



Sermon Transcript August 27, 2017

Psalms: Prayers of Faith and Hope Praise the Lord! Psalm 146

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on August 27, 2017 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Psalm 146

¹ Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul! ² I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

³ Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. ⁴ When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish. ⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God,

⁶ who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever;

⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; ⁸ the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. ⁹ The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the Lord!

Introduction

“Praise the Lord!” That is how Psalm 146 begins and ends. It begins with *“Praise the Lord!”* and it ends with *“Praise the Lord!”* Actually, that is how the last five psalms in the book of Psalms each begin and end. Each of them are wrapped with this refrain, *“Praise the Lord!”* The Hebrew word is *“Hallelujah!”*

If you recall, when we began our sermon series on the book of Psalms this summer, we took a look at how the book of Psalms is carefully arranged and put together. It was here we discovered that these last five psalms form the conclusion of the book. So what then is the concluding matter of this book? Quite simply, the conclusion is that God is worthy of our praise. In fact, the refrain *“Praise the Lord!”* is more than just a refrain. It is an imperative. It is a command. It is our fitting response to God. It reminds me of the Westminster Confession of faith that sums up all of life with that life shaping question, *“What is the chief end of man?”* The answer is what we read in Psalms 146-150. It is to *“glorify God and enjoy him forever.”* This is the summary and meaning of life. At the end of the day, the concluding matter is, *“Praise the Lord!”*

Now notice, once this call to *“Praise the Lord!”* is given, the psalmist embraces it and he makes it his own. He personally responds to this call to worship God by saying to himself, *“Praise the Lord, O my soul!”* Then with resolve he says, *“I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.”* I like that phrase, *“as long as I live.”* There is a lot of life that happens in that statement *“as long as I live.”* This book of Psalms picks up on the reality that life is not always easy in the *“as long as I live.”* Through this series, we saw that a third of the psalms are prayers of lament. At times the *“as long as I live”* includes honest cries of the heart, wondering where God is within the unfolding of life. Those hard times are part of the *“as long as I live.”* In fact, these concluding psalms kind of have the feel of coming to the end of life and someone looking back on the ups and downs, the good times and hard times, and yet concluding through it all, God is worthy of our praise. Just as the book moves from lament to praise, so do the lives of the faithful. It moves from lament to praise. Therefore, *“as long as I live . . . while I have my being . . . I will praise the Lord!”*

When I first read verses 1-2, I looked at it through the lens of this life. *“As long as I live”* in this life, and *“while I have my being”* in this life, *“I will praise the Lord.”* But, really, how long will I live and how long will I have my being? Psalm 23 assures me of the hope that *“I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”* In Psalm 27:4, David longs for that day when he will *“dwell in the house of the LORD.”* In fact, it is his greatest passion and desire in life, because then, he says he will *“gaze upon the beauty of the LORD.”* And so

this command to *praise the Lord* transcends this time and space. This will be our joy forever because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Isaac Watts wrote a hymn based on Psalm 146. The first stanza goes like this: "I'll praise my Maker while I've breath; and when my voice is lost in death, Praise shall employ my nobler powers. My days of praise shall never be past. While life, and thought, and being last, or immortality endures." "*As long as I live . . . while I have my breath . . . for all of eternity, I will praise the Lord!*" The psalms are prayers to help me walk by faith and to put my hope in the promises of God. But there is coming a day when our faith shall be sight and our hope realized and we will join that heavenly chorus that joyfully sings, "*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.*" In other words, for all of eternity our joy will be this refrain, "*Praise the Lord!*"

But this is a choice you need to make now. This is a choice you need to make today. Just like the psalmist personally responded to the command to "*Praise the Lord*" you need to say to yourself, "*Praise the Lord, O my soul!*" Over and over again in the Psalms, we find this choice being presented to us. Are you going to trust God or put your trust in something else? In verses 3-4, the something else is human rulers or governing officials. "*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.*" At the end of the day, governments and leaders will come and go. But you can also fill in the blank with other things as well. Psalm 17 talks about "*men of the world whose portion is in this life.*" That could be trusting in yourself, in comfort, in money, in status, in family, the next weekend, the next vacation, a better body . . . none of these things last. They are gifts that can be enjoyed. But they all come with an expiration date.

Instead, we are encouraged in verse 5 to choose God. "*Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.*" It is this very choice that is presented to us in the introduction to the book of Psalms, Psalm 1 and 2. "*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or sit in the seat of mockers, or stand in the way of sinners, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.*" Or as Psalm 2 concludes, "*Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*" So at the beginning of the book of Psalms, this way of life is offered and we need to choose God.

