

Hallelujah!
Psalm 146
ABC 9/3/23

Studies have been done to find out what words you can speak in almost any country & still be understood. What do you think the top word is? It's not *coke*, although that's up there. *Coffee* is another top word understood worldwide. The one word that's the same in every language is, *huh?*¹ Researchers have suggested that the reason *huh?* is the only word to have the same meaning in almost every language is because *there is no other word that is capable of filling its place*, whatever that means. Religious words that are almost universal include *amen* & *hallelujah*.² This morning we come to *Ps 146*, a *hallelujah* psalm, along with Pss 147-150. Why are these 5 closing psalms called *hallelujah* psalms? Because each one begins & ends with that word. What does it mean? *Hallelujah* is made up of 2 Hebrew words, *hallel* (meaning *praise*) & *jah* (a contraction of *Jehovah*). *Hallelujah* means *Praise Jehovah* or *praise the LORD*. The book of psalms, the songbook of Israel, ends with 5 praise psalms, kind of a final *Hallelujah Chorus*. Praising the Lord doesn't mean just saying, *Praise the Lord*, continuously. Instead, it's to exult & rejoice in who God is & what He's done. Our praise has both a rational & an emotional element. With our minds, we must understand who God is as He's revealed Himself to be in His Word. When we begin to understand who He is & what He's done in sending His Son to die for our sins, it affects our emotions. Worship is rational & emotional; it includes the head & the heart. **Ps 146:1-10**

1. The Call (1-2) How does this psalm begin? **Praise the Lord**, & it's plural. The author is calling all of us to **praise the Lord**. In southern speak it's, *praise God y'all*. Remember singing in VBS or SS, *Hallelu, hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah! Praise, ye the Lord!* That's biblical, isn't it? We see it right here. All of us are called to give the Lord praise. It's not enough to worship the Lord individually, although we're to do that, this is a call to worship God together. Having called the congregation to worship, the writer immediately declares his determination to worship God himself, saying, **1b-2.**

¹ Max Planck Institute, www.mpg.de/7605822/

² Roy Clements, *Songs of Experience*, p 186

This is a unwavering resolve to praise God. There are situations in life where it requires great determination to praise God. If the psalmist had to preach to himself in order to sing God's praises all his days, then certainly we must do the same. Praising God every day as long as you live won't happen naturally or because you have an upbeat personality. It requires a God-ward focus, where you see every blessing & every trial coming from His loving hand. The psalmist makes this resolution to praise God as long as he's alive because, as he'll show in vss 7-9, the Lord's people aren't exempt from trials. They're **oppressed, hungry, imprisoned, blind, bowed down, strangers, fatherless, & widowed** & there are wicked people who persecute God's people (9c). We can't base our praise on happy circumstances or on the mood of the moment. Instead, it must be our determined choice. In whatever trials or joys we may find ourselves, we must join the psalmist in preaching to ourselves, **Praise the Lord, O my soul!** Charles Spurgeon said, *We cannot be too firm in the holy resolve to praise God, for it is the chief end of our living & being that we should glorify God & enjoy Him forever.*³ If we all **praise the Lord** during the week, when we gather to worship on the Lord's Day, His praises will flood this place. That's how it should be.

2. The Contrast At 1st glance it seems strange that the psalmist's call to worship & his personal resolve to worship should be followed by the warning not to put our trust in princes. But that's what we find in vss **3-4**.

The psalmist reminds us to put our trust in the Lord & not in men. No matter how powerful someone is, they can't save you & they're going to die.

Al Mohler was with another pastor & in the course of conversation the pastor looked at Al & said, *You know, one day, they're going to put us in a box & they're going to lower us into the ground & they're going to throw dirt over us & they're going to go back to the church & eat potato salad.*⁴

He's right. All men, all **princes** will die. The connection between praising the Lord & not trusting influential or powerful people is that we praise those we trust for help. If you trust a person in high places to help you & he comes through, you sing his praises. It's not wrong to give credit to those who help you, but you mustn't rob God of His rightful glory. If your trust is in the Lord, you see His

³ *Treasury of David*

⁴ Al Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, p 203

hand behind what others do for you, so God gets the glory. In Ps 50:15 God says, **Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, & you will honor Me.** Trusting in influential people is misplaced, because they're mortal. The powerful man in whom you trust is one breath away from the grave, where he'll be no help at all. Don't put your trust in man, a son of dust who's going to return to dust. Don't put your trust in a mere earthling who's going to be food for earth worms. Vs 4 seems to deliberately recall God's words to Adam in Gen 3:19: **for you are dust, & to dust you shall return.** Vs 4, like Is 2:22, teaches that we're only one-breath beings. **...man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils.** We live one breath at a time. When our breathe stops, we're gone. They may be powerful today but tomorrow they'll be a corpse. Trust in man is misplaced. Rather, trust in God. Jer 17 makes this same point.

