

“Put not your Trust in Princes” – Psalm 146
November 8, 2020 –PM Service
Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA
Pastor Nathaniel H. Gutiérrez

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!

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Let's pray together

Preserving Life

This past week I read that “Americans have bought nearly 17 million guns so far in 2020, more than in any other single year, according to estimates from a firearms analytics company.... By August, we had exceeded last year’s total. By September, we exceeded the highest total ever”.¹

Every human and every creature on earth seeks a way to defend and protect itself. Animals have instincts to run or fight when in danger. They find caves, nests high in the trees or burrow in tunnels deep underground.

In many similar ways, as humans we have a deep desire to protect and defend ourselves. When faced with fears of shortages, we stockpile supplies. If we experience theft or even a threat of theft or violence, we usually increase our security measures. We seek to protect and safeguard our lives.

And seeking to protect life and the lives of those around us is a godly response to danger. We are commanded not only *not to kill*; we are also inversely called *to promote and protect life* as the Westminster Larger Catechism 135 reminds us.

Seeking to preserve our lives and the lives of those we love and the generations to come is an important responsibility. We ought to take it seriously especially as God’s covenant people.

But like many things in our lives, sin finds ways of twisting and defiling God’s commands. While we are certainly called to safeguard our lives, this can quickly be taken to extreme levels of exaggeration and paranoia and eventually even become an idolatry. We react like the world and forget who we are in Christ. We can move from trusting in God to turning to the rulers of this world as our hope.

In Psalm 146 we can assume, from its exhortation *not to trust in princes*, that God’s people, desiring to safeguard themselves and their families, seemed to be setting their trust in tangible and visible rulers rather than waiting on God.

This of course was not the only occasion where Israel had placed their hope in a visible ruler. Among the many occasions spread throughout the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 8 stands out because in this section of Scripture, we read of the people of Israel asking for a king like the kings of the nations around them – thereby rejecting God as their King.

It appears that the Israelites had lost faith in God as their King. They had lost their sight of Zion of their heavenly home and their true King. And their lack of faith in the invisible God, took them to the place of abandoning God in order to secure their safety by trusting in the visible princes of this world.

Their desire for safety, protection and control of their circumstances moved them to seek their own protection without God. They made an idol of their visible rulers, placing their hope in them.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/29/coronavirus-pandemic-americans-gun-sales>
www.faihtacoma.org

This week, in our guys' high school discipleship group, we looked at Tim Keller's book on counterfeit gods. There, Keller explains that things in our lives move from a healthy place and into an idolatrous one when they move from being merely *good things* that we pursue, to becoming *ultimate things*. He explains that when we take something in this world and "build our entire life on it or around it," we make it ultimate. This is the definition of idolatry.

These are the things in our lives that when lost, they don't just cause us sorrow. These are the things, that when they are put at risk or when they are torn down, rather than feeling sorrowful about losing them, we might instead feel deep despair and bitterness. We become inconsolable because we have lost *something ultimate* that we have built our lives around. Something that was the ultimate source of our meaning or hope is lost, and it breaks us.² What causes you to despair? What makes you angry and bitter?

While we are called to give godly attention to our lives, and to do things excellently for the glory of God, we can easily turn an *important thing* into an *ultimate thing* faster than we realize.

Politics has turned into an ultimate thing

If we were to analyze this Psalm through this framework, it would not be difficult to identify that the people of God had turned something good – rulers and safety, their desire for a visible king – into something ultimate – an idol.

And if we were to analyze our lives through this framework, what would we find? What in our lives has become ultimate? What, when taken away, makes us bitter?

During the years of terrorism in Peru where we served as missionaries, a man named Alberto Fujimori was president. He served two, five-year terms from 1990-2000. When his limit was met, he tried to force his way into a third term only to have a corruption scandal break that revealed secretly filmed videos of his participation in matters of corruption, bribery, murder and kidnapping.

It was a significant blow for the people of Peru because Fujimori had overcome the Shining Path terrorist movement and done so much for the infrastructure of Peru. He was sentenced to jail, where he is now.

I remember speaking with a really godly Peruvian woman about the videos where you could see the president bribing someone and how it showed how he had been complicit in so many horrible atrocities. She refused to believe it and said, "No! I don't believe that. It isn't true. He is a good man. I would vote for him again!"

This woman wanted to view Fujimori a certain way, and she didn't want that to change. She refused to accept anything other than what she wanted because he had become ultimate in her mind.

If you have gotten caught up in this time of elections and have become passionate about the outcomes, in some ways it should not come as a surprise. In many ways this is probably rooted

² Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 10-11.
www.faithtacoma.org

in our heart's longing for justice and righteousness in our nation. Our desire to see change in this world is a good and godly desire. This world is deeply affected by sin and desperately needs change and hope. It needs the love of Jesus and the hope of the gospel

Our longing for God's kingdom to come and that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven is a good longing. It is a longing that God has given us!

And yet it is easy to see how Satan seeks to twist this godly desire into something it should not be.

