

Psalm 146: A song to sing into the future

The final five psalms of the Bible's songbook share a recurring lyric: praise the LORD. Each of these psalms begins and ends with this phrase, inviting everyone to join in a noisy chorus of worship to the living God

Yet each psalm brings its own unique angle to this symphony of praise.

In Psalm 146, it is trust and confidence in the living God. The psalmist calls us to prioritise God over any other place where we might look for help. He alone is trustworthy. In many ways, the underlying refrain of Psalm 146 is: "Praise the LORD... because why would you offer your loyalty to anyone else?"

The Psalm starts by saying: The LORD God is more worthy of devotion and trust than the best human leaders.

The people of ancient Israel were familiar with impressive leaders. The Middle East was no less volatile than it is today. Cities and lands were constantly conquered and re-conquered as various nations rose to power. From the Pharaohs of Egypt to the kings of Assyria, a range of powerful rulers dominated the known world.

Their empires continually threatened Israel, who were a considerably weaker nation. During moments of fear, the people of Israel were tempted to ally themselves with these nations to secure their own future.

But the psalmist is clear: don't put your trust in these princes, however great they appear. Don't let their apparent power deceive you: they are mortal human beings, just like you. They rise and fall. However powerful they might be, each of them will eventually return to the ground. On that day 'their plans come to nothing'.

But, by contrast, God's rule will never end. The living God remains forever.

He is 'the Maker of heaven and earth' – the mighty God who made and sustains *everything*. And since the *Maker* can't die like human beings, His good plans are never frustrated or cut short. Verses 6 and 10 both emphasise it – the LORD remains faithful *for ever*, He reigns *for ever*, for all generations.

Can you hear the psalmist's cry? 'People of Israel, if you place your hope in human leaders – however mighty – you will one day be disappointed. Even the best of them will die.'

'But you have a God whose rule will never run out. He won't disappear one day. He will never leave you. He is able to protect you to the very end.'

'So', sings the psalmist, 'praise the LORD! Praise Him – because in Him you have a confidence no-one else can have. Your God reigns for all generations.'

But the psalmist goes on – because the LORD's rule is not only eternal. It is also *good*.

Verses 7-9 emphasise how the LORD's reign is good news – especially for the most vulnerable. 'He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.' The LORD liberates and heals, restores and loves, he carefully watches and does justice. He loves what is right; he opposes what is wrong.

These are the hallmarks of God's reign.

Again, the psalmist is reminding His people how the LORD surpasses every other ruler.

The pharaohs of Egypt were proud; the kings of Assyria were harsh. Even the best human leaders have flaws and make errors – they damage their people.

But the LORD is always and eternally good.

And so, says the psalmist, 'praise the LORD. Israel, your God is the ruler you long for! He is committed to your good. Why would you look anywhere else?'

And why would we?

Part of the reason is our nagging doubts. We ask – is God really like this? Sometimes the reality of our lives can cause us to question his goodness.

But centuries after this psalm was written, Jesus came announcing the beginning of a new kingdom: the kingdom of God. And when you discover what Jesus did, you realise that verses 7-9 read like a mini-biography.

Jesus fed the hungry, he gave sight to the blind, he provided for the destitute. As Jesus went around acting and speaking as if he were God, he gave us a vision of a kingdom unlike any other – a glimpse of the world we all want.

Except, then he died. Jesus seemed like every other leader, stopped in his tracks by death.

And yet.

For every other leader, death was a mark of defeat. But for Jesus, his death was His greatest victory. Jesus' death was the *fulfilment* of God's plan.

Because *this* was God's great plan to bring us into his good kingdom. Jesus died in our place. Then he rose again as conqueror – a king that even death cannot stop.

And today he rules – not as the ruler of a single nation. But he is building a kingdom of people from every nation – inviting anyone in who will trust Him as King.

And because he has conquered death and is alive today, Jesus the King protects his people. He protects his people now – he doesn't promise a pain-free life, but his people

have countless stories of him bringing healing and restoration, justice and provision. And he will ultimately protect his people forever – when they die, they will be eternally safe with him.

So we're able to join in this song with even more confidence than those who sang it long ago.

As the academic year closes, we're about to head in different directions – some of us to life beyond graduation. It's easy to feel vulnerable and exposed.

But on the throne of the universe is a King of everlasting goodness. His power is uncompromised, his reign is kind. Wherever we may turn, we face the future knowing He guides us and guards us.

And his care will never stop. On the day we face the greatest enemy of all, our story will continue, through death into life forever.

So praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! Speak to your own soul and direct its focus to the living God.

Because now – as ever – why would you place your hope anywhere else?