

Hallelujah in Memphis!

In our text for today the psalmist rehearses the main reason for our existence, namely, that we praise the Lord.

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!

The psalmist begins and ends his psalm with one Hebrew word, “hallelujah,” which means, “praise the Lord.” This is also found in the next four psalms. The psalter ends with this emphasis upon our praise. When we praise the Lord as we ought, we regain our sanity, we become the human beings we were made to be. Jesus teaches us that the Father is seeking worshippers (John 4:23) and Paul teaches us that the first consequence of being filled with the Spirit is that we sing praise to His name (Ephesians 5:18-20).

In the psalm, we are shown the primary impediment to our worship: that we often trust in creatures rather than the Creator. The psalmist warns against putting our trust in even the most prominent of those human beings, the “princes” of the world, in order that we might give ultimate praise to God alone. These princes of the world can neither save themselves nor us, thus we will turn from them and their plans to the Lord Himself and His plans for us.

We worship the Lord for several reasons that the psalmist gives us: He blesses those who hope in Him (vs. 5); He made the heavens and the earth and the sea (vs. 6); He keeps His word (vs. 6); and He will continue His reign forever (vs. 10).

But the main reason the psalmist gives that we ought to praise the Lord is because of His unspeakably glorious compassion. In verses 7-9 the psalmist mentions 10 categories of human beings, and God relates to each of them uniquely. Nine out of the 10 categories are descriptions of God's people at various times. We are oppressed, hungry, imprisoned, blind, bowed down, righteous, sojourners, widows, and orphans. God in His compassion has protected and provided for each of us regardless of our circumstances. He calls upon us, therefore, to go into the world to minister to these same oppressed peoples because in ministering to these folks we display the character of God, which then inspires the peoples of the earth to give praise to Jahweh, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian faith grew exponentially in the early decades and centuries of our history precisely because we were ministering to the vulnerable of the earth—the very folks that the princes of the earth were ignoring and marginalizing. We must continue to do the same.

Why do we do this? Simply because we were the oppressed, the poor, the blind, and the imprisoned. We were the orphans and the sojourners, and God delivered us.

How did He deliver us? By sending His own son, Jesus Christ, to take on human flesh and to minister to us in our vulnerability. When John the Baptist asked if He was the one to come or whether he and the others should look for another, Jesus answered, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me” (Luke 7:22-23).

Discussion Questions

1. From Psalm 146 describe how the Christian's worship is connected to his/her ministry to vulnerable people.
2. What keeps us from praising the Lord as we ought?
3. What reasons does the psalmist give for why we should praise the Lord?
4. Describe the relationship between the proclamation and the demonstration of the Gospel in our mission work.
5. What happens to a Christian that makes him/her more eager to serve vulnerable people?

Going Deeper

1. How do you plan to connect to and serve the most vulnerable people in Memphis this next year?
2. What are the greatest hindrances in your life to serving the poor in Memphis?