We can think back to Genesis when Abraham and Sarah wanted children. This was a good and godly desire. But they, refusing to wait on the Lord, took charge of the situation and made a mess of their family by introducing Hagar. We see numerous other stories like this in the Old Testament.

We humans have our MO – our mode of operation – or our pattern. Our corrupted desires, seek to speed our longings by force. Rather than wait on God and in his timing and in his power, we are often tempted to put more pressure on the situation and help our rulers achieve the godly desires we want accomplished.

When we reach this point, we can see that *what began as a godly desire*, later turned into a full-blown *absolute demand*.

Our actions become less patient, godly, and Christlike. We demonize our opponents, we become enraged with contrary opinions, and we condemn people who contradict us. When “the opponent” appears on the TV or in a new article, our blood begins to boil, and we say or think things about the other side that we would be ashamed to utter in God's presence.

How quickly we elevate a godly and good thing into an absolute thing. How quickly we distort a good process into an idolatrous one.

As we look at our own election process, and the amount of finances poured into trying to control and secure the outcome, the levels of hatred and division that have risen out of it, it makes it clear that the USA and especially the church could benefit from a little more Psalm 146.

Our true hope cannot be in the candidates and in their positions of power.

As Charles Spurgeon explained, men are not to be hoped in, no not even one. He says, “Adam fell, so why would we lean on his sons? Man is a helpless creature without God; ...Man who comes from the earth returns to the earth...this is a poor creature to trust in: a dying creature, a corrupting creature. Those hopes will surely fall to the ground....”³

This psalm calls God's people to embrace their longing for God's will to be done. BUT it calls for us to long for this in biblical ways. To hope for it by hoping in the eternal God, not in the helpless and sinful, dying, and corrupting creatures who will return to the earth.

³ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Classic Reflections on the Wisdom of the Psalms* (Book 3), 401.
www.faihtacoma.org

Let's be careful not to be like this woman in Peru. So blinded by our passions...that we make politics or candidates or other idolatrous things in our life counterfeit gods.

We cannot be blind to the reality that our rulers are fallen men just like us. Our hope for this world is not in them. They will fail us over and over again. Our hope is not in them. It must be in God.

Maybe some of you don't think much about politics. Maybe you see this as a sermon for someone else, and you are not really sure what to do with this sermon. Or perhaps you want to forget about the election altogether and not think about it. But I would encourage you not to check out. In many ways, we all have things that we trust in or hope in, just like princes or politics. There are other things in our lives that are good things that have become *absolute*.

Parenting

Let me give you an example in parenting, for instance. Anyone who has been around a new parent or has been a new parent knows that this is one of those areas where we can take good things too far. While it is true that babies need diapers, car seats, strollers, cribs, clothes and food, it is also true that a new parent sometimes goes overboard trying to make sure they do everything well, or perhaps better said, perfectly.

At the birth of our firstborn son, we looked for the best car seats, the best cribs, strollers, toys, clothes, diaper genies. Yes, a diaper genie. We read books, we read blogs, we asked advice, we were terrified. What if we messed up our kid?! We don't know what we are doing!!! After all, we had two parakeets that we weren't able to keep alive!

Parenting of a newborn or a high school student, is one of those areas where you can easily turn obsessive and make your desire to have a good kid, turn into an ***absolute idol***. It starts as a good desire, but when we pursue it without God, we end up trusting in ourselves (instead of princes) to accomplish our ultimate goal. While we don't trust in princes, we trust in ourselves.

While different, it is clear that God does not want us putting our trust in ourselves or anyone but him for parenting our kids. We are fallen human beings. I find that many people have the same concerns I do. They wonder if they are going to mess up in parenting their kids, or handle things incorrectly. I always tell them YES! You definitely will mess up. But thankfully, we don't trust in man or ourselves ultimately. Our trust is in the Lord!

Have you turned something good in your life into *something ultimate*? Is there something *you try to control* in life? Your finances, your health, your business, your academics, your relationship, your children, your image?

Have any of these things become your fortress, your security or something you trust in more than you should? More than God? That you have turned into an ultimate thing?

If so, this Psalm calls you, calls us to not put our trust in this thing that has become *ultimate* and instead to place our trust in the eternal Lord.

Why does the Psalmist remind us to trust in God? Why is this such a difficulty for us? In many ways it is because it is hard work to trust in God. It is a difficult obedience. Abraham and Sarah waited a very long time before God gave them what they wanted.

We often question God's ways. Since we don't know God's plan, we sometimes find it difficult to rest in his plan. Like someone who doesn't like a surprise, we communicate through our actions and choices that we will do all we can to prevent being surprised by God's plan in our lives.

Sometimes children want to know about an upcoming trip or surprise. They want to know all the details that are coming. They persistently ask more and more questions and at some point, we tell them they are just going to have to wait and find out. We aren't going to reveal everything to them.

