

August 7, 2022

“Praise for God’s Justice”
Lesson 1 of Unit

Psalm 146

Intro

Every decent and honorable person wants justice to be done in this world, both for themselves and for others. Unfortunately, not everyone gets justice in this world. Perfect justice comes only from the One person able to give it—God Almighty.

The Psalms can be split up into sections which have specific themes and ideas. The fifth and final section deals with the remnant from the Babylonian captivity praying for justice from God, the only One who can give perfect justice to them.

Today’s text is an individual hymn of praise for God’s justice. The last five psalms (146-150) deal with praise for God’s justice, this one specifically about justice for the downtrodden emotionally, spiritually, and in other ways as well.

Read Psalm 146

1. vs. 1: The psalm begins and ends with “Praise the LORD”

This phrase is a translation of the Hebrew word “Hallelujah”

Note that the psalmist first encourages others to praise, then does so himself

“Praise the LORD, O my soul.”

We are all to be priests (leaders) in our worship of God

If we lead, perhaps we are encouraging others to join us

The word “LORD” is actually written in smaller capital letters after the “L”

This indicated God’s name, “Yahweh”

This word “LORD”, God’s name, is used 9 times in this 10-verse psalm

We could say 11, as “Yah” at the end of “Hallelujah” is a short form

We are being called on / encouraged to worship a very personal God

2. vs. 2: This verse is a good example of Hebrew parallelism

This means ideas are repeated using slightly different words

First Line

“I will praise”

“the LORD”

“all my life”

Second Line

“I will sing praise”

“to my God”

“as long as I live”

This verse refers to a lifetime commitment to praise God

3. vs. 3: This verse is using a negative example of what not to do, before giving the thing to do

Don’t trust in princes (kings or other nobles)

Don’t trust in mortal men

Earthly leaders are just humans—they aren’t perfect and will make errors

4. vs. 4: These mortal men are going to die, like all humanity: “they return to the ground”
And what happens to all that they did while ruling?
“their plans come to nothing”
They may have done good things on Earth, like King Josiah did (2 Kings 22-23)
But when they die, all their good stops, and frequently gets undone (2 Kings 23-24)
5. vs. 5: Here is now the positive example following the negative one
God is the one who people are called to turn to for help, not man
The one who does so is called “Blessed”
Choosing to get help from “The God of Jacob” is the right one to put one’s trust in
6. vs. 6: This verse tells of some of God’s attributes / character
He is the Creator, “the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them...”
He is also faithful, says the second half of the verse
Put together, these two ideas tell us a lot about God and His justice
The Creator naturally cares for and protects what He has created
He also “remains faithful forever”—
The word translated “faithful” literally means “truth”
God is always true to His character / nature
He will always do what is right for us
7. vs. 7: Here, God watches out for and cares for the oppressed
To be oppressed means to suffer “unjust or cruel abuse of power or authority” by another
God takes up the cause for those who are being mistreated by those in power
It could be that the oppressed are poor or in need
God says he will feed them; He meets the needs of those needy that turn to Him
It could be that the oppressed are suffering bondage of some kind
The Israelites in Egypt
Those who have sold themselves into slavery to pay a debt or simply survive
God says He “sets the prisoners free”
This happened in the Jubilee; people weren’t kept in slavery forever
This also happens to a person who is released from the prison of sin
Is. 61:1 says the Messiah comes to “proclaim freedom for the captives and
release from darkness for the prisoners”
8. vs. 8: Another way the Lord shows His kindness/justice to us when we are in need
He gives sight to the blind
Jesus performed many miracles of this kind, giving sight to blind men
Being blind means not being able to see
The application is those in spiritual darkness, who cannot see where to go
Every Christian has “had his eyes opened” spiritually, to see and understand
We must ask Him to “open our eyes”; He won’t do that unless we want it
He lifts up “those who are bowed down”
This could be physically, but more likely in mind or spirit or heart
Ps. 145:14 (just before our text) says God “lifts up all who are bowed down”
Those who are bowed down spiritually, God Himself will help to get up

He loves the righteous

This may seem different from the previous two, but it's not

Part of knowing righteousness is knowing what unrighteousness is

We know we aren't righteous, apart from Christ

Prov. 15:9 says God loves the one who pursues righteousness

Our desire to follow Him pleases Him

Also, righteousness and justice and synonyms in many Bible passages

See Ps. 9:8, 37:6, and 72:2 as examples

9. vs. 9: God here takes care of two groups, and brings justice to another

First, God watches out for the alien

This is a group that likely is also being referred to in vs. 7 about the oppressed

The terms "stranger" and "foreigner" are also used about this group

Even though they don't have inherited rights or land, God watches over them

He did this with both Abraham and Moses

Israel is not to oppress this group, since they themselves were aliens in Egypt

Aliens are to be treated like the poor

Lev. 19:10 commands leaving some of the reapings for the alien/stranger

Christians are also referred to as "aliens and strangers"

See I Peter 1:1 and 1 Peter 2:11)

God will also take care of us, like He does with aliens in OT times

Second, God watches over the fatherless and the widow

These two vulnerable groups are also in the "oppressed" category

The verse says He "sustains" these groups

Synonyms for "sustains" are "relieves" or "restores"

God will relieve their oppression, and restore to them what they need

God gave many strict laws and serious warnings about abusing widows/orphans

See Ex. 22:22-24 and Deut. 27:19

Prophets sought to help them, Jesus referred to their abuse, the early church paid attention to their needs.

God is concerned for them, and often works through His people to protect them

Third, God "frustrates the ways of the wicked"

When these wicked work against His righteous / helpless ones, God intervenes

Note that the righteous have died as well

God sometimes allows bad things to happen to achieve a greater purpose

We are called to be faithful to Him even if bad things happen

10. vs. 10: The kings and the people of Israel are reminded of an important truth

God reigns forever

Kings and people in power don't reign forever; they will die

If they have done injustice in their reigns, those injustices will cease

The reminder here for us is that even when things are going wrong around us, God reigns

His reign is just and of equity

Application: Human leaders, even if their intentions are ones of trying to do the best, cannot give us complete justice. Human leaders deal with human institutions, and those leaders are themselves subject to the flaws of humanity. They can't do what God alone can do. He alone is perfect, and therefore perfectly just. One day all injustice will be judged, and God's true justice will replace injustice forever. We are called to place our faith, our hope, in God alone to deliver justice to us, and to remain faithful to Him until that time.

Prayer: Father God, we put our trust in You and not in man. We pray for justice for the oppressed, and we pray for the strength to be your agents who provide that justice. Overturn the plans of the wicked, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.