

Psalm 115

Trust in God, not in idols

Psalm 115: The note of confidence is so strong in this psalm that it should be classified as a psalm of national confidence. The message of the psalm could be aptly summarized in three ideas: honor the Lord, because in contrast to idols, He alone is God (verses 1-8), trust the Lord, because He will help you (verses 9-11); praise the Lord, because He is worthy (verses 12-18).

Verses 1-18 (see note on Psalm 113:1-9). This praise psalm appears to be antiphonal in nature, following this outline and pattern:

- (1) The people (verses 1-8);
- (2) The priests (verses 9-11);
- (3) The people (verses 12-13);
- (4) The priests (verses 14-15); and
- (5) The people (verses 16-18).

Let no opinion of our own merits have any place in our prayers or in our praises. All the good we do, is done by the power of his grace. And all the good we have, is the gift of his mere mercy, and he must have all the praise. Are we in pursuit of any mercy, and wrestling with God for it, we must take encouragement in prayer from God only. Lord, do so for us; not that we may have the credit and comfort of it, but that thy mercy and truth may have the glory of it. The heathen gods are senseless things. They are the works of men's hands. The painter, the carver, the statuary, can put no life into them, therefore no sense. The psalmist hence shows the folly of the worshippers of idols.

Verses 4-11 are very similar (to Psalm 135:15-20). It has been suggested that this psalm is post-Exilic (compare verse 2), and could have first been sung at the dedication of the second temple (compare Ezra 6:16).

Psalm 115:1 "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, [and] for thy truth's sake."

“Unto your name give glory”: God declared He would share His glory with no one (Isa. 42:8; 48:11).

It is so amazing to me that the people of God are seeking for signs and wonders. They have the strange opinion, that if God has not done any great miracles in the last few days, they cease to hold Him in awe. The Psalmist here, is seemingly afraid that the people around them have ceased to fear the Lord, and he is asking to show His mighty power once again to make the enemies of Israel fear Israel's God. This is possibly, a continuation of the same theme that the last Psalm had. In it, the mighty power of God was shown at the Red Sea and in fact, all across the wilderness. The people in the surrounding area feared Israel's God. Israel now has lost a battle or

two and the people have ceased to fear. The verse above is saying, glorify yourself among these heathens. Do it not because of us, but to let them know who God is.

Verses 2-3: On occasion, people ask the question: "Where is ... God"? The sufficient answer is that He is "in the heavens", meaning He rules there and everywhere, and all things are ordered in accordance with His sovereign will ("He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased").

Psalm 115:2 "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where [is] now their God?"

"Where is now their God"? (Compare Psalms 42:3, 10; 79:10; Joel 2:17; Micah 7:10). The Jews despised this Gentile taunt.

The heathen has ceased to believe that God is truly with Israel. More than that, they have ceased to believe that God truly exists.

Psalm 115:3 "But our God [is] in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

Israel's God is alive and rules the earth from His throne room above.

God does things on His time table. He does not have to please the whims of a few shallow believers. God does not have to prove Himself to anyone. God is above the ridiculous planning of simple man. If they cannot retain their belief by what He has already shown them, He is not obligated to run and do a miracle every time someone doubts.

Verses 4-8: In contrast, Gentiles worship dead gods of their own making, fashioned in the image of the fallen creature (compare Isa. 44:9-20; 46:57; Jer. 10:3-16; Rom. 1:21-25). The idol worshiper becomes like the idol, spiritually useless.

Psalm 115:4 "Their idols [are] silver and gold, the work of men's hands."

The idols of the Gentiles; so the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions. The gods they serve and worship are not in the heavens; but the matter of which they are made is dug out of the earth. And this is the greatest excellency and value that there is in them. And such as are made of these are of the greatest worth, and yet only for the matter of them. otherwise useless and inanimate statues. Such are the idols of the Papists (Rev. 9:20).

"The work of men's hands": The matter of them is gold and silver, which they owe to the earth as their original. The form of them they owe to men, and therefore cannot be God (Hosea 8:6). If it is idolatry to worship what God has made, the sun, moon, and stars, it must be gross idolatry, and great stupidity, to worship what man has made. If it is sinful to worship the creature besides the Creator, or more than him, it must be still more so to worship the creature of a creature.

