

“O Briarwood, Trust in the Lord”
Psalm 115
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In this study we’ll work our way through Psalm 115. A psalm is perhaps a song, a psalm or a poem that is put to music. For those of you who know me well know I’m not necessarily drawn to poetry books and that’s okay because I appreciate people deeper who are more culturally rich than me. However, I have grown to love the Psalms, to embrace and hear the heart and passion of the psalm writers who are rich in expression, telling us of their love for the Lord and crying out to Him. I would encourage a study of the Psalms to you. So let’s start by looking at Psalm 115. It is God’s Word, infallible, inerrant and absolutely sufficient.

Psalm 115:1–17 says *[1] Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!*

[2] Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” [3] Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

[4] Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. [5] They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. [6] They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. [7] They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. [8] Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

[9] O Israel, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. [10] O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. [11] You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.

[12] The LORD has remembered us; he 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, both the small and the great. [14] May the LORD give you increase, you and your children! [15] May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth!

[16] The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man. [17] The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence. [18] But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!

A Psalm just like any song is written for a purpose. The Psalm writer has some event, emotion or need to communicate in their life and they want to do it in a powerful sense so they put it into a poem or a rhyme or in this case to music. So in many cases with the psalms some event has taken place and it causes them to write about whatever particular emotion it brings out of them around that event.

Our music director here at the church, Clay, has such a broad knowledge of music and this includes all music and not just Christian music. You could throw out a lyric to him and he could just about tell you the song it was from but what really tickles me is when he’ll add something like ‘oh yeah that was in so-in-so’s phase and I think they lost their dog during that time’ or ‘their girlfriend broke up with them so for the next six years they wrote all these melancholy songs’ or ‘that was during their drug phase and none of their songs made much sense during that time.’

In other words, the composer of the song was writing songs based on what was taking place in their life and that would be true of the Psalms. Often times when studying a particular Psalm it can be helpful to figure out what was going on during the time that Psalm was written so that you can understand the context of actually what is trying to be communicated.

So what is the context of Psalm 115? We don't know because we're not told the time in which this was written and there is not enough in this Psalm where you could figure out what is being referred to but we do try to find out when it was written to try to get some meaning into it. Charles Spurgeon has said that this Psalm was often sung at Passover so it would remind them to give glory to God, not to themselves, to worship God, to trust God and not to trust in idols.

Psalm 115 is most quoted on the heels of great victory. For instance, at the end of World War I and World War II Christian leaders have been known to quote this Psalm. They would say from Psalm 115:1 [1] *Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!* It's been heard from coaches at football games and other sporting events, the very same verse. It is used in appropriate context because they don't want others to think that they accomplished this victory on their own. They want to give the glory to God.

We use this Psalm a lot here at Briarwood when we pray and ask the Lord to lead us into missions, in our giving with our stretch goals and our hallelujah goal. Then by God's grace we surpass that goal and what do we say? *Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory.* When we have an evangelistic event and we see God open the minds and hearts of people we are very careful and say *Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory.* These are all appropriate uses of the Psalm because it is a declaration where we do not want glory to go to us but we want all the glory to go to our Lord.

However, that is not the context that this Psalm 115 was written in. It wasn't written in the context of giving praise to God on the heels of a victory although that is appropriate to do but the context of this Psalm is that the church is being mocked. The unbelievers, heathens, pagans and the world are mocking the church and they are basically saying 'here's my god where's yours? Here is what I worship, where's yours? You don't have anything tangible yet here's mine.'

The reason for this is because right after Psalm 115:1 it says in verse 2, [2] *Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"* The Psalmist wanted to know why the church was being mocked by these nations. I want to give you a few reasons for this and I'm sure there are many more but one is the world has a definition of a god and ours does not fit it. If you were mankind getting ready to create a god would you not create one that would agree with you? If you don't then you're doubly dumb. Why would you create a god to contradict you or tell you that which you don't want to do? Our world creates gods and idols that say you ought to be able to believe and do whatever you want to do and to be fair let everyone else do the same, right up to the point it infringes upon what you want to do and then the whole god structure just breaks down at that point. So it's not a world driven by faith or what we don't see but it's driven by sight.