The refrain "*Praise the Lord!*" is more than just a saying we utter when things work out. "Hey we got good weather for the picnic! Well, Praise the Lord!" Or as we hear the stories today from our baptism candidates we may respond with an appropriate "Praise the Lord!" But this phrase is more than just an acknowledgment of God. It is also more than a song we sing. When we are called to "*Praise the Lord!*" we are being called to a way of life. Psalm 112 begins the same way the last five psalms begin. It begins with

“Praise the Lord!” But then listen to what it says next. *“Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments.”* In other words, it is a phrase that reflects a tone of life. It reflects a choice to follow God. It is not just a phrase. It is not just a song. It is a way of life. *“As long as I live . . . while I have by breath . . . I want my life to be an act of praise to God.*

In a few moments, our baptismal candidates are going to stand before you and by sharing their faith stories with you, they are basically saying to you, *“Praise the Lord!”* They are giving testimony to this church family that “as long as they live . . . while they have their being, they want to follow Jesus. That is what it means to say *“Praise the Lord!”* It means that you want to center your life around Jesus as you live for God.

The rest of Psalm 146 tells us why we would want to build our lives around God. It tells us why we would say, *“As long as I live . . . while I have my breath . . . Praise the Lord!”* There are four reasons given in this psalm explaining why we would order our lives around God. Here is what I like about these four reasons to praise God with our lives. They don’t focus on what God does, as great as that is. Rather, they draw our focus to who God is. They remind us that there is nothing in life that is of greater worth than God. Paul says it this way in Philippians 3, *“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”* In other words, God is worthy of our praise. Why?

God is the Creator

First of all, we discover that God is worthy of our praise because he is the Creator. In verse 6 it says of God, *“who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them.”* Psalm 19:1-2 says *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”* In other words, through what God has made, God is speaking to us. When you look at creation it is speaking back to you that there is a Creator. Romans 1 tells us when we consider creation it ought to be plain to us that there is “Someone” who made it and that this “Someone” is powerful. In fact, the expectation of Romans 1 is that this knowledge that should be *clearly perceived* should lead us to “honor this “Someone” as God and give thanks to him.” In other words, when we take in creation, it should lead us to say *“Praise the Lord!”*

Did you get a good look at the solar eclipse this past week? The path of the eclipse went from Oregon down to South Carolina. Of course, people traveled to spots along the way, just to get a glimpse of this rare phenomenon. The pictures were rather

spectacular. Do you know what fascinates me about this eclipse? The last time it happened was February 26, 1979. When it happened back then, it was announced that the next time this will happen is on August 21, 2017. Then we were told that if you missed it this year, you can see it again in seven years, on April 8, 2024. Only this time, it will pass a little closer to home, crossing parts of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. It is amazing to me that the earth and the moon are in constant motion as the earth rotates and the moon orbits around the earth. The fact that we can pinpoint when and where the moon will move between the sun and the earth next speaks to the amazing order of the universe. How does such precision happen by chance? The solar eclipse declares the glory of God. It pours forth speech that tells us that there is a God.

But creation doesn't just tell us that there is a God. When we proclaim that God is the Creator, we are saying that God is the starting point for understanding life and for understanding yourself. John Calvin said it this way, "without the knowledge of God, there is no knowledge of self." You can't understand who you are or how to live life if God is not the reference point for life. During the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant flipped Calvin's statement by saying, "There is no knowledge of God except through the knowledge of the self." That is a significant flip and it explains why our faith clashes with our culture. It all has to do with your starting point. If you are going to say for yourself what Psalm 146 says, "*as long as I live . . . while I have my being . . . I will praise the Lord!*", then God needs to be the starting point of your life. That is what God is if God is the Creator of all things.

God Keeps Promise

The second thing we learn about God is that God is faithful and he keeps his covenant promises. There is a little statement at the end of verse 6 that could be easily glossed over, but it is a great statement. Here it says of God, "*who keeps faith forever.*" As you read the story of the Bible, you discover that God is the one who moves towards us. He does so through a series of covenants. For example, God makes covenant with Abraham to bless the world through his descendants. He promises David that he would have a son who would sit on the throne of God forever and who would bring justice to this world. The Bible presents a series of covenants that present one plan of God by which God will bring his salvation to this broken world and this plan culminates in the coming of Jesus, the Son of God. It is the promise of God that was first given back in Genesis 3:15 where God said that the seed of the woman would one day crush the head of the serpent. God keeps his promise, he keeps faith and through Jesus he saves us.