We have discussed before, that the word that idols was translated from means nothings. Their objects of worship have no power. They are cold metal. This again is saying that they are worshipping the creation, rather than the Creator.

Psalm 115:5 "They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not:"

These idols are carved with mouths, but they make no use of them. If any cry to them for they cannot answer them, nor save them from their troubles. Baal's priests cried to their idol, but there was no voice heard, nor answer returned. They are rightly called dumb idols (Hab. 2:18; 1 Kings 18:26), but our God in the heavens, when his people cry to him, he answers them, and sends them relief. And tells them his grace is sufficient for them, and so they find it to be.

"Eyes have they, but they see not": They are made with eyes in their heads, but cannot see with them. They cannot see their worshippers, nor what they bring to them. Neither their persons nor their wants (Dan. 5:23). But our God and Father in heaven, he sees in secret the persons and hearts of his people. Their desires are before him, and their groaning's are not hid from him. His eyes are on the righteous, and are never withdrawn from them.

These chunks of metal have mouths, but how can an inanimate object speak? These are the imaginations of men's hearts formed into an idol.

Psalm 115:6 "They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not:"

The makers of them have taken care to place a pair of ears to their heads, but could not convey the faculty of hearing to them. So that though their priests may cry from morning to noon, as Baal's worshippers did, saying, O Baal, hear us. And even tonight, and one day and night after another, nothing is heard (1 Kings 18:26). Indeed, the image of Jupiter at Crete was made without ears; because it was thought unbecoming that he, who was prince and lord of all, should give ear to any. But the God of heaven and earth is a God hearing prayer. His ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear; his ears are always open to the cries of his people.

"Noses have they, but they smell not. The incense that is set before them, nor the sacrifices offered to them (Deut. 4:28). But our God smelled a sweet savor in legal sacrifices, offered up in the faith of the Messiah. And especially he smells a sweet savor in the sacrifice of his Son, and in the prayers of his saints, which are sweet odors. And particularly as they come to him perfumed with the incense of Christ's mediation (Gen. 8:21).

They have ears formed out of the metal, but it goes no deeper than the surface. They cannot hear the cries of their people. They have none of the senses operating in that chunk of metal.

Psalm 115:7 "They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat."

So as to feel anything that is put into their hands. They cannot make use of their hands to stretch them out, and receive anything from their worshippers; nor can they give anything to them. But

our God receives and accepts the sacrifices of his people, their prayers and their praises. And opens his hand, and liberally supplies their wants, both in providence and grace.

"Feet have they, but they walk not": Cannot stir from the place where they are, to the assistance of those that call unto them (Isa. 46:7). But our God walks upon the wings of the wind, and is a present help in times of trouble. A God at hand and afar off, and makes haste to the relief of his people in distress.

"Neither speak they through their throat": Or make a mournful voice as a dove, as the word is used in (Isa. 38:14). Or chirp as a bird, or chatter as a crane; or warble out any note through the throat, as birds do. And much less form any articulate sound, or utter any proper word, that may be understood.

They cannot hold anything in their hand, neither can they give anything out. Elijah proved these idols for just what they were, when he challenged the prophets of Baal to prove who God really was. 400 of Baal's prophets died that day.

Psalm 115:8 "They that make them are like unto them; [so is] every one that trusteth in them."

As stupid as the matter of which they are made; as sottish and as senseless as the idols themselves (see Isa. 44:9). Aben Ezra and Kimchi interpret it as a petition, "let them that make them be like unto them". And so the Targum, the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions: they liked not to retain God in their knowledge, let them be given up to a reprobate mind, to a mind void of all sense and judgment. And which indeed is their case (Rom. 1:28).

"So is everyone that trusteth in them": More especially they that worship them. For an artificer may make them for gain, and have no faith in them; but a worshipper places confidence in them. Or this clause may be explanative of the former, and be rendered, even "every one", etc., for "to make" sometimes signifies to serve and worship (Exodus 32:35).

Someone who worships an inanimate object is less than wise himself. To worship an idol, brings no power at all. They have no thought deeper than what they can see. Their judgement is impaired as well. As Elijah proved that day, they cannot respond at all to the people worshipping them, and the people worshipping them cannot respond either.