Thus says the Lord, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind, & makes flesh his strength, & whose heart turns away from the Lord. For he will be like a bush in the desert & will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in stony wastes in the wilderness a land of salt without inhabitant. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord & whose trust I the Lord. (5-7).

Who is your trust, your confidence, your hope in? If it's not in God it's misplaced.

This reminds me of the man who was having trouble trusting God to give 10% regularly off the top of his paycheck to the Lord's work. (The NT standard, as I understand it, isn't 10%, but rather, as the Lord has prospered you, 1 Cor 16:2). This man wanted to tithe, but he couldn't see how he could tithe & meet his bills. He shared his fears with his pastor & the pastor replied, *If I promise to make up the difference in your monthly bills if you should fall short, do you think you could try tithing for just one month?*

After thinking about it for a moment, the man replied, *Sure, if you promise to make up any shortfall, I guess I could try tithing for one month.*

The pastor then said, *You say you'd be willing to put your trust in a mere man like myself, who possesses so little materially, but you couldn't trust your Heavenly Father, who owns the whole universe!* The man got the point & started giving faithfully off the top, trusting God to provide.⁵

If we trust people for help, we'll be disappointed. We're ramping up for a presidential election. Let me remind you not to put your hope in any politician. God is sovereign. He's still in charge. His authority & power are unmatched. He's not up for re-election. & no one can ever dethrone Him. **Do not trust in princes** or politicians. Whether your guy or party wins or loses, put no confidence in them. Make sure your confidence is in the Lord your God. History is littered with the

⁵ Told by Steven Cole, <https://bible.org/print/book/export/html/21994>

disappointments of people who've put all their marbles in the basket of men who've failed them. The Lord will never fail His people. That's the contrast of this psalm. This is included because we're tempted to trust in man. The psalmist wouldn't have to say, **Do not trust in princes**, if we weren't tempted to do so. He wouldn't have to say, **Do not trust...in mortal man**, if we weren't tempted to do so. He wouldn't have to remind us that there's no salvation in mere men if we didn't act like there was. Sometimes we think that what another person can give us or do for us is absolutely essential to our life but the truth is only God is absolutely essential to our life. Therefore, we're to look to & praise Him.

3. The Character (5-10) The last section begins with a beatitude. **How blessed is he...** It's the last beatitude in the Psalter & it promises blessing for those who've learned not to put their hopes in man but in God instead. The rest of the psalm is all about God, **the Lord**, Jehovah. The psalmist points us to the blessedness & perfections of God. He does this by reminding us of what God is like & what the blessing is that we have because our hope, our faith is in Him. In these vss the psalmist states his case, that you'll be blessed when you trust in the Lord (5). Then he supports his case, showing that the almighty, faithful Creator, comes to the aid of the weak who cast themselves upon Him (6-9). Finally, he comes full circle, showing that when you trust the Lord you'll praise Him forever (10). In other words, he reminds us if we've put our trust in God then our help, our aid, & our hope is the Lord Himself. The psalmist is saying, *What is our God like?* & then he tells us several things about God. **5**

When God is your help & your hope, you will be blessed (5). The title, **God of Jacob**, underscores God's sovereign grace. Why did God choose Jacob over his brother Esau? Esau was the nicer brother, someone you'd like hanging out with. Jacob was a conniving scoundrel. But God set His blessing on Jacob over Esau **before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's plan of election might stand** (Rom 9:11). You know the story. Jacob was deceitful, a schemer, & a liar. He was just the sort of person we want to face God's justice. But instead of God bringing him to ruin He wrestles with him, changes him, & transforms him. As a sign of the work he's done in his life God gives him a new name, *Israel*. & from this unlikeable man God brings a

new man. The psalmist is saying, blessed is the person who worships this life-transforming God; the God who takes a man deserving of justice & makes him into a man who pleases Him. God gives him 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel. The implication is that as God did with Jacob so He will do with us. Thus, the man is blessed **whose hope is in the Lord his God** (5). Jacob was weak in himself, but became strong in the Lord, & thus truly blessed. Likewise, when you're weak in yourself, but the **God of Jacob** is your help & your hope, you'll be truly blessed. Spurgeon put it this way: *The Lord pours most into those who are most empty of self. Those who have least of their own shall have the most of God's.*⁶ God alone can save us, in contrast to the important people of this world, who cannot (3). What is God like? **6**

