

April 8, 2009

Psalm 146 (ESV)

Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.
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.
Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
Whose hope is in the LORD his God,
Who made heaven and earth,
The sea, and all that is in them,
Who keeps faith forever;
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.
The LORD will reign forever,
Your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the LORD!

Praise the Lord? Some don't believe that we have a praiseworthy God. A lot of people question the suffering of innocent children or the mass destruction that occurs through violent storms or even at the hands of violent people. It is easy, I suppose, to ask why God allows such things. Most of us have asked such questions, but I haven't found any clear answers. So when we look at a hazy picture of the world, we can either have faith that God is there in the details, or we can write Him off as nonexistent or something worse. I wish we were better at seeing things like this psalmist did; His focus is instructive.

He doesn't dismiss God because of the trouble around us; instead, he affirms and praises God because of the uncommon good that he sees in the world. Now, the bad does seem to be more prevalent than the good, but what possible explanation is there for selflessness and grace unless there is God? How does this psalmist know that an exalted God would stoop low enough to touch with the oppressed, the hungry, the incarcerated, the blind, the humbled, the aliens, the widows, and the fatherless? He can know that this claim is made in Scripture. But knowing of a claim and praising God for its truthfulness are two different things. I'm from Missouri—the Show-Me State, and I'm not likely to believe something until I see it.

Let's assume that this psalmist didn't actually see the Lord God huddling around dumpsters or loitering in impoverished and underprivileged places. What makes him think that God is doing these things? It must be because he saw these things being done by ordinary people in the name of the Lord!

When we help the righteous and all the others listed in this psalm, we are displaying the love, selflessness, and grace of God. When we stoop down and lift others up, we are proclaiming that God's faithfulness is certain and the days of this world's corruption are numbered. When we rub shoulders with the untouchables and share life with the marginalized in our society, is it not God who is working through us?

This is how God works. This is how God has always worked. Praise God that He uses our hands when we offer them to His service.

Patrick Barber