Verses 9-18: It is folly to trust in dead images, but it is wisdom to trust in the living God, for he is a help and a shield to those that trust in him. Wherever there is right fear of God, there may be cheerful faith in him; those who reverence his word, may rely upon it. He is ever found faithful. The greatest need his blessing, and it shall not be denied to the meanest that fear him. God's blessing gives an increase, especially in spiritual blessings. And the Lord is to be praised: his goodness is large, for he has given the earth to the children of men for their use. The souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burdens of the flesh, are still praising him. But the dead

body cannot praise God: death puts an end to our glorifying him in this world of trial and conflict. Others are dead, and an end is thereby put to their service, therefore we will seek to do the more for God. We will not only do it ourselves, but will engage others to do it; to praise him when we are gone. Lord, thou art the only object for faith and love. Help us to praise thee while living and when dying, that thy name may be the first and last upon our lips. And let the sweet savor of thy name refresh our souls for ever.

Verses 9-11: This 3 verse, priestly admonition (compare 118:2-4; 135:19-20), could apply to 3 different groups:

- (1) The nation Israel (115:9);
- (2) The Levitical priests from the house of Aaron (115:10); and
- (3) Proselytes to Judaism who are God fearers (115:11).

To all 3 groups, God is their help and shield.

In response to the superiority of God over worthless and powerless idols, the psalmist urges "Israel", the "house of Aaron" (the priests), and "ye that fear the LORD" to trust the God who is their "help" and "shield".

Psalm 115:9 "O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he [is] their help and their shield."

This exhortation is founded in a great measure on what had been just said in regard to idols. They had no power. There was no reason why they should be confided in. They could not help in the day of trouble; and as people need a god, and as the idols cannot be to them as gods, the exhortation is addressed to his people to trust him. He would be to them all that was implied in the name God; all that was wanted in a God.

"He is their help": The help of those who trust in him. He is able to help them in the time of trouble; he is willing to help them; he will help them. They who put their trust in him will find him a sure and certain help. This is the experience of all who confide in him.

"And their shield": The shield to defend, and the help to support and strengthen those that trust in and cleave to him.

Let the uninformed world around you worship whoever or whatever they choose, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. The most real things in life are not the things we see with our physical eyes. Love is possibly the strongest force we know of between humans, and you cannot see that. There is no greater love than a man would lay down His life for His friends. You cannot see that, but that is just what Jesus did. He is our very present help in trouble. You cannot see the wind, but you know it is there, because of the effect it has on other things that you can see. This is like God. We cannot see Him, but we know He exists, because of the effect that He has on those things and people around us. Place your trust in the Lord. He is their help, and our help. He is our shield against the storm. The physical house of Israel should have no trouble with this, because of the effect the presence of God had on the Red Sea.

Psalm 115:10 "O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: he [is] their help and their shield."

The family of the tribe of Levi, that was separated from the rest, to minister in the priest's office, to offer gifts and sacrifices for the people, and to bless them. And therefore, ought to trust in the Lord and set a good example to others. As ministers of the word should, who are entrusted with much by the Lord, and should trust in him for much. For every supply of gifts and grace; and the rather, as they are to be examples of faith to the people. And as all the saints under the Gospel dispensation are priests unto God, they should put their trust and confidence in the Lord; since their sacrifices cannot be acceptable and well pleasing to God, without faith in him.

"He is their help and their shield": The Lord is the help and shield of everyone of Aaron's family; of the priests under the law, and of ministers under the Gospel. And of all those who are kings and priests unto God; and therefore, they should trust in him. This is repeated for the certainty of it, and for the particular application of it to Aaron's house.

The house of Aaron, the priestly tribe, should know better than anyone else of the greatness of God. They are in the temple with the presence of God, and they should know of the power and protection He provides better than anyone else. Those who have much knowledge of God, should have the best understanding of Him.

Psalm 115:11 "Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he [is] their help and their shield."

Which is said not to distinguish true saints from hypocrites, in Israel or in Aaron's house; rather to describe such who belonged to neither. But, as Aben Ezra interprets it, who feared the Lord, of every people and nation; or proselytes, as Jarchi explains it. The distinction between the people of the Jews, and the proselytes among them, under the character of those that feared the Lord, may be observed in (Acts 13:26). It takes in all true worshippers of the Lord; and who are exhorted to trust in him, for faith and fear are consistent. And where there is the one, there is the other. Where there is the true fear of God, not a slavish nor a hypocritical fear, but a holy reverence and a godly fear, there will be faith and confidence in him. Job was a man that feared the Lord, and yet trusted in him. These characters meet in the same persons (see Psalm 31:19).