A. The Lord is Creator You can trust in God because, in contrast to those in vss 3-4, God is the almighty Creator. For the Hebrews, the sea often pictures that which is dark & threatening. But God made it & controls it. He is Lord of heaven & earth. The doctrine of creation is important for us having confidence in God. In hoping in Him, we're placing our trust in the God who is eternal, who stands outside of His creation, who isn't bound by it, & who is sovereign over it. He isn't like man who is passing away (4).⁷ It's interesting that those who make much of the glory of nature rarely pause to worship the God who made it. Recognizing that God is the Creator of everything is an enormous comfort & gives us confidence that He is our help & our hope.

2. The Lord is Faithful (6). Not only does God save us, but He also remains faithful to us after He's saved us. He **keeps faith forever**. He never goes back on His promises. As the writer of Hebrews exhorts, **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful** (10:23). His faithfulness is everlasting. He is forever faithful. He will never ever let you go.

George Matheson wrote the hymn, *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*, & there's a wistful sadness to that line. You don't write that unless you've experienced a love that has let you go.

When he was 20 years old, George Matheson (1842-1906) was engaged to be married but began going blind. When he broke the news to his fiancée, she decided she couldn't go through life with a blind husband & she left him.

George's sister offered to care for him. With her help, George had a successful pastoral ministry. The day came, however, when his sister fell in love & prepared for marriage herself. The evening

⁶ *An All Round Ministry*, www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/aarm11.htm

⁷ Donald Williams & Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Psalms 73-150*, p 513

before the wedding, George's whole family had left to get ready for the next day's celebration. He was alone & facing the prospect of living the rest of his life without the one person who had come through for him. On top of this, he was doubtless reflecting on his own aborted wedding day 20 years earlier. It isn't hard to imagine the waves of grief washing over him.

In the darkness of that moment he wrote this hymn. He remarked afterward that it took him 5 minutes & that it was the only hymn he ever wrote that required no editing.⁸

*O Love that will not let me go
I rest my weary soul in Thee
I give Thee back the life I owe
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.*⁹

The psalmist, like George Matheson, points us to a God that's forever faithful, that will not let us go. The psalmist rejoices in his God. He then lists people in a crisis whom the Lord sustains or delivers. 7

C. The Lord is Just He's a God who gives justice to those who've been abused by human injustice. He's saying, *The Lord will make that right. He's going to give justice to those who've been abused by human injustice.* That should be significant to us who have brothers & sisters around the world who are being persecuted because they're believers in Jesus. They're experiencing human injustice. The Lord cares about that & He knows about that & He intends to do something about that & He will do something about that. He will execute **justice for the oppressed.**

D. The Lord Feeds the Hungry (7b). Ps 145:15-16 says the Lord provides food for all of His creatures. Therefore, we can trust Him to provide for our needs. He opens His hand & gives those in need the food they require. That's what our God is like. 5x in rapid fire, he now puts **the Lord, Yahweh**, in the emphatic position to apply the general truth that the almighty Creator is also the sustainer of the weak & needy (7-9).

E. The Lord Frees the Prisoners (7c). They may be imprisoned unjustly. It could also refer to those who are imprisoned by various sins or guilt or troubling situations beyond their ability to break free. The Lord is able to deliver the prisoners, no matter how securely the enemy guards them. In

⁸ www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/o-love-that-will-not-let-me-go/

⁹ #75 in our hymnal

the Bible, there are many captives that were set free by the Lord. Remember Joseph, Jeremiah, Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego? They were imprisoned wrongly & God set them free. Think of Peter & Paul. Same thing. Of course, sometimes there are captives like Stephen who aren't set free in this world. But when they enter into heaven the Lord is standing & waiting for them & they're free indeed. He sets the captives free. These vss take us to the NT, where Jesus announced the purpose of His mission in the synagogue at Nazareth, quoting from Is 61:1–2, He said,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, & recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18–19).

