

Why we Trust in God - Psalm 115

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[0 : 00] Good morning church. Happy New Year to you all. I can't think of any better way to start out the New Year than by singing songs of praise with you guys, with praying together with you guys, and opening up God's word together.

Our passage this morning is Psalm 115. So if you want to turn with me, I'll read our passage for us. And then I'll pray, and then we'll dive in.

Psalm 115 starting in verse 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.

Why should the nations say, Where's their God? Our God is in the heavens. He does all that He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

They have mouths, but do not speak. Eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear.

Noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel.

[1 : 08] Feet, but do not walk. And they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them. O Israel, trust in the Lord.

He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord. He is their help and their shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord. He is their help and their shield.

The Lord has remembered us. He will bless us. He will bless the house of Israel. He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the Lord, both the small and the great.

May the Lord give you increase, you and your children. May you be blessed by the Lord who made heaven and earth. The heavens are the Lord's heavens. But the earth, he is given to the children of man.

The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any who go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord.

[2 : 10] Would you pray with me? Lord God, Lord God Almighty Maker of heaven and earth, the supreme Creator, this morning and this first day of the new year, we as those that you have bought and redeemed through the blood of Christ declare not to us, but to your name be the glory.

Lord, we thank you for this passage that tells us about your faithfulness, about your goodness. And Father, we thank you that this passage teaches us how to trust you in no matter what circumstance we find ourselves in.

So I pray that you'll be with me as I preach your word, maybe your word and not mine, and be with us as a body, help us to glean what you have for us here. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Not to us, but to your name be glory. I pray that that is the cry of our hearts this morning as we begin this new year together. Now that popular first verse has a long history of being used throughout history at times of great victory.

So at the battle of Agincourt during the Hundred Years' War when the English army defeated the French army in an underdog battle, they recited Psalm 114 and Psalm 115 aloud.

[3 : 27] And at the words, non-nobes domine, they knelt. Not to us, oh Lord. My favorite use of this Psalm though, the first verse is actually the story of William Wilberforce.

This resilient five-foot-three warrior fought to abolish the slave trade in England for 46 years.

Twenty years to abolish the trade, and then 26 more years to abolish slavery throughout the British Empire.

And on the day that the parliament finally abolished the slave trade, he went home and he meditated on Psalm 115 verse 1. Not to us, oh Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory.

This Psalm goes even farther back in usage though. This Psalm goes back to the time of Christ.

Psalm 115 is one of the Hallel Psalms, or the songs of praise.

And the Hallel Psalms were songs that the Jews would sing together during the Passover. Psalms 113 and 114 were before the Passover, and then 115 through 118 were afterwards.

[4 : 33] That means that hours before Jesus was crucified, Psalm 115 was on his lips and in his mind in his heart, as he sang these songs with his disciples and as he looked ahead to the cross.

So what better way to start out the new year than with this Psalm together? Now this passage is important for us this morning because we're entering into a new year that is filled with many different possibilities.

As we look ahead into the new year, I know we find ourselves in very many different states this morning. Some of us are really excited for this new year. There's new things to look forward to, new resolutions.

I'm going to hit the gym and finally lose those 15 pounds. I'm going to learn how to bake sourdough. That's my resolution. Those are both mine by the way, I think that would be great. But to many others, and maybe to you this morning, this year does not bring a sense of excitement.

It brings a sense of discouragement. The problems of last year of 2022, of last week, of yesterday, they're all still with you.

[5 : 44] You're stressed about money, maybe about a relationship, maybe about your family, your health, maybe even your faith is feeling weak this morning.

Well you aren't alone. Israel found themselves in the same place all the time. And this Psalm was written in the time of particular discouragement and stress for Israel.

And the Psalmist is encouraging Israel to trust in the Lord. Many commentators believe this Psalm was written while Israel was in captivity in Babylon.

Can you imagine that? Far from your home in a foreign land, being mocked by people who worship idols of wood and stone, you're really feeling down in the dumps.

But in this beautiful Psalm, which was meant to be sung aloud by the people of Israel, even in their captivity, we are reminded of who God is, that he is faithful, that he is sovereign, that he is good, and because of those things we can worship him and we can trust him.