"He is their help and their shield": The help and shield of all those that fear the Lord, their protector and defender, and therefore should trust in him. The word "ezer", translated help, in this and the two preceding verses, is applied to God, and often in this book of Psalms, as a title and epithet belonging to him.

We have said over and over, that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. We have also said that trust goes beyond faith. When we know in our heart and rest on that knowledge that God is our shield and help, we find perfect peace. This to me, is the (rest), in the LORD. We know that whatever happens, it is God moving in our best interest. Sometimes in the natural, we could look at circumstances around us and our faith might falter. If we trust the LORD, we are not concerned with circumstances. We rise above circumstances and put our total confidence in the LORD.

Psalm 115:12 "The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless [us]; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron."

This would be especially appropriate if the psalm was written, as is commonly supposed, after the return from the captivity of Babylon. In such circumstances, it would be every way proper to bring before the mind of the people the fact that God had remembered them and had delivered them.

"He will bless us": Our past experience furnishes the fullest evidence that he will continue to bless us. He who has delivered us from so great calamities, and who has restored us to our native land after so long and so painful a captivity, will not forsake us now. There can be now no circumstances in which he cannot bestow on us all the blessings which we need. There will be none when we may not hope that he will bless us. If he could save us from such troubles, he can save us from all. If he did thus interpose, we may argue that he will always grant us his help when we need it.

"He will bless the house of Israel": He will bless the house of Aaron (compare Psalm 115:9-10).

The desire of the LORD is to bless His people. He will bless us and the physical house of Israel, as well as bless the chosen ministers of God, if we will obey Him. We have only to think how far we have already come in the LORD, to know that His blessings have been abundantly upon us. There are not only blessings for this earth, but He will bless us even more in the eternity to come.

Psalm 115:13 "He will bless them that fear the LORD, [both] small and great."

They shall want no good thing now, and have much goodness laid up for them to be enjoyed hereafter. The sun of righteousness rises upon them, and a book of remembrance is written on their account. The Lord delights in them, his eye is upon them; and they are blessed with more grace now, and will be blessed with glory hereafter.

"Both small and great": Young and old, rich and poor, high and low, lesser or greater believers; be they children, young men, or fathers (see Rev. 11:18).

You do not have to be the High Priest in the temple to be blessed of God. Sometimes I believe that God is even more interested in those of low estate. Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and raised the dead. Not once in all of this, did He regard the person of the one He was ministering to. All in fact, are small in comparison to Him. He owns the cattle on every hill. All of this is His creation. We cannot be high and mighty around Him. He sees the spirit of man, and not his circumstances.

Psalm 115:14 "The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children."

The Word of the Lord, as the Targum, shall do it; in a temporal sense, with a numerous posterity, with riches, wealth, and honor. And in a spiritual sense, with an addition of spiritual blessings; with renewed instances of divine layout. With an increase of the gifts and graces of the Spirit of

God, as faith, hope, love, joy, patience, humility, and other graces. And with more knowledge of God and Christ, and of divine and spiritual things.

"You and your children": Not only they that feared the Lord of the present generation, but those that should succeed them. And be as they were, a seed to serve the Lord, and who should be accounted to him for a generation.

All of those who fear the LORD are the believers. If we are believers in Christ, then all the promises made to Abraham are ours, as well.

Galatians 3:29 "And if ye [be] Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

This promise does not die out with one generation, but is for all generations to come.

Psalm 115:15 "Ye [are] blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth."

Blessed in your present comforts and mercies and blessed in his promises in regard to the time to come. Blessed in the prospects which are before you.

"Which made heaven and earth": The true God; the great Creator of all things. It was not the blessing of a creature, man or angel, it was the blessing of the living God.

These blessings are not from a mere mortal. These blessings are from the Creator of the world. Not only did He make the heaven and the earth, but He made us as well. We are His creation.

Psalm 115:16 "The heaven, [even] the heavens, [are] the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men."