As far as we know from the gospels, Jesus never literally freed anyone from prison. His deliverance includes a spiritual side, a deliverance from sin for those who put their faith in His death & resurrection for them. We'll come back to this later. **8**

F. The Lord Gives Sight Again, we're reminded of Jesus when the psalmist describes God as giving sight to the blind. The greatest blindness of all is blindness to the truth of God revealed in Scripture. When Jehovah gives sight to the blind, the blind recognize His Word to be true & place their faith in Jesus. Every time a blind sinner sees Christ, every time a dead sinner comes to life, God has performed a miracle. He's changed a heart. He's opened blind eyes. He's unstopped deaf ears. The Lord does that. As God told Moses, **Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?** (Ex 4:11). Isaiah 35:5 predicts of the Messiah, **Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, & the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.** Jesus referred to this when He assured to John the Baptist that He was the Messiah (Mt 11:5).

G. The Lord Lifts the Low (8). Many things in life push us around & knock us down but God cares for us & lifts us up again. The next psalm says, **He heals the brokenhearted & binds up their wounds** (147:3). Over & over the Bible celebrates the fact that God exalts the humble, that He raises the lowly. He loves to lift up those who are bowed down & He loves to exalt those who are humble. That's what our God is like.

H. The Lord Loves the Righteous (8). **Love** is mentioned here because it's the source of all God's other actions. Why does God act in a trustworthy way toward us, uphold the oppressed, free

prisoners, give sight to the blind, & lift up those who are bowed down? The answer is because He loves us. It isn't because we've made ourselves lovable or righteous. No, only God can make us righteous in Christ, & that too is only because He loves us. The Lord loves us with a love that will not quit. Human love is a fickle thing. But the Lord's love isn't. He loves the righteous & He'll never stop. Why is this in the midst of a list of people with overwhelming problems? Because the righteous are often oppressed & persecuted because they follow the Lord. But as Jesus said, **Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven** (Mt 5:10).

I. The Lord Protects the Stranger 9

The 3 1st mentioned, the **strangers, the fatherless, & the widow**, are often cited in the OT as examples of those who are defenseless. God watches over them & protects them from the wicked. Often, those who are foreigners are shunned or ridiculed or discriminated against. They feel lonely & as if no one cares for them. But the Lord cares for & protects them. As Christians, we have no lasting city. We're pilgrims. We're on the way. We're not home yet. But the Lord is watching over us & He's caring for us & He's protecting us & He will bring us home.

J. The Lord Supports the Fatherless & the Widow (9b). This isn't saying that orphans & widows are never oppressed or killed (Ps 94:6; Is 10:2). It's saying that such helpless victims never suffer apart from God's permissive will & that He cares especially for those whom the wicked trample. As we saw at the beginning of the list, the Lord will execute justice for all the oppressed in His time. The psalmist's point is that when we are weak & needy, we must trust the Lord. Some will say these are all just clichés because the real world isn't like this. How can the psalmist be confident of these things? The answer lies in his faith. He's speaking about the God who's revealed Himself. If you believe, as the psalmist does, that this world is in the hands of such a God, you can have hope. In spite of all the injustice, misery, & unsolved problems we face, we can have hope. Because our God is faithful forever.

K. The Lord Thwarts the Wicked (9c) This verse is like Ps 145:20 which says, **The LORD keeps all who love Him, But all the wicked He will destroy**. Spurgeon put it this way: *Where they* (the wicked)

*looked for joy, they experienced disappointment; where they expected success, they met with defeat; & whereas they thought to heap to themselves pleasures according to their lusts, they find that they have only increased their misery.*¹⁰ Or, as Isaiah succinctly states, **There is no peace for**

the wicked (48:22). The psalmist says the Lord is able to bless you because He's the almighty Creator; He's forever faithful; He delights to sustain the weak & needy, & He will **thwart the wicked**.

L. The Lord Reigns Forever Then he wraps up his case by coming full circle back to **hallelujah: 10**

What's God like? He lasts & rules forever. This is the ultimate contrast with what was said in vs 3-4. The breath of man departs, he returns to the earth & his plans perish. But **the Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations** (10). The God he's describing & praising will reign for **all generations**. It follows that God also must be praised from generation to generation. Do you see what the psalmist's done? The doxology, the praise of God here, is about theology, about the person of God, the character of God, the nature of God, the perfections of God, the attributes of God, & the love & care of God. The doxology is theological. What the psalmist knows about God, because God has revealed Himself in His Word, moves him to resolve to praise Him while he still has life & then an eternity of praising Him in His presence. He ends just as he began. **Praise the Lord, y'all.**