[6 : 55] So let's look at verses one through three together. Verse one says, Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory for the sake of Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness.

That declaration is how we should begin every day, that God may receive glory. At the center of the universe is not self, but God. And the Westminster Catechism says that the chief end of man, our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

But in our sinfulness, we try to compete for God's glory, don't we? We strive to put ourselves at the center. But that does nothing for us but make us miserable.

Tim Keller says it like this. He says, There's nothing that makes you more miserable or less interesting than self-absorption. But thankfully, the Bible says that God will not share his glory with another.

And we don't want him to, because our greatest good and highest joy will come when we live for God's glory in our lives, not our own. The Hebrew word for glory is kavod.

[8 : 06] And Dr. Vreeland can correct me if I'm wrong on my pronunciation, but the way that that's best translated as is heavy, heavy, kavod. So when we glorify God, we are seeing the vastness, the majesty, the power, the glory, the heaviness of God.

We're seeing him rightly for who he is. We're putting him in the proper place as the center of all things. So in many ways, I think this verse one is the motto of the Christian life.

We should start every day saying, Not to us, O Lord, but to your name be glory. In the second part of verse one, though, it says why we should give God all the glory. It says, Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

Because of God's steadfast love and faithfulness. Because God is good to his people. Because God does what he says he will do.

Now God's steadfast love and his faithfulness are two attributes that are identified with God's covenant promises to his people. Our God is a promise making and a promise keeping God.

[9 : 20] And to the Israelites that sang this song, this would have a lot of meaning as they thought back to the promises that God made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses that then extended down to them.

As they remembered that God described himself at Mount Sinai as the God of steadfast love and faithfulness. God had promised to make them his own people, that he would dwell among them and

that they would worship him forever.

And that's important for us to remember because in our context, Israel was not celebrating a victory. They were not in a William Wilberforce situation, far from it.

They were struggling. God had promised them a holy land, but they were in exile in Babylon. This song is not a song of victory. But what it is, is assurance that victory will come at the hand of the faithful God.

This song is a reminder to trust God. And that, as we will continue to see, is the central theme of this entire song, trusting in God.

[10:30] But that trust is not always easy, is it? And the unbelieving world sees this. Look with me at verse two. It says, why should the nations say, where's their God?

Can you hear the mocking tone which the nations use when they say this? You can imagine the mighty nations looking down at weak Israel at various points in their history and mocking her, saying, where's your God?

Look at your condition. You talk about God's power and love, and yet you're in captivity. Where's your God? There's really two senses to this question.

And first, it's a question of power. Think again of Israel and captivity. It'd be very easy for the nations to think that because of Israel's circumstances, God was not in control.

And I'm sure all of us could relate to this in some way. How easy is it for unbelievers to point to suffering and circumstances and ask us, where is your God?

[11:31] But the second sense of this question is most likely a very literal one. To the gentile nations around Israel, a God was seen in the carving of wood, a statue of gold or silver.

They would direct their worship towards a physical representation of a God. But where is Yahweh? He's nowhere to be seen. So how does the psalmist answer these taunts?

With a calm and competent answer. Look with me at verse 3. He says, our God is in the heavens. He does all that He pleases.

Notice how both senses of the mocking question are answered. The psalmist is making the point that God is sovereign. That means he is the sole ruler over all things.

Yes, he is invisible. He's not seen in a graven image, but he is reigning and he is ruling in heaven, far above all of the pedi-idols.

[12:32] And does he have power? He does all that he pleases. He's able to do whatever he wants to do. He may not act the way that Israel thinks he will act.

He may even let them go into captivity, but he is God and he is still reigning. Israel didn't always have the answers to why they were going through difficulties, but this much they did know at all times, God reigns.

And this is true for us today, who put our hope in Jesus Christ. We trust that God is reigning and ruling, even if our current circumstances look bleak.

And we must remember that God never promised to eradicate all evil until Jesus returns, and he will return. But tragedy and hardship and suffering, that's all part of this life.

It's a part of this fallen world in which we're living in right now. And so we can confidently say that even though we're perplexed about some of the suffering that we're going through, God is in the heavens.

