

Friday 9/7

Read: Psalm 146:7-9

Examine: Permanence and power alone are not the grounds for trust. Trust is also founded on character, so the LORD's character is epitomized in a phrase: "the Lord who remains faithful forever" (v 6c). Verses 6-7 then outline the LORD's character by reciting the characteristic activities by which the LORD "keeps faith" by being a "help" for the oppressed, the hungry, prisoners, and so on. The terms are used for both physical and spiritual need (for instance, the use of hunger and blindness for the condition of the exiles in Isa 40-55). Blessed is he whose "help" and "hope" is in the God of Jacob!

Apply: In the list of groups in need, the categories of the "righteous" and "wicked" may seem out of place. Their inclusions an illustration of the way the righteous and the wicked are thought about in the psalms. The pair is viewed more in salvific than in strictly moral terms. If the LORD did not vindicate the righteous and frustrate the wicked, He would not be keeping the faith. In a world where right and wrong have no meaningful place in the order of the universe, nothing at all could be trusted (Cf. Psalms 145:20, 139:19, 104:35).

Pray: Pray that the Holy Spirit would impart to us God's character, a heart for helping our fellow man and thirst for righteousness, a sense for right and wrong in a world that seeks only pleasure and gain.

Saturday 9/8

Read: Psalm 146:1-10

Examine: Why should Israel put their trust in the LORD and not human rulers? Because our all-powerful, eternal God is always and forever faithful. One of the chief characteristics used throughout the Old Testament to describe Israel's God is *hesed*, which can be variously translated as "loving-kindness" or "covenantal faithfulness." It is the eternal loving-kindness and faithfulness of Israel's God that was the foundation for the covenant. The covenantal nature of Israel's faith looked forward to its ultimate fulfillment in the promised Messiah, one that would feed the hungry, give sight to the blind, and free the oppressed (Luke 4:18).

Apply: In Christ Jesus we have the ultimate fulfillment of God's faithfulness to His promises, the fulfillment of the covenant to His people. In what is your faith and trust founded? While the temptation to put ultimate trust for salvation in human leaders and institutions is perennial, Christians can sometimes be prone to put their faith and trust in their own faith: we have faith in our faith! Yet our faith is so often fleeting and weak. But it's not the strength of our faith that matters, but the all-powerful, everlasting, and righteous faithfulness of the One in whom we have faith. The psalms we've studied this summer were written to be sung lessons. Those who sing and hear and read them will be taught as they praise. One of the things they have taught us is that even as we lament with the psalmist, honestly exposing our weak faith doubts in a world so often set against us, we can praise our LORD and Savior for His faithfulness, for He will never let go of His chosen!

Pray: Use the psalms we've studied this summer as a training manual for prayer. Don't be afraid to lay your doubts, lack of faith, fears, and even frustrations with God at the foot of the throne. Do this in confidence that God will hear you, and be a sure "help" and "hope" for all those who ask. It is for this reason He is worthy of our praise.



Taking Gathered Worship Home

Family and Individual Devotions

Meditations in the Psalms

Week of September 2, 2007

The last Psalm we will look at in this summer series will be Psalm 146. The last five Psalms (146-150) are usually referred to as the "Hallelujah Psalms" because of their opening and closing verses. The word "hallelujah" is from the Hebrew words *hallel* and *yah*, which is short for "Praise Yahweh." The Psalm calls us to praise the LORD all our life, and that call brackets the entire Psalm. Why should we praise our LORD God? Because, unlike earthly rulers, He can be trusted (vv 3,4). Why can He be trusted? First He is all powerful, the Creator and sustainer of all that exists (v6). Second, His reign will never end; He will always be there for us (v 6, 10). Third, His character is righteous, loving, and faithful (vv. 7-9). We will examine all these themes this week as we explore this hymn of praise.

Sunday 9/2

Read: Psalm 146:1

Examine: While Psalm 146 starts as an individual hymn of praise, it goes on to show its corporate nature. The psalmist invokes his own soul to sing the praises of his God; sort of carrying on a public dialogue with himself. By encouraging himself to praise, he also motivates others around him and teaches them about the character of his God and the reason for praising Him. It's not to any "god" that he sings his praise, but specifically to the "God of Jacob," the LORD God of the Bible. Worship is not just an individual exercise, but is foremost corporate exercise that not only strengthens and encourages the faithful, but is a witness to the God we worship to those around us. Our works and our worship cannot be hid under a bushel.

Apply: The Westminster Larger Catechism speaks of the outgoing nature of praise and worship in prayer in discussing the first petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Acknowledging the utter inability and indisposition that is in ourselves and all men to honor God aright, we pray, that God would by his grace enable and incline us and others to know, to acknowledge, and highly to esteem him, his titles, attributes, ordinances, word, works, and whatsoever he is pleased to make himself known by; and to glorify him in thought, word, and deed; that he would prevent and remove atheism, ignorance, idolatry, profaneness, and whatsoever is dishonorable to him; and, by his overruling providence, direct and dispose of all things to his own glory." (WLC Q190)

Pray: Pray that through your worship and prayers you would be an open witness to those around you, teaching them about the one true God, His character and grace, that God's Spirit may work in them to honor and praise Him as well.

