

# Praise the Lord O My Soul

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 06 June 2010

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I'd like to draw your attention to something that was handed out to you in your bulletins, a sermon series card. This is a sermon series we're starting today on the Psalms.

And one of the reasons we're doing this is because the book of Acts talks about the creation of the church, of the gospel going into the world with great power by the Holy Spirit and people being transformed.

And in the Psalms, what we're going to hear is, what does the church do? What are we about as people who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and transformed through his gospel?

And one of the fundamental things that we do is to pray and to read God's word and to live for him. And so we want to talk about praying through the Psalms.

My hope is that this is a very practical sermon series. That you will be encouraged to pray, perhaps in ways that you have never prayed before.

[ 1 : 01 ] And that you will understand a bit more about what God has for us in prayer. And so what we've done with this sermon series is to look at different aspects of prayer that the Psalms teach us about.

So there's praise and joy in prayer. There's lament in prayer. There's gratitude in prayer. There's being mindful of God's grace in prayer. Experiencing God in prayer.

There is doubt in our prayers. How does that happen? We express confidence in God in our prayer. And we know the sovereignty of God, his rule over all the things that we pray about and we pray for as well.

Now, the Psalms can shape our prayer life and broaden them so that it is not only about petition, asking God for our needs, which is very important for us to do, but that we would find our prayer life broadened and understand the fullness of what God has for us in prayer, knowing the different aspects of prayer that the Psalms teach us about.

And the only way that this can happen is if you do homework, is if you actually read the Psalms, is if you actually pray those Psalms as well.

[ 2 : 18 ] And that's why the series has to be interactive. We can't just passively listen to a sermon from the Psalms. You need to be active and involved to allow these Psalms to shape your prayer life.

And so, I want you to turn to the other insert, which is green. And this has Psalm 146 on it. And underneath it are some very practical and simple ways to interact with Psalm 146.

So it gives you every day a way that you can actually just say a short prayer after thinking through this Psalm. There's two things that you can do to let Psalm 146 shape your prayer life.

Read 146 each day as a prayer, and then pray one short prayer each day in response. And I've given some practical ways, they might be helpful, they might not be, to do this.

And my hope is that every week we will have some practical exercise of prayer that comes out of these sermons. So that we're going to have you doing spiritual exercises every week in the summer.

[ 3 : 27 ] It's a good thing to do, an active summer. Because the best way to learn to pray is the same way as it is to be more physically fit. It is just to do it, to do exercise.

No special knowledge is required. There's no extensive prayer life that you need. All you need is the Psalm, God's Word. One of the great things about the Sun Run that's run in Vancouver every year is that tens of thousands of people run in it.

And there is a huge range of people that are actually running in that race. From people who are highly trained to people who are very good at walking fast, I think.

I mean, I see it's sometimes not so fast. And so the goal is just to finish for some. It's a race for everyone. And so usually in around January, when people are doing their resolutions, there is a program set up as to how you can begin to run for those 10 kilometers.

And each week, you increase the amount of exercise you're doing. You run a little bit further. It's a very practical and attainable way to get going into exercise, especially for those who are very busy people.

[ 4 : 45 ] Well, the idea of practical prayer is like this. Like the Sun Run, the Psalms are a praying that's meant for everyone.

Even very busy people can deepen their prayer life by praying through and with the Psalms. And that can happen in just 5 or 10 minutes each day as you interact with the Psalm.

And that needs to be something that becomes our habit, just as running in preparation for a race becomes habitual. You can increase your time in prayer as time goes on.

But if you haven't been praying like this before, here is a very practical and attainable way to start. When Cranmer wrote that little maroon book in front of you, the prayer book, he assumed that it was for everyone.

That everyone, town bakers, students, ministers, farmers, business owners, aristocrats, people who are farm laborers, would follow the Bible reading guide that's called the lectionary in there.

[ 5 : 46 ] And as part of that lectionary, the Psalms were listed. And people who read that reading, that list of readings, would go through 150 Psalms every month, which means about 5 a day.