[13:39] He does all that he pleases. In the midst of our hardships, we know that God knows what he is doing. We worship a God who's not a prisoner of circumstances, but their master.

So even when to our human eyes, it seems like things are falling apart. When we can't make sense of what is going on, we look up and we trust in the sovereign God.

I think the greatest example of this is the cross. In the midst of the agony of Golgotha, while the onlookers mocked and jeered our Savior, it looked as though the enemy had won for a while.

But the sovereign God had a plan. And in the midst of that awful scene, he was redeeming lost humanity. God is sovereign. And God is doing all that he pleases.

Let's look at verses 4 through 8 now. After stating that God does whatever he pleases, the psalmist tells us what the idols of the nations can't do. So let's read 4 through 8.

[14:45] Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths but do not speak. Eyes but do not see. They have ears but do not hear.

Noses but do not smell. They have hands but do not feel. Feet but do not walk. And they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them. So do all who trust in them.

First of all, see the contrast. Our God, who is faithful and steadfast, is in heaven, doing all that he pleases. But idols made of silver and gold by human hands.

They're beautiful, sure, beautiful craftsmanship, ultimately, they're powerless. They're dead. The psalmist highlights the powerlessness of idols by showing how human they look with all the features, but how lifeless they actually are.

He dismembers them, stating how all their parts do nothing. Church, idols offer promises that they cannot keep. Idols promise fulfillment, blessing, peace, prosperity, joy.

[15 : 58] But what do they actually provide? Let's look at verse 8. Those who make them, it says, those who make them become like them. So do all who trust in them.

There's a very important principle for worship here. You become like that which you worship. If you worship a dead idol, you're becoming like a dead idol.

Blind, deaf, lost. Not physically blind, deaf and lost, but spiritually. But thankfully, we don't worship dead idols, right? We don't worship graven images.

And there's few stories in the Old Testament that we feel more superior to the Israelites in than the golden calf at Mount Sinai, right? How silly they must have been to think they could craft a God and worship that.

That's something that they could make in their backyard would be a thing to worship. Almost too absurd to believe. That is until we examine our own idols that we have today.

[17 : 00] Imagine if the Israelites could see the idols we bowed down before. Cable news shows on big screen TVs. Grades on our report card.

Acceptance on social media. The Israelites would likely find our idols even more ridiculous than theirs. An idol is essentially a substitute God.

Anything that you trust in to give you what only God can give, that's an idol. So if you're trusting in anything to give you ultimate joy, ultimate meaning, ultimate significance, other than Jesus, then that is an idol.

Consider what idols have you crafted? What idols are you clinging to even today? Reflect even now.

That idol that you are harboring, our passage says, is killing you. That addiction you hide is sucking the life from out of you.

[18 : 03] That unforgiveness that you cling to is suffocating you. Those things only lead to death. What I'm not going to tell us this morning is to feel guilty and try harder to kill our idols.

This isn't a do issue. This is a heart issue. Feel the weight of your sin, repent of it, and run to the forgiveness of the cross. This morning we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper after the sermon. And one of the things that the Lord's Supper teaches us is that in Christ our sins have been forgiven. Completely cleansed, completely washed away. So bring your idols and surrender them at the foot of the cross.

Be free. Trust in God. Do not trust in idols. Because in contrast to worshipping dead idols, which causes you to die, worshipping the living God leads to eternal life.

Eternal life. Rather than being blind, deaf, and dumb, those who behold the glory of Jesus become like Him. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, he says this, And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

[19 : 25] When we worship Christ, when we worship the living God, we become like Him. And I can't think of anything better than being like Christ. So who or what are you worshipping?

What are you trusting in? Reflect on that this week. This Psalm tells us that trusting in idols kills us. But then that leads us to verses 9 through 11. And this is the central point, the central exclamation of this Psalm.

It says this. Oh Israel, trust in the Lord. He is their help and their shield. Oh House of Aaron, trust in the Lord. He is their help and their shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord.

