

To God Be the Glory

Psalm 115

By
Dr. Dallas R. Burdette

Website: www.freedominchrist.net

We must give God glory for His mercy and faithfulness. Psalm 115 is one of the psalms that Jesus and His disciples sang during the Paschal meal.¹ As Jews reflected upon this psalm, they were conscious that all glory belonged to God, “not to us” (115:1a). This same consciousness is displayed in the Christian community about redemption from the kingdom of darkness. It is as Jesus says, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matthew 6:13).² The psalm is shouting, as it were, “to God be the glory.” The psalmist reflects upon the past wonders that God worked for His honor, and because of God’s intervention in the lives of the Israelites, the psalmist asked God to allow glory to envelop Himself (Psalm 115:1). The gist of the psalm seems to be a prayer that the living God will glorify Himself as He did at the Red Sea and the Jordan. Psalm 114:3 reads: “The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back.”

Some scholars assert that this psalm was written in the latter period of Jewish history, especially following the Babylonian captivity, but there is nothing in this psalm to maintain this presupposition or to deny this presupposition. As we read this psalm, the psalm appears to have been written during the time of some national calamity, possibly of a national disaster that would cause the surrounding nations to say that their God forsook them. The psalm asserts that what had occurred had taken place under God’s permission, and, thus, the current events in no way proved that God was not the true God. We should pay attention to the psalmist as he speaks of God’s glory:

Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. ² Why do the nations say, “Where is their God?” ³ Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. (115:1-3)

¹For an overview of the Passover in the time of Christ, see Dallas Burdette, “Passover Traditions in the Time of Christ,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL.: Xulon Press, 2008), 181-195.

²This reading is from the *KJV*.

The psalmist wanted relief from the contemptuous insults of idolaters: “Why do the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’” (115:2). The adversaries no longer feared God. Is this not also true today? We should give glory to God because of His love and His faithfulness (115:1). The ungodly denied the past miracles in the life of Israel and questioned the existence of Israel’s God: “Where is their God?” (115:2). As we seek to enter into the mind of the psalmist, we are immediately confronted with one who traces everything to God. When we experience calamity in our lives, that, in and of itself, does not mean that God is not there. We cannot read this psalm without recognizing that this prayer is colored with a consciousness of unworthiness on the part of the petitioner. The psalmist is saying that we are not seeking our own glory, but, rather, we want to glorify God: “**Not to us, O LORD, not to us** but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness” (115:1).

GOD’S GLORY IN HIS PEOPLE

Are we praying for the triumph of God in our nation as well as the other nations of the world? Are we praying for the local fellowship of God’s people with whom we meet? Do we want our local congregation to grow in order to boast of the numbers in attendance, or do we wish for our neighborhood fellowship of believers to increase in numbers so that God may be glorified, or honored? We must not seek the glory to ourselves; rather we should ascribe glory wholly to God. This must be the highest aim of our prayers and of our daily walk with God. In the short prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, He began by saying, “**Hallowed be your name**” (Matthew 6:9). Is this our prayer? Do we intensively yearn for the glorification of God’s name? Do we pray, “Hallowed be your name”? God is to be honored in all that we do? Even the Death of Christ upon the Cross was to uphold God’s glory.

JESUS’ DEATH GLORIFIED GOD

Jesus, as He predicted His Death, to Philip and Andrew expressed the agony of His soul over His impending Death: “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:27-28). As the Father of heaven listened to Jesus’ prayer, John says, “Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and will glorify it again’” (12:28). In the Cross of Jesus, God glorified His name. In the Cross of Jesus, mercy and peace kissed each other. It is in this vein that Paul defends the justice of God:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ **God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—** ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

Is it any wonder that Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus about this wonderful love on the part of God? We should take note of Paul's words as he expresses our reason for praising God:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:3-6)

REPETITION OF PHRASE: “NOT TO US”

No wonder the psalmist says, “Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness” (Psalm 115:1). The repetition of the phrase—“not to us”—is the sincere desire to disclaim any self-glory. Since the idolatrous foreigners questioned the Israelites about the whereabouts of their God, so the psalmist appeals to God to vindicate His honor. The psalmist is conscious that God's glory is manifested when He exhibits love and faithfulness to His people. How true this was and is in the Cross of Jesus. In the redemption offered to us, we must not boast about our salvation before the Lord because of anything we have done. Salvation is God's doing, not our doing. Listen to Paul as he calls notice to this salvation provided by God:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Surely the words of the psalmist are appropriate concerning our salvation in Christ: “Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness” (115:1). As we reflected upon Psalm 114, we recall that the earth trembled at the presence of God: “Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob” (114:7). Now, this Psalm (115) is a call for humans to tremble in the presence of the Lord. As we search to get a hold on Psalm 115, we quickly discover that it is difficult to classify this psalm into one neat package.

