

The Great Hallelujah Chorus

Psalms 146-150.

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There is very much encouragement for us in the assurance that as the outcome of all God's ways with men there will arise a great outburst of praise. There will be a chorus of Hallelujahs in which all creation will join, as is made very manifest in the last five Psalms. It is true that in all their intricacies "His ways" are "past finding out" (Rom. 11: 33); it is true also that they involve much trial and suffering and exercise for His saints as is shown in detail in Psalms 1 - 145, yet the end of it all shall be for the highest glory of God and the highest blessing of men. As His ways reach their close, and the bright millennial scene unfolds itself, the universe will reverberate with the great Hallelujah chorus.

The five closing Psalms form a group by themselves, and each begins and ends with the word, Hallelujah, rendered in our Authorized Version as, "Praise ye the Lord." Each Psalm calls for praise, yet each furnishes different reasons why the praise should be rendered to Him; and there seems to be an increasing fervour in the call until the climax is reached in Psalm 150. The earth and Israel are mainly in view, as befits these Divinely given poems which date from a thousand years before Christ came, yet incidentally they introduce many a thing which we can in the happiest way apply to ourselves.

In Psalm 146 the call for praise is addressed to those who have learned two things: on the one hand that man, even those who are princes, are not to be relied upon; on the other, that it is a blessed thing for men to have God for their help, and to find their hope in Him. In verse 4, "the son of man," does not refer to Christ. It is rather, "Put not confidence in nobles, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation" (New Trans.).

Most of us find that it takes us a long time to pass the vote of no confidence in man. It is not particularly difficult to distrust one's fellows. Indeed many of us may feel a good bit of sympathy with the Psalmist who said in his haste or agitation, "All men are liars" (Psalm 116: 11). The difficulty is to lose all confidence in the man who is nearer to us than any other — oneself. The point here does not seem to be the wickedness of man but his helplessness. The best of men may be in view, entertaining the kindest of thoughts. Yet suddenly he dies, and in that very day his thoughts perish. It is folly to put the weight of our trust on such a one as that.

But what help and hope we have in God! The rest of the Psalm presents Him to us in His character and actions. To begin with, He is the Creator: to end with, He will reign for ever. In between these two things we learn that He keeps truth for ever; He executes righteous judgment, He extends mercy in various ways to the needy, while turning the way of the wicked upside down. Who would not set his hope in a God who bears such a character as that? In this God will we trust and, when He reigns in Zion unto all generations, Hallelujahs will fill the earth. In anticipation of His reign our hearts are saying Hallelujah today.

The Hallelujahs of Psalm 147 are called forth more particularly by God's dealings with Israel and Jerusalem. His glory and might expressed in creation are contemplated, yet all that seems to be a background against which the kindness of His dealings with His people shines the more brightly. There will be the building up of Jerusalem and the gathering of the outcasts of Israel at the beginning of the millennial age. Then it is that He will cast down the wicked and lift up the meek, healing the broken in heart and binding up their wounds.

The grace that is expressed in such actions is enhanced to our minds when we remember His greatness. He can tell the number of the stars. Some six thousand stars can be detected by human eyes in both north and south hemispheres. Long since, this number has been expanded into millions by the aid of telescopic powers. With the monster instruments in use today the astronomers begin to talk not merely of stars, but of galaxies of stars running into millions; and of unimaginable depths of space which can only be measured in "light-years," that is, the distance that light, travelling at 186,000 miles a second, covers in a year. Our God has counted all the stars, for He made them, and not only so but to each He has given a name. Now the names that God gives mean something, because they describe the person or thing that He names. Every star is distinctive: He knows its distinctive feature and He names it accordingly. So great a God as that is ours.

But if verse 4 presents the wonder of His *greatness*, verse 3 shows us the wonder of His *grace*. The God who names all the stars stoops to heal wounds and heal broken hearts upon earth. The broken hearts, like the stars, are beyond our counting; yet we judge that what is contemplated here is "the broken and contrite heart," of Psalm 51: 17, and that is a much rarer thing than a heart merely broken by the trials and adversities of this sinful world.

By-and-by Israel will have the broken and contrite heart, when they look upon their Messiah whom they have pierced, and then it is that they will be gathered together and Jerusalem built up. While we wait for that day God is healing broken hearts by the gospel of His grace. He lifts up the meek by the gospel. What pleases Him is not mere animal strength but the right moral condition, as verses 10 and 11 show; and that is why He has shewed His word unto Jacob, according to v. 19.