And by the way, I just want to mention to you that next week, as a regular part of our practice, the lectionary from the Book of Common Prayer is given out in the bulletin. And you can follow that in addition to what we're doing here.

But what we are doing here is we are starting small. We're reading one Psalm through the whole week that we've preached on. And the Psalm for this sermon is Psalm 146.

It is a hymn of praise and joy. And you're going to ask me, why are you starting a sermon series in the Psalms right at the end of the Psalter? Well, even though there is a lot of lament and some pretty raw human emotion that comes out in the Psalms, the general tone of the Psalms are of joy and of praise.

The Hebrew word for Psalms means praises. And these hymns of praise and joy are not as common towards the beginning of the Book of Psalms, but they are in the majority by the end.

[ 7 : 06 ] It's as though everything's leading up to and permeated by praise and joy. In fact, the last five Psalms are together a great crescendo of praise.

And they're called the great doxology. All prayers are leading to the praise and joy in God. And Psalm 146 is the beginning of that group.

That's why I chose it. It begins and ends with an exuberant call, as you see there in the green sheet, to praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. It is an evangelistic call because it exhorts everyone who hears to praise God.

Now, one of the great things about Sunday school is that they sing lots of songs and praise when they start their lessons all together. And Nicholas, who is our four-year-old son, loves that way to start Sunday school.

And he comes home and he sings the songs that he learns there very, very loudly, and often repetitiously as well. So that I have to say, you need to tone it down a bit.

[ 8 : 16 ] If you're going to be that loud, you need to be outside the house. But what this means is that he does sing loudly outside the house. And what it has also meant is that the last few weeks, when I have gone to safely with him, we'll be walking down the aisle and suddenly he will break out in, I want to see Jesus lifted high.

And everybody looks at him and smiles. And this is an evangelistic call to praise God that is very exuberant, which is what this psalm is about.

It is exuberant. It is joyful. And it is not something that we are simply to smile about. It is something for us to take on for ourselves.

There is a natural call here, a call that comes out of the fact that we, and the psalmist knows who he is talking to, have a covenant relationship with God.

That there is a covenant that God has set up between his people and himself. And so as the psalmist throughout the psalms pour out their hearts in good and bad situations, they know always that they are in covenant relationship with the God of the universe.

[ 9 : 34 ] And Psalm 146 expresses the most fundamental aspect of that relationship. And that is that God created every person to trust God, to praise him.

In verse 2, it says, I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. That's what real life is about.

This is what we are made for. It is the substance of the life of heaven. And that's why praise and joy in God permeate all the psalms in the Psalter.

However, the Westminster Catechism teaches us that the chief end of man, our great purpose, the reason for our being, is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Very famous line. But what that gets to is the heart of that covenant relationship. There is this joy that comes from being in relationship with God through every experience in life.

[ 10 : 38 ] And it is the substance, not only of our life here, but the life of heaven as well. And that's what's being expressed in Psalm 146. Hymns of joy.

Now, the great thing about Psalm 146 is it doesn't just praise God. The psalmist tells us why we should praise God. They express wondrous things God has done and the greatness of who he is, who he is in his very being.

And we should notice that the great hymns of the church, the great songs of worship, are songs that not only call us to praise God, but they give the reason for why we praise God.

They talk about what God has done. They talk about who he is as well. They follow the pattern of the psalms, both praising God and expressing that God is worthy, why he is worthy of our praise.

And that call to praise in Psalm 146. The reason for that praise comes in verse 5, which is all important to us.

[ 11 : 47 ] It has to do with trusting God. Verse 5 says, Blessed is he whose help is in the God of Israel, whose hope is in the Lord his God. That gets to the heart of the Christian faith and to our human experience.

Because one of the hardest things that we do and that we're about as Christians is to entrust ourselves to God. It's a very vulnerable thing for us to do.

We have a natural desire to want to control the course of our lives and to be somewhat autonomous from God. Have some parts of our life that we hold on to and control.

And this goes back to the Garden of Eden. What was Satan's temptation with the fruit? What did he say? He said, Did God really say you must not eat the fruit?