TITLES THAT CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF PSALM 115

I have chosen to call this psalm, “To God Be the Glory.” But, on the other hand, there are other titles that are also descriptive of this psalm: “The One True God,” “A Liturgy of Praise,” “God and the Idols,” or “National Trust in God.”³ All of these titles could very well express the theme of this magnificent psalm. As we seek to analyze the components of this psalm, we discover that this psalm speaks of humility on the part of the psalmist (115.1), absolute trust in God (vv. 9-11), total assurance on the faithfulness of God (vv. 12-13), and praise to the One in the highest heavens (vv. 16-18). Before seeking to analyze this psalm in its individual parts, we should reflect once more upon the entire psalm. Listen to Psalm 115, in its whole, as the psalmist pours out his heart to God:

Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. ² Why do the nations say, “Where is their God?” ³ Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. ⁴ But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. ⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; ⁶ they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; ⁷ they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. ⁸ Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. ⁹ O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. ¹⁰ O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. ¹¹ You who fear him, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. ¹² The LORD remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron, ¹³ he will bless those who fear the LORD— small and great alike. ¹⁴ May the LORD make you increase, both you and your children. ¹⁵ May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. ¹⁶ The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to man. ¹⁷ It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to silence; ¹⁸ it is we who extol the LORD, both now and forevermore. Praise the LORD. (Psalm 115)

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

As we begin an analysis of the wording of this psalm, perhaps, a brief introduction to each major component should facilitate our comprehension of the message contained in this psalm for the Christian community today. To smooth the progress of a clearer awareness of this psalm and its message, it is necessary to view the psalm in its entirety. Even though there is a great deal of repetition in this study, nevertheless, it is easily justifiable. As stated earlier, this psalm opens with a declaration that glory belongs to God alone, not to man. Glory—praise and honor—must be given to God: “Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness” (Psalm 115:1). **The psalmist traces everything to God.** On the other hand, the foreigners want to know where the God that the Israelites trust in is: Why do the nations say, “Where is their God?” (115:2). The psalmist argues that even though things look bad on the surface, nevertheless, these occurrences of misfortune belong to God. This setback does not mean that God has forsaken them: “Our God is in heaven; he does

³See Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reyburn, *A Handbook of Psalms* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 972.

whatever pleases him” (115: 3). The psalmist then deals with the utter foolishness and inefficiency of idols. They are entirely powerless since they are without life:

But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. ⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; ⁶ they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; ⁷ they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. ⁸ Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. (115:4-8)

Following his denunciation of the idol gods, he then exhorts the Israelites to trust in the Lord in spite of external circumstances in life:

O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. ¹⁰ O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD— he is their help and shield. ¹¹ You who fear him, trust in the LORD— he is their help and shield. ¹² The LORD remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron, ¹³ he will bless those who fear the LORD— small and great alike. ¹⁴ May the LORD make you increase, both you and your children. ¹⁵ May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. ¹⁶ The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to man. (115:9-16)

Since death is certain of all of humanity, then we should live our lives in such a way that God is praised. The psalmist exclaims: “It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to silence; ¹⁸it is we who extol the LORD, both now and forevermore. Praise the LORD” (115:17-18).

GOD’S POWER IS LIMITLESS

In Psalm 114, the psalmist recounts the glory that belongs to God. In this present study on psalm 115, individuals are called upon to glorify God. The foreigners were assuming that the absence of miracles indicated that Israel’s God was nowhere to be found: “Where is their God?” (115:2b). This attitude disturbed the godly that Yahweh should be dishonored, thus, they called upon God to vindicate His honor. This statement, so it appears, is not so much about the whereabouts of Israel’s God as it is about the activity of Israel’s God. In other words, the rejecters of Yahweh were saying, “What’s happened to their God?”⁴ The psalmist responds by saying, “Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him” (115:3). Next, the psalmist contrast Israel’s invisible God with the weakness of the Gentile gods in order to illustrate that Yahweh is supreme and His power is limitless. On the other hand, the gods of the heathen were lifeless, powerless, and ineffective. Once more, read the words of the psalmist with an open ear:

But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. ⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; ⁶ they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; ⁷ they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. ⁸ Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. (115:4-8)

⁴See Batcher and Reyburn, *Psalms*, 973.

This psalm is a psalm for God’s people who still live in a world of people who trust the gods they have made. This psalm is a psalm that is concerned about faith. Today, we, as Christians, live in a world in which governments, as well as individuals, do not trust in the Lord. We, often times, respond in the same way to tragedy that the ungodly do—a denial of God. **We cannot help but wonder how this psalm fits our understanding of God.** Are we measuring our faith in God based upon our perception of how God ought to act? How do we act in response to sickness? What kind of actions do we exhibit to financial loss? How do we answer the horrors of various heinous, or monstrous, crimes that we see on TV or read in the newspapers? As we face the trials of life, what is our comeback: “Where is God?” For the psalmist, God is still God, even if we cannot explain misfortune. We may pray for relief from circumstances that create doubt, but, if God does not intervene, we must still trust in the Lord.