We aren't that different. We also want to know what is coming, what God's hidden will is, but God has revealed what he wants us to know in his word. As Deut. 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

God calls us to trust in his revealed will in faith. It is not our responsibility to try to figure out God's hidden will. He doesn't want us to bypass him. He wants us to come to him, to wait in him and to rest in his plan. To go through our struggles, our restlessness, our anxiety with and in him. He wants us to trust in him because when we trust in God, the psalm says we are blessed. When we stop kicking against the goads trying to do things in our own strength and control, we rest in his purposes, he is pleased, and we are blessed. When we accept that we are on God's roadmap instead of in God's control room, we are blessed.

As our Father, he wants us to come to him with our needs.

Prodigal Son

Imagine how you would feel as a father if your child had needs, and instead he went to someone or something else for those needs. To someone who would be unable to even begin to meet his needs.

One of the most beautiful parables Jesus gives us is found in Luke 15. Here we read of a young man who decides to leave his father and live on his own. He takes from his father's wealth and makes a mess of his life. He makes many mistakes and feels like a complete failure. In many different ways he had sinned against his father and had acted sinfully and foolishly.

When a severe famine arose, he hit rock bottom. This young man, in his shame lived in solitude away from his father and worked to feed pigs, longing to eat what the pigs had. When he finally came to his senses, he decided to rise and go to his father and beg him to accept him as a servant in his house, ***believing himself unworthy to still be called a son.***

When he was still far off, his father, who clearly was looking off to the distance for his lost son, felt compassion, got up, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

The son repents of his sins and asks to be one of his servants. The father completely disregards his request and dresses him like royalty, killing the fattened calf, and celebrates with gladness.

When I think of this parable, it is clear that the son's failures were painful for the father and the son, but I also think how hurt and broken the father must have been, to later know that his son was suffering in hunger and in pain, while the father was able to help him.

I would be devastated to know that my son needed help and felt like he couldn't come to me, but instead went to someone else for crumbs in a pig sty.

If I would want to help my needy son, how much more so do we see that in God in this psalm.

God calls us to himself. He is standing at the ready and doesn't want us to depend on the crumbs of our rulers. He doesn't want us to squander our lives on our own efforts and idols.

He wants us to come to him, and like the father of the prodigal son, he stands waiting to provide above and beyond anything we could imagine.

This is who God is to us. This is the relationship he wants us to have with him.

He knows us by name!

In Isaiah 51:12, we see a sister passage to our psalm. Here the Lord says,

"I, I am he who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass, and have forgotten the Lord, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth...."

God our Father wants to be our Comforter. He who made heaven and earth tells us that we need not trust or fear man who is like grass. He is our might and eternal maker.

If it were not enough, he reminds us of his faithfulness throughout all generations as he reminds us that he is the God of Jacob. He is our Covenant Lord and he will not forsake us in our moments of need. He wants to carry us through our every problem.

When Israel was pinned against the Red Sea, about to face devastation and death in that immensely stressful moment, rather than leave them stranded, God not only made a way for the redeemed to pass over, but he dried up the sea! They walked on dry ground!

He who made heaven and earth, who holds elections, our health, our parenting, our lives in his hands, who gives us the life that we breath, who keeps faith forever, and who is just, reminds us that he is our Father, and he wants us to trust in him.

When we see people being unfairly oppressed, or hungry; when we see prisoners, the blind, the sojourners, the widows, and the orphans; we need not trust in the rulers of this world or their policies.

Our God and Father heals the blind, lifts up those who are bowed down. He watches over the sojourners and upholds the widow and the orphan.

As the Father of many prodigal sons, he wants us to know that he not only promises to provide for our needs, but he waits for us and beckons us to come to him. Not as servants, but as his sons, his covenant children.

How is this possible? Why does God show us such great mercy when we constantly seek to replace him with counterfeit gods? Why does he show us such tenderness and patience when we regularly push him out of our lives and place our hope and trust in the things of this world?

We get an understanding of why when we look back at this psalm. In it, we see that God demonstrates who he is, but also what he intends to do and is already doing. He shows that he will set prisoners free, he will open the eyes of the blind, he will give food to the hungry and uphold the way of the righteous.

These are the acts of the Messiah. These words match up closely with the words spoken by Jesus in the account of Luke, from Isaiah 61. Jesus says,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then Jesus rolls up the scroll and says to them, *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

In our psalm, we see a picture of God as Messiah, bringing justice and freedom to those who have been oppressed. We see the blind seeing, and the poor, the widow, the fatherless receiving good news and celebrating.

This is all possible, because God himself has redeemed his people. He is the hope of the nations. Because in Jesus, in Jesus, the true and living God, he has provided for all our needs. All of our everlasting needs through the long-awaited Messiah.

And Jesus, unlike the rulers of this age, Jesus, as our good shepherd, lays down his life for his sheep. He uses his position of power and authority to help and rescue us. He is the ruler we all long for. He is the prince we can trust in. He is our hope, both now and forever. And he says, come to me all you who are weary, and I will give you rest.

This is why the psalmist cannot stop saying, praise the Lord! Because his promises are not only sure, but they are forever and for all generations. Praise the Lord!

Amen.