To wit, in a peculiar manner, where he dwelleth in that light and glory to which no man can approach, and whence he beholds and disposes all persons and things upon earth.

"But the earth hath he given to the children of men": For their habitation, possession, and use. But these words may be and are thus rendered by others, and the earth which (which particle is very oft understood), he hath given, etc. And then as the foregoing verse declared that God was the Creator of heaven and earth (Psalm 115:15). So, this asserts that he is also their Lord and Governor, to dispose of all men and things as he pleases.

"The earth": Strong implications that planet earth alone is the dwelling place of life.

We have discussed before, how He made the world and everything in it, and then He made mankind to dwell there. His plan from the beginning was for us to have a place of habitation. The earth is for the children of men. That is very interesting, in the fact that Christians are not children of men. We are sons of God. This earth is not the home of the Christian. We are in the world, but we are not of the world. Heaven is our home. Our Father dwells there and His Son has

gone there to prepare a place for you and me. My home is in heaven, because I am no longer children of men, I am a son of God.

Psalm 115:17 "The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence."

The meaning of this is, that as those who are dead cannot praise God, or cannot worship him, this should be done while we are in the land of the living. This opportunity, like all other opportunities, will be cut off in the grave, and hence, we should be faithful in this duty, and should avail ourselves of this privilege, while life lasts. In regard to the sentiment here expressed, and the grounds on which that sentiment was entertained (see the notes at Isa. 38:18-19; and Psalm 6:5).

"Neither any that go down into silence": Into the grave, the land of silence (Psalm 94:17). Nothing is more impressive in regard to the grave than its utter silence. Not a voice, not a sound is heard there, of birds or human beings, of song or conversation, of the roaring of the sea, the sighing of the breeze, the fury of the storm, or the tumult of battle. Perfect stillness reigns there; and the first sound that shall be heard there will be the archangel's trump.

The Bible says, let everything that has breath, praise the LORD. When we are dead, we do not have breath. Our breath has been removed. Those who have no breath (dead), cannot praise the LORD. Those who go to heaven praise the Lord, but they are not dead.

Psalm 115:18 "But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD."

The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions, render it, "we who are alive". Both in a corporeal and in a spiritual sense who, as long as we live, and while we have a being, will bless the Lord. Being made spiritually alive, quickened by the Spirit and grace of God. And so capable of ascribing blessing, praise, and glory to him, for all the great and good things he has done. And especially when in lively frames, or in the lively exercise of grace: and that from this time. Under a sense of present favors, and outward mercies being renewed every day. Yea, throughout the whole of life, and so to all eternity in the world above (see Isa. 38:19).

"Praise the Lord": Let others do the same as we; let us join together in this work, now and hereafter.

It is natural for the sons of God to praise the LORD. It will matter not whether that it is in this earth, or in heaven to come.

Psalm 115 Questions

1. In verse 1, who was the glory to be given to?
2. If God has not done a miracle in the last few days, they have ceased to hold Him in _____.

3. The countries around did not fear the Israelites, they feared who?
4. What caused the people to cease to fear?
5. Why did the Psalmist want God to glorify Himself?
6. Worse than the fact that the heathen had decided God was not with Israel, was what?
7. Should God follow the wishes of the Psalmist?
8. Their idols are _____ and _____.
9. What is an idol?
10. They are worshipping the _____, and not the _____.
11. They have mouths, but they _____ not.
12. What has been formed into an idol?
13. What prophet proved to the people that these idols were nothing?
14. How many prophets of Baal died that day?
15. Someone who worships an inanimate object is less than _____ himself.
16. Trust thou in the LORD: He is their _____ and _____.
17. What are the real things in life?
18. Why should the physical house of Israel have no problem in believing in God?
19. O house of _____, trust in the LORD.
20. Why should the house of Aaron know more about God?
21. Verse 11 says, that the Lord is whose help and shield?
22. What is trust?
23. How can we rise against the circumstances, and put total confidence in the LORD?
24. God will bless us, if we _____ Him.
25. Name some of the miracles Jesus did for the under-privileged.
26. The earth hath he given to the _____ of _____.
27. Who are the Christians?

28. We are ___ the world, but we are not ___ the world, if we are Christians.

29. Let everything that hath _____, praise the LORD.

30. It is _____ for the sons of God to praise the LORD.