WHERE IS GOD IN TRAGEDY?

Is it not in this vein that Paul prays for relief from his “thorn in the flesh”? Listen to Paul as he explains his reaction to God’s refusal to remove the “thorn”:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Do we “delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, and in difficulties”? Do we resent God for the tragedies in our lives?

Trusting in God

Are we willing to trust God in spite of circumstances in our lives? Many believers suffer from various physical disabilities, yet, thousands continue to put their trust in God. Even though many of us have lost relatives, yet, we are still faithful to God. Numerous Christians in reading this chapter are presently experiencing trying times, but still they will not allow their problems or disappointments in life to dampen their faith. Do we trust in the Lord? Are our prayers the words of the psalmist? We should focus once more on the words of the psalmist:

O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. ¹⁰ O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. ¹¹ You who fear him, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. (115:9-11)

Job: An Example of Trust

Just what does it mean to trust in the Lord? Perhaps, Job is a classic example of what it means to trust in the Lord in spite of difficulties. Do we sometimes think that things are too tough for us to trust in God? Listen to the narrator of Job as he reveals the devastation that Job encountered.⁵ His troubles fell on him just like the rapid fire of a machine gun—bang, bang, bang, bang. The following is an account of the heartbreak he suffered:

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁴ a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁶ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁷ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁸ While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1: 13-19)

In the first scenario, Job's oxen and donkeys were stolen and his servants were killed. Next, fire fell from heaven and killed his sheep and more of his servants. Then, the narrator, or Job, tells about a raiding party that took off with his camels and put additional servants to death. And finally, his sons and daughters were killed in a storm. How would we have reacted if this had happened to us? Would we still put our trust in God? Would we blame God for wrongdoing? Would our first response be to worship God? How did Job counter these tragedies? Again, the storyteller allows his readers to see behind the scenes:

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. **The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away**; may the name of the LORD be praised." ²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. (1:20-22)

CONCLUSION

The trust that Job manifested is the same kind of trust that the psalmist is emphasizing to his readers. This psalm is as relevant today as it was during the time of its author. This psalm is a call for us to live by the knowledge God has given us in His history of salvation. God uses the psalms to give knowledge of His holy history in order to evoke praise and trust from us. The messages of Psalms 114 and 115 are timely for any generation. We must never forget the words of the psalmist: "He will bless those who fear the LORD—small and

⁵The Book of Job may have been written by Job himself. If so he wrote in the third person, which means that Job stood on the outside, as it were, looking in on the events that transpired.

great alike” (Psalm 115:13). Whether we are rich or poor does not make any difference, whether we are educated or uneducated does not make any difference, whether we are of humble birth or exalted birth does not make any difference. If we fear God, then God will bless us. Has not God remembered us in the sending of His Son? Has not God blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ?

We, as the people of God, should always keep in mind the words of the psalmist: “The LORD remembers us and will bless us” (v. 12). Just as God blessed the children of Israel, so God still blesses us “through” Jesus Christ. The blessings of God apply to all generations. Do we remember Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost? His sermon went into the very depth of the hearts of those who had crucified Him. On that day, three thousand asked what to do to be saved. He responded by saying:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:38-39)

The One who is willing to save is the Maker of heaven and earth. Again, the psalmist says, “May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalm 115:15). **If we believe that God is the “Maker of heaven and earth,” then we will live to God’s glory and not our own.** It is as the psalmist says, “It is we who extol the LORD, both now and forevermore” (115:18). Our applause will never end. Our joy for salvation will grow louder and louder as we reflect upon redemption “in” Christ Jesus. Is it any wonder that Jesus and the Twelve sang this psalm in their last Paschal meal together? Even though we will go down to the grave, still the praises of God on earth will continue through our children, even children not yet born.

Are we bringing our children and grandchildren up in the nurture of the Lord? Are we telling them about God’s love? Are we telling them about redemption in Jesus? Are we telling them about God sending His Son into the world to provide salvation? God wants every believer to tell the old, old story of the Cross of Calvary. In conclusion, the testimony of another psalm (Psalm 78) is called to witness God’s desire for us, His people, to pass on the history of God concerning His blessings bestowed upon Israel.

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. ² I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—³ what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. ⁴ **We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.** (Psalm 78:1-4)

What does Psalm 115 mean to us? Do we tremble in the presence of the Lord? Do we praise the name of the Lord? Do we trust in the Lord? Do we allow our troubles to dampen our spiritual fervor? Are we lukewarm about spiritual things? Do we praise Him for all our spiritual and physical blessings? Have we related to our children “the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD”? Have we told them about His power and His scheme of redemption through Jesus His Son? If not, why not?