

PSALM 115

Many ancient translations join this psalm to that which goes next before it, the Septuagint particularly, and the vulgar Latin; but it is, in the Hebrew, a distinct psalm. In it we are taught to give glory,

I. To God, and not to ourselves (v. 1).

II. To God, and not to idols (v. 2-8). We must give glory to God,

1. By trusting in him, and in his promise and blessing (v. 9-15).

2. By blessing him (v. 16-18). Some think this psalm was penned upon occasion of some great distress and trouble that the church of God was in, when the enemies were in insolent and threatening, in which case the church does not so much pour out her complaint to God as place her confidence in God, and triumph in doing so; and with such a holy triumph we ought to sing this psalm.

~~HEB~~ PSALM 115:1-8

THE ABSURDITY OF IDOLATRY

Sufficient care is here taken to answer both the pretensions of self and the reproaches of idolaters.

I. Boasting is here for ever excluded, v. 1. Let no opinion of our own merits have any room either in our prayers or in our praises, but let both centre in God's glory.

1. Have we received any mercy, gone through any service, or gained any success? We must not assume the glory of it to ourselves, but ascribe it wholly to God. We must not imagine that we do any thing for God by our own strength, or deserve any thing from God by our own righteousness; but 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 therefore he must have all the praise. Say not, *The power of my hand has gotten me this wealth,*

~~HEB~~ Deuteronomy 8:17. Say not, *For my righteousness the Lord has done*

these great and kind things for me, ~~1800~~ Deuteronomy 9:4. No; all our songs must be sung to this humble tune, *Not unto us, O Lord!* and again, *Not unto us, but to thy name*, let all the glory be given; for whatever good is wrought in us, or wrought for us, it is for his mercy and his truth's sake, because he will glorify his mercy and fulfil his promise. All our crowns must be cast at the feet of *him that sits upon the throne*, for that is the proper place for them.

2. Are we in pursuit of any mercy and wrestling with God for it? We must take our encouragement, in prayer, from God only, and have an eye to his glory more than to our own benefit in it. "Lord, do so and 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." This must be our highest and ultimate end in our prayers, and therefore it is made the first petition in the Lord's prayer, as that which guides all the rest, *Hallowed be thy name*; and, in order to that, *Give us our daily bread*, etc. This also must satisfy us, if our prayers be not answered in the letter of them. Whatever becomes of us, *unto thy name give glory*. See ~~1807~~ John 12:27, 28.

II. The reproach of the heathen is here for ever silenced and justly retorted.

1. The psalmist complains of the reproach of the heathen (v. 2): *Wherefore should they say, Where is now their God?*

(1.) "Why do they say so? Do they not know that our God is every where by his providence, and always nigh to us by his promise and grace?"

(2.) "Why does God permit them to say so? Nay, why is Israel brought so low that they have some colour for saying so? Lord, appear for our relief, that thou mayest vindicate thyself, and glorify thy own name."

2. He gives a direct answer to their question, v. 3. "Do they ask where is our God? We can tell where he is."

(1.) "In the upper world is the presence of his glory: *Our God is in the heavens*, where the gods of the heathen never were, *in the heavens*, and therefore out of sight; but, though his majesty be unapproachable, it does not therefore follow that his being is questionable."

(2.) "In the lower world are the products of his power: *He has done whatsoever he pleased*, according to the counsel of his will; he has a

sovereign dominion and a universal uncontrollable influence. Do you ask where he is? He is at the beginning and end of every thing, *and not far from any of us.*”

3. He returns their question upon themselves. They asked, Where is the God of Israel? because he is not seen. He does in effect ask, What are the gods of the heathen? because they are seen.

(1.) He shows that their gods, though they are not shapeless things, are senseless things. Idolaters, at first, worshipped the sun and moon (^{<3815>}Job 31:26), which was bad enough, but not so bad as that which they were now come to (for evil men grow worse and worse), which was the worshipping of images, v. 4. The matter of them was *silver and gold*, dug out of the earth (*man found them poor and dirty in a mine*, Herbert), proper things to make money of, but not to make gods of. The make of them was from the artificer; they are creatures of men's vain imaginations and *the works of men's hands*, and therefore can have no divinity in them. If man is the work of God's hands (as certainly he is, and it was his honour that he was made *in the image of God*) it is absurd to think that that can be God which is the work of men's hands, or that it can be any other than a dishonour to God to make him in the image of man. The argument is irrefragable: *The workmen made it, therefore it is not God*, ^{<3816>}Hosea 8:6. These idols are represented here as the most ridiculous things, a mere jest, that would seem to be something, but were really nothing, fitter for a toy shop than a temple, for children to play with than for men to pray to. The painter, the carver, the statuary, did their part well enough; they made them with *mouths and eyes, ears and noses, hands and feet*, but they could put no life into them and therefore no sense. They had better have worshipped a dead carcass (for that had life in it once) than a dead image, which neither has life nor can have. *They speak not*, in answer to those that consult them; the crafty priest must speak for them. In Baal's image there was *no voice, neither any that answered. They see not* the prostrations of their worshippers before them, much less their burdens and wants. *They hear not* their prayers, though ever so loud; *they smell not* their incense, though ever so strong, ever so sweet; *they handle not* the gifts presented to them, much less have they any gifts to bestow on their worshippers; they cannot *stretch forth their hands to the needy. They walk not*, they cannot stir a step for the relief of those that apply to them. Nay, they do not so much as *breathe through their throat*; they have not the least sign of symptom of life, but are as dead, after the priest has pretended to