Monday 9/3

Read: Psalm 146:1-2

Examine: The psalmist invokes his "soul" to praise the LORD. This should not be interpreted as some form of "spiritual inner man" as opposed to his fleshly body. The Old Testament has no room for such dichotomies (which owe more to Greek and Enlightenment philosophies than Christian biblical theology). The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh* is a very rich word referring to the whole person and self, the unity of flesh, life, and will; it refers to the personal desires and dispositions in all of our physical, emotional, and spiritual life. It is everything about me in this life, for as long as I have life.

Apply: Our modern society wants us to confine our religion and worship to something that is merely personal and internal; it should have no corporate or political impact. Yet Biblical worship is a call for all of our life, in our internal personal life, in our external bodily life, in our corporate life in the church and in the world to be one of worship and praise. It's not just our inner "soul" that is called by God (if there were such a way to separate that from all else), but all of us. All we do in life, thinking, meditating, eating, exercising, conversing, suffering, rejoicing, deciding, laboring, etc. is called by God for His purposes and for His unique praise.

Pray: Pray that you would praise and worship God in all that you do this week, and that all you are and do would be a visible "hallelujah" to the world around.

Tuesday 9/4

Read: Psalm 146:3-4

Examine: We don't really know who the psalmist actually was, but tradition still maintains it was King David. This would make these verses ever so poignant as Israel's greatest Prince tells them not to put their trust in princes! The problem with human leaders is that they don't "keep faith forever;" they are untrustworthy. Mere mortal men have no power over the forces that are arrayed against this world. Man is both captive to sin and death, and despite the greatest of plans and projects for the "good" of mankind, sin will ultimately corrupt and death ultimately cut short any such goal of "self salvation." Our salvation and only hope must come from the LORD.

Apply: The psalm does not say that leaders are unnecessary or not useful. It does warn against putting our full trust in them, especially for salvation and deliverance from all the evils of this world. While Christians are called to be actively involved in the politics and policies of our country, we can easily become confused about where our true hope and power lies. It will not come from electing even "godly" men to office or passing laws that honor God's will and law (as important as these may be). Misplaced faith in these worthwhile activities can lead to disappointment and failure. Man's salvation will not come from government; man cannot save himself (neither through politics, science, or philanthropy). But this psalm gives us both warning and encouragement, as well as boldness without disappointment, even as we are called to work in and through the means God has ordained to govern and keep our temporary earthly home.

Pray: Pray for our governing officials, that God would give them strength and wisdom and encour-

agement. Pray especially that all would recognize that we are ultimately powerless against the powers of sin and death that truly govern this world, and that we need to look to our Creator God for the true hope of this world.

Wednesday 9/5

Read: Psalm 146:5-6

Examine: In contrast to earthly princes, the God of Jacob and Zion is not a leader whose tenure is temporary nor is He impotent against the true forces that control the world. This is our King who is worthy of our full trust and praise. The psalmist gives us the first reason: He is the maker of "heaven and earth." This is shorthand for, well, "everything!" He goes on to make a point of including "the sea, and everything in them." This is not just a reminder to remember the wonderful Maine lobster and scallops, but is symbolic of the "chaos" and "depths" the sea represents. Even the evils, chaos, despair, and unrighteousness that exists in the world is under the ultimate rule of our Creator LORD, the One who has the power over all things, visible and invisible, because He made all things!

Apply: The doctrine of creation is under attack from all quarters of our society and culture. Random blind chance is the only "force" (which is actually no "force" or power at all) that is claimed to be responsible for the world's existence and control. Man is ultimately "alone" in the universe and is responsible for his own well being and salvation. But how powerless and futile all our endeavors are destined to be under this grand delusion. How fearful even the rustling of the leaves can be under this worldview. But Calvin wrote, "If we reflect that God is the Maker of heaven and earth, we will reasonably give him the honor of having the government of the world which he created in his hands and power. There is in this first ascription, then, a commendation of his power, which should swallow up all our fears."

Pray: Praise God for His creation and the confidence and faith to know that all things are under His rule, and all things are ultimately working together for the good for those who fear Him.

Thursday 9/6

Read: Psalm 146:10

Examine: Not only is our LORD all powerful, He is eternal. So often the plans of Israel's leaders were cut short by death, invasion, or usurpation. No so with Israel's God. This can be as frightening as it is comforting. For the unrighteous, God's never ending presence secures their ultimate fate. Ultimately, all unrighteousness will come under judgment and curse. For the unrighteous, there will never be a time when God will be absent from His people.

Apply: Eternity is a concept that is as mysterious as it is incomprehensible. Yet man is destined for eternal purpose. From a secular world view, death brings an end to personal time, and science tells us that our world will soon run down and cease to exist. Yet our eternal creator God, who has conquered death and rules the cosmos, has promised to deliver us from this mortal existence to live with Him as sons and co-heirs with Christ in eternal praise. Earthly rulers come and go, and thankfully so in the majority of cases. But our LORD rules forever, and hope attached to his reign is founded on a reality that does not pass away.

Pray: Thank God for His eternal presence and promise never to be away from His people.