I would suggest that whatever gods they created was marvelous structures. And if you're late to the ballgame and there are already ten gods out there are you not going to create one bigger with a material better than what had already been used? That was pretty much what was happening – a bigger god and a bigger god kept being created then. You are going to put your trust in this god and you want your god to stand out. They look and can't see our God so they mock and say 'where is your God?' John tells us that no one has ever seen God. So I don't fault the world for looking at us and saying 'where is what you worship? All you have is a book.'

Secondly, they don't have the ability to see or experience our God. Let's be fair with the world. We experience our God by the power of the Holy Spirit. They don't have the Holy Spirit. Therefore I'm not surprised that they mock us or our God, the One that they can't see who is hidden in the Word of God. I Corinthians 2:14 says [14] *The natural person does not*

accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. So the only way you can understand God is for the Holy Spirit to give you insight. We're blessed that we can know and understand who our God is.

Thirdly, man in his sinfulness tends to mock what he can't see or understand. Even Christians tend to mock what they don't see or know. So the world would certainly mock our God. All of those are real factors that keep the world from seeing our God. The last reason is a little more convicting at least it is for me.

They can't see our God because our God is perfected in the lives of the believers. When they say 'where is your God' they are supposed to see our God in us. I John 4:12 says [12] *No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.* It doesn't mean that God's love is lacking anything. You could also say 'His love is fleshed out in us.' In other words the world cannot see God but the world is supposed to see God in our love, in our love for God and our love for one another. They should marvel at your love for one another. They should be confused and intrigued by your love for one another. That doesn't mean they are going to quit mocking but it means that is supposed to be the thing that entices them to do that. They would love to be loved that way and to figure out how you do love others that way.

The world is thinking, 'how can you be so forgiving to one another, how can you be so loving to each other, how can you bear no wrongs with each other, how can you hope all things with each other?' The world is supposed to see the love we have for one another so when the Psalmist says 'where is your God?' that is a convicting statement. If our nation or culture says to us 'where is your God' then that should be a convicting statement for they are supposed to see our God in the way we relate one to another.

The answer the Psalmist gives to the heathens is in verse 3. Psalm 115:3 says [3] *Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.* If the world wants their gods to be at the top of the hill, then they have to move them there or if they want them to shine then they have to polish them so your god does what you want it to do but our God is in heaven and He does all that He pleases to do. We serve a God who is not limited to this earth. He resides in heaven where He should be which is a place He has created for Himself. It's not just a distant place but a holy place. It is set apart, it's perfect with a place for no sin.

Our God is sovereign. He doesn't answer to you, me or anyone. He is in absolute complete control. He is the authority above all authorities. He is not moved or impacted by nature. He is not moved by the will of man. He accomplishes His will and everyone should want a God that is so sovereign and omnipotent otherwise you have a vulnerable and lesser god. So this is what the Psalmist says about his God so now let's talk about your god.

Here the Psalmist describes the world's god. Psalm 115:4–8 says [4] *Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. [5] They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. [6] They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. [7] They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. [8] Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.*

He says to them they have done a great job of making their god look like something but he is nothing. He looks powerful and is an intimidating figure but he doesn't do anything. The Psalmist would say 'surely you see that, right?' You do see that your god is inanimate? You do see that your god does nothing? I am amazed at some of the gods, idols, and heroes in our culture and to see what takes place in their life where in a few months a cultural god dies a predictable, wrecked death and people are shocked. I think, 'you did know that was coming,

didn't you?' You did know that was the ultimate end to that lifestyle? Yet they are shocked. They did it to themselves.

I was in my car the other day listening to a sport's talk show on the radio. These sports people really wanted Seth Curry to speak to these political and social issues of our day. I thought 'why?' The man can shoot a basketball like crazy but I'm not willing to ask him to solve the national debt in our nation. I don't want him to tell me how to raise my children but because someone can do one thing great we tend to build that into a god. Then we give ourselves to that and worship it. Then we hang on the very word that person speaks as if somehow that could appease us.