And he tells them, You will not die, Adam and Eve. You will be like God, knowing good from evil. Are you sure you can trust God?

[ 12 : 51 ] Are you sure you can trust his word? And he's saying to them, You need to take control. Don't entrust yourself completely to him. But of course, what Satan's saying here is, Trust me instead.

Trust something other than God. And that is the root of each of our sinful natures. And the psalmist warns us about this in verse 3. He says, Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

When his breath departs, he returns to the earth. On that very day, his plans perish. He is saying that we have a tendency to try to save ourselves, to look for earthly security, to look for fulfillment in relationships here on earth, to look to those relationships for our well-being, and for them to provide for our future, to the exclusion of God.

But the psalmist says, Everyone, even the most powerful person who can help you the most, a prince, will let you down. Why? Because he cannot save you.

They will die. Any plans to save, will die with them as well. And so, the psalmist warns us to turn away from spiritual danger of trusting anyone more than you trust God.

[ 14 : 15 ] There is the danger. Don't fall into that in this psalm of praise, he says. In contrast, instead of this, he says, Blessed is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is the Lord his God.

You see, there is a deep joy and a happiness that overflows into praise because the psalmist says, I entrust myself to God as my helper and my hope.

And that is what prayer is all about. It is about living out the truth that the living God, the one who helped Jacob and rescued him, helps you as well. The only reason we pray is because we believe that God has our future in his hands.

We only pray because he is our hope. And that hope has been clearly revealed to us in Jesus Christ. And so we are moved to pray. He's not an earthly prince.

He is the prince of peace who died for our sins and brings to us eternal salvation, an eternal relationship with you, with God.

[15:20] Blessed are you, God, because you have brought me to know and trust in you as my permanent savior and helper. It praises God in this psalm because there is a precious relationship that has been given to him and to us.

And so verse 5 says, the reason for our praise is because there is great blessing that comes as we trust him. I was talking to somebody at the end of the 9 o'clock service who said, you know, there is a great humility about trusting God, but there is this incredible happiness that I have because of it. And this is somebody who has begun to trust God more and more recently and talked about how she really relates to this psalm because of the joy of being able to trust God as hard as that is, as humbling as that is as well.

And the rest of the psalm is a huge encouragement to hold on to that trust and to continue to look to God as we pray.

And so here is the reason. Look at verse 6. There are two big reasons that we trust in God in that very key verse. It says this, God made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them.

[16:41] That is reason number one. It is because God has made heaven and it means he can make heaven for us. Jesus said, I go to prepare a place for you.

God has made earth and that means that he walks with us, that he cares for us through our earthly journey and that he surrounds us with his kingly protection and care and leadership.

But not only that, he says God created the sea and all that is in them. Now you know that the Hebrew person, people, did not look on the sea as playing with dolphins at Sea World or snorkeling with beautiful fish in a very tranquil place.

They saw the sea as something that was mysterious and dark and dangerous. And he's saying here that because God made the sea, it means that he leads us through all of the uncertain and troubled and dark times in our own lives that we face.

The verse tells us that God made all these things and therefore he rules them. His power surrounds heaven and earth, our presence and our future. The times of darkness, the times of great light as well, it is a description of God's strength that is meant to swallow up our anxiety, to swallow up our fears.

[18:08] So that's the first thing. He is able. Not only that, but God is not only able to help us, he is very willing to as well. And that's the end of verse 6.

Very simply it says, he keeps faith forever. And those words mean everything to us. Those four words, he keeps faith forever.

Because Satan very easily tempts us to distrust and to be fearful. And what those four words mean is that he is forever faithful to the covenant that he has made with his people, to that relationship, that saving relationship that he has brought to us.

His commitment to us is unchangeable. And we see that commitment perfectly in Jesus Christ. The Almighty God brings his power into your life and into my life.

Now he is faithful to that relationship. And what verses 7 through 9 do here is to strengthen our trust in God because it says to us that in his immeasurable power and goodness, he is ready and willing always to come into even the worst of circumstances as our Savior and as our friend and as our helper.

