

Where Love and Justice Meet

Psalm 146

There are three common objections to Christianity: I can't believe because of science; the God of the Old and New Testaments are different gods; Christians have done more harm than good in the world. Psalm 146 addresses each of these; and rather than rejecting God, we should worship him.

Introduction

The Psalmist calls the congregation and himself to worship God. Why do we need that encouragement? Because there can seem to be many reasons not to worship God. In telling us why we should worship God and make him the absolute focus of our lives, the psalmist tells us two things about God.

The God of Power

The psalmist says we should not put our trust in 'princes' – in people of power and influence, because ultimately they have no power to save us, they die. They are men of dust who return to the dust. So we should not put all our hope in politicians, or anyone else with power and influence. And neither should we put our trust in ourselves. Our power is limited.

In contrast God has infinite power. And far from the natural order and the world of science being a reason not to worship him, it is the display of his power in creation that calls us to worship him.

Power for the Powerless

In your CV or resume you write down your skills and characteristics. The Psalmist does that here for God. In doing so he answers the objection that the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath not a God of love.

The gods of other nations used their 'power' to prop up the ruling elite. But the God of the Bible is very different. He exercises his power for the powerless. He uses his power to make sure the weak get justice. But justice is a double-edged sword: justice also means that the wrong doer should be punished. The psalmist talks of God bringing the wicked to ruin. But how can we stand before such a God when we so often fail to love and care as we should? And how can we grow in the qualities of love and justice that we admire?

Becoming Like What You Worship

The Psalm describes God as the God of Jacob: a man who deserved to face justice for his sin, but instead a man who God transformed. But how can we know that transformation in our lives? Elsewhere, the psalms say we become like what we worship.

Jesus began his ministry by quoting words from Isaiah that are very similar to Psalm 146. By dying for us he takes upon himself the justice of God that we deserve. He was brought to ruin in the place of the wicked. That is the good news of the gospel – that sets the prisoners free. When we realise his love for us it does two things in our hearts: firstly, it makes us want to worship him, not just on Sundays, but with our lives; and secondly it empowers us to be people who work for justice and exercise power for the powerless. This answers the objection that Christians only do harm. Rather, we become increasingly like the One we worship.