consecrate them and call a deity into them, as they were before.

(2.) He thence infers the sottishness of their worshippers (v. 8): *Those that make them images show their ingenuity, and doubtless are sensible men; but those that make them gods show their stupidity and folly, and are like unto them, as senseless blockish things; they see not the invisible things of the true and living God in the works of creation; they hear not the voice of the day and the night, which in every speech and language declare his glory,* ^{<198>}Psalm 19:2, 3. By worshipping these foolish puppets, they make themselves more and more foolish like them, and set themselves at a greater distance from every thing that is spiritual, sinking themselves deeper into the mire of sense; and withal they provoke God to *give them up to a reprobate mind, a mind void of judgment,* ^{<103>}Romans 1:28. Those *that trust in them* act very absurdly and very unreasonably, are senseless, helpless, useless, like them; and they will find it so themselves, to their own confusion. We shall know where our God is, and so shall they, to their cost, when their gods are gone, ^{<240>}Jeremiah 10:3-11; ^{<244>}Isaiah 44:9, etc.

^{<115>}PSALM 115:9-18

CONFIDENCE IN GOD ENCOURAGED

In these verses,

I. We are earnestly exhorted, all of us, to repose our confidence in God, and not suffer our confidence in him to be shaken by the heathens' insulting over us upon the account of our present distresses. 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 do *trust in them*, a help to furnish them with and forward them in that which is good, and a shield to fortify them against and protect them from every thing that is evil. Therefore,

- 1.** Let Israel trust in the Lord; the body of the people, as to their public interests, and every particular Israelite, as to his own private concerns, let them leave it to God to dispose of all for them, and believe it will dispose of all for the best and will be *their help and shield*.
- 2.** Let the priests, the Lord's ministers, and all the families of the *house of Aaron, trust in the Lord*, (v. 10); they are most maligned and struck at by the enemies and therefore of them God takes particular care. They ought to

be examples to others of a cheerful confidence in God, and a faithful adherence to him in the worst of times.

3. Let the proselytes, who are not of the seed of Israel, but *fear the Lord*, who worship him and make conscience of their duty to him, let them *trust in him*, for he will not fail nor forsake them, v. 11. Note, Wherever there is an awful fear of God, there may be a cheerful faith in him: those that reverence his word may rely upon it.

II. We are greatly encouraged to trust in God, and good reason is given us why we should stay ourselves upon him with an entire satisfaction. Consider,

1. What we have experienced (v. 12): *The Lord has been mindful of us*, and never unmindful, has been so constantly, has been so remarkably upon special occasions. He has been mindful of our case, our wants and burdens, mindful of our prayers to him, his promises to us, and the covenant-relation between him and us. All our comforts are derived from God's *thoughts to us-ward*; he *has been mindful of us*, though we have forgotten him. Let *this* engage us to trust in him, that we have found him faithful.

2. What we may expect. From what he has done for us we may infer, *He will bless us*; he that has been our *help and our shield* will be so; he that has *remembered us in our low estate* will not forget us; for he is still the same, his power and goodness the same, and his promise inviolable; so that we have reason to hope that he who has delivered, and does, will yet deliver. Yet this is not all: *He will bless us*; he has promised that he will; he has pronounced a blessing upon all his people. God's blessing us is not only speaking good to us, but doing well for us; those whom he blesses are blessed indeed. It is particularly promised that *he will bless the house of Israel*, that is, he will bless the commonwealth, will bless his people in their civil interests. *He will bless the house of Aaron*, that is, the church, the ministry, will bless his people in their religious concerns. The priests were to bless the people; it was their office (⁴⁴⁶²³Numbers 6:23); but God blessed them, and so blessed their blessings. Nay (v. 13), *he will bless those that fear the Lord*, though they be not of the house of Israel or the house of Aaron; for it was a truth, before Peter perceived it, *That in every nation he that fears God is accepted or him*, and blessed, ⁴⁴⁰³⁸Acts 10:34, 35. *He will bless them both small and great*, both young and old. God has