The possession of His word and statutes and judgments was one of the great privileges conferred upon Israel; for we are told in Romans 3: 2, that one of the chief advantages they had was that "unto them were committed the oracles of God." He had not dealt in this manner with any other nation, and when His word at last has its proper effect upon them, producing the meekness and brokenness of heart that He desires, they will be blessed and break forth in a heartfelt Hallelujah. Through God's goodness His word is available for us to-day, and if it properly humbles us we shall be blessed and enabled to take Hallelujah upon our lips.

In verse 18 God is said to send out His word and melt the snow and ice; in verse 19 He is said to show His word unto Jacob, in order that the melting power of His word might be experienced by him. Jacob was his name according to nature, whereas Israel was his name according to God's grace conferred upon him.

Alas, their hearts were not melted, and when our Lord Jesus was here He had to look round upon men with holy anger, "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3: 5). The day is coming however when the true Israel of God will have their hearts melted, then they will be marked by meekness and the fear of the Lord, and their broken hearts will be healed.

It is very possible for us to misuse the word of the gospel just as Jacob misused the word concerning His statutes and judgments. We may pride ourselves on the light that shines upon us, and our hearts remain cold. If however we are melted by the truth that we know, our state will be pleasing to God.

To recapitulate then, Psalm 146 voices Hallelujahs which spring from our turning away from feeble man to trust in a God, whose righteousness and mercy and power are known. Psalm 147 utters Hallelujahs based upon His word running very swiftly upon earth to accomplish the melting and humbling of human heart, the necessary moral preparation for His intervention in healing, in gathering His people, and in building up Jerusalem.

Psalm 148 follows with Hallelujahs which seem to reverberate throughout creation. It contemplates the glorious praise which will fill the millennial scene. Verses 1 to 6 are occupied with the praises that will fill the heavens. The Lord is to be praised *from* the heavens and in the heights. We can hardly dismiss this as being a poetic allusion to the angels, for they are specifically mentioned in the next verse. We venture to think it is another of those Old Testament sayings purposely left vague for the moment. Now that we have the added light of the New Testament we can see that God will have a mighty host of heavenly saints in their appointed place when the millennial age is reached, and that we through grace shall be among them. An innumerable host will be there to praise the Lord from the heavens.

Then the angels will praise Him, and all the hosts of those mighty spiritual beings that are spoken of as "principality, and power, and might, and dominion" (Eph. 1: 21), and after that the sun, moon and stars and all else that has been created and established to fill the heavens. So we see in these verses just that which is revealed in a much fuller way in Revelation 5. Moreover we see that just the same order is observed, for in that chapter we have first the worship of the heavenly saints, represented by the twenty-four elders then the voice of many angels round about the throne, and then every creature joins in the praise.

The creatures who praise are said in Revelation 5 to be, "every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea." So things terrestrial as well as things celestial will join in the chorus. In our Psalm the things celestial are contemplated in verses 3 and 4, the things terrestrial in verses 7 to 12. The word "dragons," in verse 7 is rendered by some, "sea-monsters," so the sea as well as the earth is in view in the Psalm as it is in Revelation.

The saints are not yet planted in the heavens, glorified in the likeness of Christ, as they will be. They are on earth amongst the kings and people and princes and judges, of whom verse 11 speaks, and their Hallelujahs are faint and feeble as yet. The kings and people are not yet brought into subjection to God, and all is disorder. The root of the trouble is there, for we have to confess that there is nothing much wrong with the snow and wind, with the mountains or trees or beasts or fowl, apart from the blight that the fall of man has placed upon them. When Satan is cast out of the *heavens* any blight that exists there will be gone; and when man is set right on *earth* the curse will be lifted off the face of creation.

The blight will be gone and the curse lifted when, as verse 13 tells us, the name of the Lord alone shall be excellent and His glory revealed. We know how that will come to pass. Psalm 8 had told us. It will be when the blessed Son of Man is visibly manifested with everything under His feet. Then the shoutings will wake the heavens! Hallelujah! And again, Hallelujah!

In that day the saints will be exalted, and Israel His people will be in their appointed place on earth as the people who peculiarly and specially are "near unto Him." Again we can say, Hallelujah!