Let's look at Isaiah 44 for Isaiah speaks of this ridiculous worship of idols. Isaiah 44:9–18 says [9] *All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. [10] Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? [11] Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together.*

[12] The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. [13] The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. [14] He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. [15] Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. [16] Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" [17] And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"

[18] They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. This takes us back to Psalm 115:8 which says [8] *Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.* In other words, those who make these useless idols become like them. They are useless and so do those who put their trust in them. Why do they become like that?

Romans 1:24–25 says [24] *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.* The Psalmist is pointing out that we become like that which we worship. So when you worship inanimate, senseless, hopeless things then you become senseless and hopeless and that's not just because that is some equation but it's because God gives you over to yourself. He does that in the hope that you'll look at that and say 'this is foolish, this is ridiculous for there has to be something better than this.' Yet we know, sadly, that many don't realize this. You become like what you worship. There is certainly a negative connotation to that but also a positive one for if you worship Jesus Christ you become like Christ. So the Psalmist is telling us not to put our trust in, hope in or bow down to the idols of this world.

Then in Psalm 115:9 the Psalmist begins what I would call the chorus of this Psalm. Psalm 115:9–11 says [9] *O Israel, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. [10] O*

house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. [11] You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.

I would guess that perhaps the music leader would sing first and then the people would respond to his singing by singing the next sentence because ‘He is their help and their shield’ is repeated after the first sentence of each of those verses. Clearly there are these three designations – Israel, the house of Aaron and those who fear the Lord. When it says Israel in the Old Testament it means the nation of Israel so he is telling Israel to not put their trust in anything but the Lord because He and He alone is their help, provider and protector. He will give them all they need for the day and a double portion on the day before the Sabbath so you’ll make it through the Sabbath. When we think of Him giving us everything we need for the day that can make us feel uncomfortable. Lord, could we work it out for you to give me what I need for the year? Then that way, if we articulate it, I won’t have to trust Him as much because we’ll see that we have it. No, He will give you what you need for the day. He is your shield so He will protect you as well.

Then he talks specifically to the house of Aaron who are those who lead in worship. These would be the priests. Then he tells the spiritual leaders to trust in the Lord in an outward, visible way before the nation Israel. We can’t hope that the people of the nation Israel trust in the Lord if the house of Aaron is not trusting in the Lord. House of Aaron, you must trust in the Lord before the people so that they will see you, be encouraged, and to be taught how to trust in the Lord. Don’t place your trust in your past successes or the skills, gifts, and talents the Lord has given you or in your positions just because you were born a Levite. Trust, depend and lean on Him completely.

Then in verse 11 he talks specifically to those who fear the Lord. This can’t be a subset of the house of Aaron and it’s not a subset of the nation Israel. He is talking to us. So who are the others that trust the Lord? If you go back far enough you’ll have Rahab and her family and those grafted into the family of the Lord. It is all who believe in the Lord that He tells them to trust in the Lord. Don’t lean on your own abilities or take your cues from the world.

Think about this. If you had been a non-Israelite believer, wouldn’t you have felt more vulnerable than an Israelite believer? The Israelite believer has their government, their God leading them and then you get grafted into that so wouldn’t you have been susceptible to more fear? So He is telling those who fear the Lord not to trust in the idols of this world but in Him alone. Put your whole trust in the Lord for He is your provider and protector, your help and shield.

He only is your help and shield, so what will happen to those who trust in the Lord? Psalm 115:12–13 says [12] *The LORD has remembered us; he 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, both the small and the great.* He takes the three categories – Israel, house of Aaron, and those who fear the Lord – and not only says the Lord is their help and shield but He will also bless them.