At the beginning of this series, I encouraged you to read through the psalms. If you read

five psalms a day, you can read through the entire book in a month. So I did it in July and I am doing it again in August. One of my great discoveries in the Psalms these past two months is how often the “*steadfast love of the LORD*” is mentioned. I wrote about it in my blog this week. It is the fuel for our worship. Psalm 136 begins with “*Give thanks to the LORD for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.*” In fact, that is the first three verses of Psalm 136. This refrain is repeated three times, as if it is too good to be true. God’s love for us endures forever. Why? Because the steadfast love of God is rooted in the promise of God. He made covenant. He is faithful.

One of my favorite things about baptism is rooted in this thought. Baptism is a seal of God’s promise to us. Sure, each candidate will stand before you this morning and swear their allegiance to Jesus and their desire to follow Jesus. But we know what that journey is like. It has ups and downs. At times we are hot in our faith and at times we are cold in our faith and at times we are even lukewarm in our faith. But the water of baptism, and the bread and cup of communion, are signs and seals of God’s promise to us, that if we come to Jesus by faith, God promises to forgive us of our sin. This is why we say, “*Praise the Lord!*” God keeps his promise. Paul assures us in 2 Timothy 2:13, “*If we are faithless, he remains faithful.*” “*Praise the Lord!*”

God Saves the Weak

The third reason God is worthy of praise is because he is the God who saves. Who does he save? He saves the weak who turn to Jesus in faith. In verses 7-9 he says of God, “*who executes justice for the oppressed, who 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 sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*” Mike reminded us last week through Psalm 107 that whether you are wandering aimlessly through life, or dealing with the consequence of sin, afflicted with illness or overwhelmed with circumstances, if “*you cry out to the LORD in your trouble he will deliver you.*” It doesn’t mean that you live problem free. But God sustains you and meets you and provides for you. And most of all, God forgives you and fills you with his peace. And when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we know that God will deliver us because Jesus defeated sin and death at the cross.

It is amazing what God requires of us. He simply requires us to recognize that we are needy. He requires us to acknowledge our sin and turn in faith to Jesus. Who are the weak? You are the weak. I am the weak. Psalm 62:9 says it well. “*Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion.*” In other words, if you think you are

something, you are just fooling yourself. In fact, the psalm says two times that it is for God alone that we wait and God only is our rock and our salvation. So, whoever turns to him in humble repentance of their sin and trusting in the work of Jesus on the cross, God will save them from their sin. For this we say *"Praise the Lord!"*

The Lord Reigns!

The final reason we say with our lives, *"Praise the Lord!"* is because Jesus reigns over all things. In verse 10 we read, *"The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations."* In the previous psalm, Psalm 145:13 we discover that the kingdom of God is the reign and dominion of God. As I read through the psalms, I was struck by how often the reign of God was the source for the worship and praise of God. For example, Psalm 97:1 begins by saying, *"The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad."*

This ultimately points us to Jesus, who came announcing the coming kingdom of God. Through Jesus, God is bringing heaven to earth. Right now, he is doing that through his church. Colossians tells us that we have been delivered from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of the beloved Son in whom we have the redemption of our sins. But there is coming a day when God's kingdom will be established in full. Revelation 11:15 speaks of this day when it says, *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."* In fact, it is because God reigns that we can be sure that all the promises of God will come true. And so, we say now, *"Praise the Lord!"*

Conclusion

"Praise the Lord!" We come to the end of the psalm, and once again we are called to *"Praise the Lord!"* Is that the cry of your life today? The *ESV Devotional Psalter* says of this psalm, "When perfect power meets perfect compassion you are free to fall into the arms of the Lord in quiet trust." He is the Creator! He is faithful! He saves! He reigns! Therefore, *"as long as I live . . . while I have my being . . . I will praise the Lord!"*

This is the testimony of those being baptized this morning. This is the testimony of many here this morning. Have you made this your testimony? In Jesus the Son of God, God has triumphed over sin and death and hell with utter triumph and power, and at the same time the sheer steadfast love of God is poured out from heaven's heart to all who turn in faith to Jesus. Therefore, *"as long as I live . . . while I have my being . . . I will praise the Lord!"*