[19:28] So if you look at those verses, it says, and you think of Jesus, what he was anointed to do to bring release and liberty to the captives, to bring sight to the blind. And we see here in verse 7, he executes justice for the oppressed, he gives food to the hungry, 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 sojourner, he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Now the thing that jumps out is the fact that the Lord is named five times in those short verses. And the word is what we translate in English, Yahweh or Jehovah.

It was an unpronounceable word in Hebrew and it's a powerful personal name of God. That means I am. And what it means is that God is both I am here and I am who is eternal as well.

And what that means is that God's power comes into human helplessness. He knows those who suffer and he is their helper. He is the help of those who call on him.

Now if you look at verse 8, there is something that seemed a bit off when I read it. It talks about all these situations, the worst of human experience and how God comes into it.

[ 20 : 56 ] And then it says the Lord loves the righteous. And the reason that's in there because it means the righteous, those who are faithful to God, will experience these kinds of things.

Even as we belong to him, we will suffer the things that he describes and he loves us in it. He loves us. He cares for us in those times. And as we look at that list, we should think of ourselves as well because they are much bigger than what we see because it says this, that the God who executes justice for the oppressed is also the God who can come in and bring justice to situations where we are treated unfairly, where we are slandered, where we feel helpless in the face of injustice.

He is the righteous judge. And at the end, it says that he frustrates the way of the wicked, the people who bring about oppression in one's life. Secondly, the hungry.

God gives food to the hungry. Well, the hungry are not just for the physical things, but if the God can give physical food, he will also satisfy our hunger for righteousness, for instance.

The hunger for our families to know God and to be in relationship with him and our friends as well.

The God who releases prisoners is the same God who can release us from addictions, from our slavery to different types of sin that all of us are prey to.

[ 22 : 24 ] The God who opens the eyes of the blind is the one who brings light in the midst of the various darkensses in our own lives. The times when we don't know the way forward, what to do, how to make the right decision.

God opens the eyes to our truth, to his truth, when we don't know the way forward. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. And that word literally means those who are pressed down.

And that perfectly describes depression. It describes those things in our life that press us down and weigh us down, that we are burdened by. God lifts those people up.

They are part of his power, that he encompasses them. And it says here that God watches over the sojourners who are refugees with no home. He upholds the widow and the fatherless.

And these speak about vulnerable people in society who have experienced great loss in their life. Loss of home, loss of relationships, times of grief. And he is speaking to us in our own grief and in our own loss.

[ 23 : 28 ] He says that he watches over us, that he upholds us. Jesus is our home. He is our husband. God is our father. You know, all of this is saying that suffering in God's people is part of what it means to live in this fallen world.

But our joy is that the powerful ruler and maker of the world loves and provides for those who know God and who trust him as their helper and their hope.

Blessed are you in all those circumstances, the psalmist says. And that's why the psalm ends in verse 10 by saying, the Lord will reign forever.

Your God, O Zion, to all generations. It is saying that the reason that God reigns, the reason he is king, is expressly for you and for your salvation.

The Lord reigns. He is your God. God is king in order to save you, to help you, to be your hope. He wants to be in a living, loving relationship with you.

[ 24 : 36 ] In every circumstance, good or painful, he wants to hear you speak to him. And he wants to speak to you and to lead you and show you his will for you.

That's why this is such an enthusiastic, joyous psalm. It is every bit as exuberant as my son singing at Safeway. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord, it says. And why is that? It's because this psalmist is expressing praise because he can trust God with his life in every situation.

God is able to help. He is willing to help. He is our king. And we express that trust in our prayers and our praises just as the man who wrote Psalm 146 does.

So, again, I hope this psalm encourages you very practically to pray at least a little bit each day using this psalm. And remember, you can use those practical ideas if they are helpful to you.

[ 25 : 38 ] But either way, interact with this psalm and let it shape you and your prayer life a little bit each day will do that. and pray that God might grant you a heart that is full of joyous gratitude.

And that's what the psalms will do for you so that you might glorify God even as these psalms do. Amen.