How can you declare that He will bless us? One of the reasons the psalmist knows God will bless us is because of the first part of verse 12 which says ‘the Lord **has** remembered us.’ At any point in your life, every once in a while, you have to take a snapshot and answer this question; up until this point in your life with your walk with the Lord, has the Lord ever forsaken you? No. Has the Lord given you every prayer request you have asked of Him? No. Has the Lord blessed you the way you hoped to be blessed? No. I didn’t get this job I wanted or that relationship I had hoped for. Did the Lord forsake you? Eventually you find out that the Lord

blessed you even in the midst of not giving you that job or that relationship or whatever you had hoped for.

I often times marvel at our pastor for many different reasons but when he found out that he had the aortic aneurism, as he was leaving the doctor's office he called me to tell me. Our pastor is a verbal processor where he has a few billion words he uses on an hourly basis no matter what the need. When he was telling me what he had just found out he said in the midst of it 'Bruce, praise the Lord for prostate cancer that the Lord blessed me with that.' Do you know how silly that sounds, because it didn't feel like a blessing? But if it hadn't been for his prostate cancer he would not have known he had this aneurism. See, when the Lord blesses you it doesn't always feel like a blessing but you can trust that He is blessing you.

The Psalmist is reminding us that He has never forsaken us and He never will so I can say with confidence 'He has remembered us and He will bless us' by bringing about His good and perfect will. That will be the ultimate blessing to us. It is not our will but His good and perfect will and then the Psalmist puts in this statement that I love – He will bless those who fear Him, both the small and the great – every last one of us. No matter how significant or insignificant you may feel there are no insignificant believers. No matter how small or big you might feel and if you want to compare yourself to anyone else big or small, He will bless you, both small and great. I wonder if those grafted into the nation Israel as believers just grinned when they heard that. The Lord will bless us too and bring about His good and perfect will in their life too.

Then he gives a prayer for them. Psalm 115:14–15 says [14] *May the LORD give you increase, you and your children!* [15] *May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth!* Remember this is in a spiritual context, so how is it that the Lord increases the children of God? He does it through evangelism and salvation. So may the true elect of the Lord grow and grow until the day of Christ Jesus' return. We know that He will do that. He has already promised us that He will do that and then he transitions this part to the heavens which is the Lord's heavens.

Psalm 115:16–18 says [16] *The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man.* [17] *The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence.* [18] *But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!* He says the Lord resides in heaven which is perfect and holy and God's children reside there.

When it says He has given the earth to the children of man it doesn't mean God has no power over the earth for He hasn't given it over exclusively. Then we see that when the Lord gave the earth to man, we messed it up so the curse of sin brought death, separation from God. So now there are those separate from God and they don't praise the Lord. He saying to praise the Lord while He may be praised and bless the Lord while He is available to be blessed for to leave this world without the Lord means there is no opportunity then to bless the Lord. Then the Psalmist ends with that great declaration in verse 18 where we will bring blessings to the Lord because He will glorify Himself through us.

I want to end with this antiphonal statement that is made – O Israel trust in the Lord, for he is their help and their shield. This is good for us to hear and be charged with this. I'm not going to add to or take away from scripture just for the point of application. We need to remember this and hold fast to it. Psalm 115:9–11 says [9] *O Israel, trust in the LORD! **He is their help and their shield.*** [10] *O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! **He is their help and their shield.*** [11] *You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! **He is their help and their shield.***

O Briarwood, trust in the Lord! ***He is their help and their shield.*** Elders, deacons, and staff of this church, trust in the Lord! ***He is their help and their shield.*** Pastor Reeder, trust in the Lord! ***He is their help and their shield.*** Let's pray.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I thank You so much that You and You alone are trustworthy. Lord, may we receive from You as we receive from the Psalmist the call to trust completely in You. I pray for each and every one of us that we would identify the issues, the footholds and the gaps in our lives that would incline us not to trust in You or to put our trust in something other than You. Lord, we confess that before You so that we would trust wholeheartedly in You for You alone are our Provider. You alone give us what we need for the day to walk with You, glorify You and praise You. You are our Protector and our Shield so we pray, not to us, but to Your Name, You Lord give Yourself all glory, honor and praise and I pray that in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.