lives this incredibly righteous life, but dies an unrighteous death. And then there's this incredible switch that happens. If we put our hope in Christ, our true hope, he says, okay, have my righteousness.

I will take on everything that is unrighteous about you and you will be righteous. You are now the object of my love. And what does Jesus do upon the cross? He actually dies.

That's one of the reasons in the creed we say that he died, was buried. We want to emphasize that this wasn't just like a swooning or kind of a rumor that Jesus died, but that he actually died.

[32:37] So he breathes out his last. He is buried, but then rises again. And then he breathes a second time. The risen Christ before he ascends to heaven, he gathers with his disciples and he breathes upon them his Holy Spirit.

Okay? He gives the Holy Spirit, his very spirit to his church, those that have put their hope and faith and trust in him, to be their comforter and their helper.

And he gives the Holy Spirit to them so that they will know that one day, if God's very presence is with them on this earth, it is a foretaste of what it will be one day when they are with him in his presence in heaven.

And this is why there is no other person to hope in except Christ. Because what man or woman, what political ideology or philosophy can promise the breathing out of God's own spirit that will permeate our very being, who promises that one day we will be with him for eternity.

And this is what we see in the last verse, in verse 10 of Psalm 146, the psalmist captures it beautifully. The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations.

[34:01] Praise the Lord. He will be reigning forever. His salvation doesn't last for a moment or a season or even a human lifetime, but forever.

What influencer or prince can promise that? Who are you, who am I, putting our hope in? Ask the question honestly, if you can.

Who are you putting your hope in right now that is ultimately going to let you down? Where is your hope misplaced? And then like the psalmist, in verses 1 and 2, cry out, praise the Lord, O my soul. God, help me praise you. You see, my spirit is willing, my flesh is weak. I believe, help my unbelief. The Bible is full of instances where God, he just hears the faintest cry and he rushes to act. Will you cry out to the Lord this morning? Church, will you say, praise the Lord, O my soul, I will praise the Lord. Will you cry out to him? Listen, this life is full of difficulties and temptation. [35 : 18] This might be the very cry of your heart for the next few decades or few years or few months or however long the Lord has for you to live on this earth. but make it your cry. Cry out to him and just watch how he will act. Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the Lord.