If you're not yet a disciple of Jesus, let me encourage you to consider who you're trusting? Are you placing your trust in political parties or social movements? Are you entrusting the outcome of your life to the latest fads & trends? Have you given any thought to the eternal nature of your soul? Are you entrusting eternity to a pile of your worthless works or to the One who sees the end from the beginning, the One who began it all, & the One who will end it all? Put your trust & your praise in God. Admit your sin & trust in what Jesus did on the cross, taking your sin & paying the price for you. It's in our sin where we're most poor, despondent, & without hope outside of Jesus. It's because of our sin that we are spiritually hungry & orphaned. It's our sin that leaves us imprisoned & our only hope of freedom is in God through Jesus Christ. Have you put your hope & faith in Him? Do you worship & praise Him as the only utterly trustworthy One in this universe? If you haven't,

¹⁰ (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

your only alternative is despair because people will always let you down. The politicians will let you down. The intellectuals will let you down. The scientists will let you down. The pastor will let you down. **Salvation comes from the Lord**, said Jonah, & he was right (2:9). God alone is utterly good, utterly powerful, & utterly trustworthy. Why settle for less? God is the only being about whom we can honestly & truly say, **Hallelujah**.

Communion

As we saw, Jesus began His ministry by quoting from Isaiah, words that are similar to the words in Ps 146:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, & recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18–19).

How does He do that? He does it at the cross, by taking all the justice of God for our sin upon Himself. At the cross God brought Jesus to ruin. He hung there in the place of the wicked, in your place & mine. When we realize that that's the level of His love for us it does something in our hearts. It makes us want to love Him & worship Him in response. When we understand what Jesus has done for us, then we'll join the psalmist as he says, **I will praise the Lord while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being** (2). When you realize the level of His love & compassion towards you, when you realize just how needy you are & how in Jesus God has met that need, you'll praise Him forever. As John wrote **We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us** (1 Jn 3:16). When you know that Jesus gave Himself for you, you'll give yourself to Him. We can't pray Ps 146 without thinking of Jesus' sermon in Nazareth, when He unrolled the scroll of Isaiah & read from it (Lk 4:14–21). Jesus began His public ministry by proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoner, & recovery of sight for the blind. But at the end of Isaiah 61 it says Jesus came **to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD & the day of vengeance of our God** (2). There are 2 sides of justice: vengeance against the perpetrators & favor for the oppressed. Jesus identifies with the God of the OT & this prophecy. He says, *I'm the Messiah, & I have come*. He reads from Isaiah 61 & says, *That's what I'm about*. But guess what? When He gets to the place where it says, **the favorable year of the Lord**, He stops. He doesn't read the last part of the verse, which is, **& the**

day of vengeance of our God. Jesus says, *I've come to do justice. I've come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, to lift up the oppressed, the brokenhearted, & the captives.* But then He stops & He doesn't say, *I'm here to bring the vengeance of God.* Why did Jesus stop mid-verse? He read through all the justice part & He brought out the good news for the oppressed. But He didn't get to the bad news. Why? Because He didn't come the 1st time to *bring* the vengeance of God. He came to *bear* the vengeance of God. He didn't come to *bring* judgment. He came to *bear* judgment. The reason He could say, *I've come to bring good news to the afflicted*, & not say, *I've come to punish the wicked*, was because He came to take the punishment that we, the wicked, deserve. He didn't just stand *with* us. He didn't just stand *by* us. When He went to the cross, Jesus stood in *for* us. He took the punishment we deserved. The judgment came down on Him. Because the judgment came down on Him we can be accepted. We can be loved. He will stand by us forever, even when we fail, because our sins are forgiven.¹¹ It's this that we remember in communion. Men Come

As the elements are passed, use this time to confess your sins & praise the Lord that they are forgiven. PRAY Pass Elements

In Mark's gospel we read,

While they were eating, He took *some* bread, & after a blessing He broke *it*, & gave *it* to them, & said, "Take *it*; this is My body" (Mk 14:22).

We remember what Jesus did for us as He died in our place, taking our punishment so that we might have true life. Let's praise the Lord together as we eat of the bread.

Mark continues,

& when He had taken a cup & given thanks, He gave *it* to them, & they all drank from it. & He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mk 14:23-25).

We remember what Jesus did for us as He shed His blood & died in our place, taking our punishment so that we might have true life. Let's praise the Lord together as we drink of the cup together.

¹¹ Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*, Logos Software