In Psalm 149 the great King has been manifested in His glory, and the effect of this is twofold, as verses 2 and 4 show us. The children of Zion are joyful in their King, and the Lord takes pleasure in His people. In that day Israel will have been brought into the reconciliation of the Cross. We have been brought into it *now*, as we are told in Colossians 1. 21: they will brought into it *then*. But in both cases the effect of it is the same — God can find His delight in His people, and they find their delight in Him.

How this will work out we can see in the latter part of the Psalm. First, it will mean salvation for God's people, and that in the fullest sense. They will be in a fit state of heart and mind to receive the salvation when they can be described as "the meek," and the salvation they will receive will beautify them. Today God's earthly people — the Jews — are neither meek nor beautiful, if we consider them

in a national way; nor were any of us in our natural condition. If there is anything about any of us that is beautiful, it is the fruit of the salvation that has reached us. When Israel at last is humbled and meek she will be like her King, who was meek and brought salvation (See Zech. 9: 9, Matt. 21: 5). His salvation will have beautified her.

Salvation will be like a vestibule to the glory of which the next verse speaks. There will be a glory on earth as well as glory in the heavens, and in it the saints will exult and be very joyful. Their joy will be expressed in song and in the high praises of God.

Verse 6 is indeed remarkable. We may find it difficult to put together the high praises of God on the lips and a two-edged sword of vengeance in the hand, and regard the two things as quite incompatible. But that is because we are not Israel but Christians. At the beginning of the millennial age Israel is going to be used of God in the subjugating of rebellious peoples. We are called to set forth the grace of God before that age dawns, and so the only two-edged sword that we are called upon to wield is the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. But having said this much, we have also to remember that we too shall have our part in judging the world in the coming age, as 1 Corinthians 6: 2 tells us; though this is not in the way of executing vengeance, but rather of administering the affairs of the world to come in a righteous manner.

"This honour have all His saints," is what our Psalm says. It is an honour to be used of God in any way, whether in grace or in judgment. But very specially is it an honour to be used in grace. This honour is ours today. Oh! that we esteemed it at its true value.

So in this Psalm we have salvation. glory, joy, praise and judgment. No wonder that it too ends with Hallelujah!

Psalm 150 brings this series to a finish. There is in it only one reference to what God has done: God Himself in His excellent greatness is before the Psalmist's mind. This is of course always the great ultimate theme of praise and worship.

God is to be praised "in" certain things: — in His sanctuary, in the firmament of His power, "for" or in His mighty acts. The first indicates His inner dwelling place: the second the vast expanse of creation wherein His power operates: the third the actual doings in which His power is expressed. In the world to come Israel will have the sanctuary of God established in their midst, and there they will praise Him. We shall be amongst the heavenly saints. Our part will lie in the heavenly city of Revelation 21 and 22, where "the Lord Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." What praise will ascend from the sanctuary on earth! What endless praises from the sanctuary in the heavens!

In the firmament of His power dwell those bright unfallen spirits, who will as ever be filled with His praise, though they cannot strike the note of redemption as we do. They will have been the delighted observers of His mighty acts, not only acts of creation but acts of GRACE, which will provoke their Hallelujahs, and yet,

"One string there is of sweetest tone,
Reserved for sinners saved by grace;
'Tis sacred to one class alone,
And touched by one peculiar race."

As observers however they will praise Him to the full.

He is not only to be praised "in" but "*according to*" His excellent greatness. Now, who is

sufficient for this? The creature, however highly blessed and exalted, can never rise up to the level of the Creator, and yet doubtless there will be an adequate uprising of praise in that day; such praise as will be satisfying to the heart of God.

The following verses show us Israel praising their God "with" all kinds of instruments of music. These instruments, the work of men's fingers, are used today, like all the other works of their fingers, for their own gratification and praise. Then they will be wholly for God. But even when they are thus used to His glory, they will be but lifeless instruments, men may praise with them, but the instruments themselves do not praise.

Praise can only spring from those that have the "breath" of *life*. In the coming age at long last there will be an adequate outburst of praise to the Lord, proceeding from everything that hath breath. The curse will be gone, and praise will fill the scene. The Hallelujah chorus will be universal and complete.

It is ours to catch the spirit of it even today.