blessings in store for those that are good betimes and for those that are old disciples, both those that are poor in the world and those that make a figure. The greatest need his blessing, and it shall not be denied to the meanest that fear him. Both the weak in grace and the strong shall be blessed of God, the lambs and the sheep of his flock. It is promised (v. 14), *The Lord shall increase you*. Whom God blesses he increases; that was one of the earliest and most ancient blessings, *Be fruitful and multiply*. God's blessing gives an increase — increase in number, building up the family — increase in wealth, adding to the estate and honour — especially an increase in spiritual blessings, with the increasings of God. He will bless you with the increase of knowledge and wisdom, of grace, holiness, and joy; those are blessed indeed whom God thus increases, who are made wiser and better, and fitter for God and heaven. It is promised that this shall be,

(1.) A constant continual increase: “*He shall increase you more and more*; so that, as long as you live, you shall be still increasing, till you come to perfection, as the shining light,” ²⁰⁴⁸Proverbs 4:18.

(2.) An hereditary increase: “*You and your children; you in your children*.” It is a comfort to parents to see their children increasing in wisdom and strength. There is a blessing entailed upon the seed of those that fear God even in their infancy. For (v. 15), *You are blessed of the Lord, you and your children are so; all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord has blessed*, ²³⁹⁰Isaiah 59:9. Those that are the blessed of the Lord have encouragement enough to *trust in the Lord*, as *their help and shield*, for it is he that *made heaven and earth*; therefore his blessings are free, for he needs not any thing himself; and therefore they are rich, for he has all things at command for us if we fear him and trust in him. He that *made heaven and earth* can doubtless make those happy that trust in him, and will do it.

III. We are stirred up to praise God by the psalmist's example, who concludes the psalm with a resolution to persevere in his praises.

1. God is to be praised, v. 16. He is greatly to be praised; for,

(1.) His glory is high. See how stately his palace is, and the throne he has prepared in the heavens: *The heaven, even the heavens are the Lord's*; he is the rightful owner of all the treasures of light and bliss in the upper and

better world, and is in the full possession of them, for he is himself infinitely bright and happy.

(2.) His goodness is large, for *the earth he has given to the children of men*, having designed it, when he made it, for their use, to find them with meat, drink, and lodging. Not but that still he is proprietor in chief; *the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*; but he has let out that vineyard to these unthankful husbandmen, and from them he expects the rents and services; for, though he has given them the earth, his eye is upon them, and he will call them to render an account how they use it. Calvin complains that profane wicked people, in his days, perverted this scripture, and made a jest of it, which some in our days do, arguing, in banter, that God, having given the earth to the children of men, will no more look after it, nor after them upon it, but they may do what they will with it, and make the best of it as their portion; it is as it were thrown like a prey among them, Let him seize it that can. It is a pity that such an instance as this gives of God's bounty to man, and such a proof as arises from it of man's obligation to God, should be thus abused. From the highest heavens, it is certain, God beholds all the children of men; to them he has given the earth; but to the children of God heaven is given.

2. The dead are not capable of praising him (v. 17), nor *any that go into silence*. The soul indeed lives in a state of separation from the body and is capable of praising God; and *the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burdens of the flesh*, do praise God, are still praising him; for they go up to the land of perfect light and constant business. But the dead body cannot praise God; death puts an end to our glorifying God in this world of trial and conflict, to all our services in the field; the grave is a land of darkness and silence, where there is no work or device. This they plead with God for deliverance out of the hand of their enemies, "Lord, if they prevail to cut us off, the idols will carry the day, and there will be none to praise thee, to bear thy name, and to bear a testimony against the worshippers of idols." *The dead praise not the Lord*, so as we do in the business and for the comforts of this life. See ~~100~~ Psalm 30:9; 88:10.

3. Therefore it concerns us to praise him (v. 18): "*But we, we that are alive, will bless the Lord*; we and those that shall come after us, will do it, *from this time forth and for evermore*, to the end of time; we and those we

shall remove to, *from this time forth* and to eternity. *The dead praise not the Lord*, therefore we will do it the more diligently.”

(1.) Others are dead, and an end is thereby put to their service, and therefore we will lay out ourselves to do so much the more for God, that we may fill up the gap. *Moses my servant is dead, now therefore, Joshua, arise.*

(2.) We ourselves must shortly go to the land of silence; *but, while we do live, we will bless the Lord*, will improve our time and work that work of him that sent us into the world to praise him before the night comes, and because *the night comes, wherein no man can work. The Lord will bless us* (v. 12); he will do well for us, and therefore *we will bless him*, we will speak well of him. Poor returns for such receivings! Nay, we will not only do it ourselves, but will engage others to do it. *Praise the Lord*; praise him with us; praise him in your places, as we in ours; praise him when we are gone, that he may be praised *for evermore. Hallelujah.*