He is their help and their shield. Now, this was meant to be sung in a corporate worship gathering sense, like this one, but in Babylon for Israel. And you can imagine a worship leader calling out to different groups in the congregation.

First of all, to Israel, to the sons of Israel, he says, oh Israel, trust in the Lord. And then Israel responds by saying he is their help and their shield.

[20 : 31] And then the worship leader turns to the House of Aaron, the priest, and he says, trust in the Lord. And they respond, he is their help and their shield. And then he turns to those who fear

the Lord.

That's probably the Gentiles, the outsiders, those who have been folded in to the faith. Trust in the Lord. And they respond, he is their help and their shield.

I love this passage right here because this is the community of God encouraging one another in worship. And that's something that we do on Sunday mornings. That's something we just did together that we're going to do after this.

Yes, in worship, we're primarily adoring God and making much of him. But when we sing the truths of God, we're teaching one another what is true about God. And we're encouraging one another to believe those truths and to live out those truths.

Singing together is a transformational activity. And this is what Israel's doing when they sing together. While they're in exile, discredits, they're saying, hey, trust in the Lord.

[21 : 34] He's your helper in your shield. Don't put your trust in anything else. Trust in the Lord in this hard time. And I find this picture so beautiful. Israel bolstering one another.

Now the phrase, he is their help and shield, it reminds Israel that they have nothing to worry about because God is their shield. He is the one who will fulfill his sovereign promises to them.

In the midst of their exile, God was with them. And beautifully, this phrase could also be said of everyone who places their faith in Jesus Christ today.

Christ is our ultimate help and our ultimate shield. And not that he shields us from afflictions of the world necessarily, but he shields us from our ultimate enemies.

He shields us from Satan, from death, and he shields us from the wrath of God. And that's the gospel.

[22 : 36] Jesus absorbed what was due us. He shielded us from the judgment, the just judgment of God taking our place on the cross. And because of that, because our relationship has been made right, we can be close to the Father.

We can know the Father and be in relationship with him. So, church, in the midst of hardship in this life, you can find security in the Lord.

You can find comfort in him, knowing that your heavenly Father loves you and he's working out all things for his glory and for your good.

That's what a good Father does. And nothing is befalling the saints that doesn't first go through God's fingers. He's numbered every hair on your head. He knows what you're doing tomorrow, next week, and years down the road.

So, until we see Christ face to face, our call is to trust in the Lord. He is our help and our shield. Let's move on to verses 12 and 15.

[23 : 41] So, after giving the central exhortation to trust in the Lord, the psalmist encourages us by telling us that God blesses those who trust in him. Verse 12 says, The Lord has remembered us.

He will bless us. He will bless the house of Israel. He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the Lord, both the small and the great. May the Lord give you increase, you and your children.

May you be blessed by the Lord who made heaven and earth. Notice first how it says, The Lord has remembered us. The psalmist is again extolling God's sovereignty, his steadfast promise-keeping love.

God always takes care of his people. To deliver them and to bless them is a fulfillment of his promises. That's what he does. And so, for the Israelites that are singing this song in captivity, they are trusting that God would bring them out of exile.

And he did. We can look back now and say that he did. He is a faithful God. Notice next how the threefold called a trust in the Lord in 9 and 11 through 11 as paralleled by a threefold assurance of God's blessing on all of God's people.

[24 : 54] Verse 13 says, Both the small and the great. From the religious leaders to the social outcasts and everyone in between, all may experience God's blessing when they trust in him.

And the psalmist asks for God's blessing with confidence because he knows the nature of God's covenant love and based on the fact that God is the maker of heaven and earth, which we see in verse 15.

God is faithful to bless those who trust in him. And we are no exception today. Ephesians 1 tells us that in Jesus Christ, we have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

That means that if you're trusting in Christ today, you've received the blessings of forgiveness, adoption, inheritance, and everlasting peace.

And just like the Psalm, these blessings are granted to every single person who puts their trust in Jesus Christ, both the small and the great. No exception.

[26 : 02] What a contrast between the living God and the dead idols. The living God blesses, he fulfills promises, and he dispenses grace on both the small and the great.

But the idols, the dead idols in contrast, they never provide what they promise. They only leave you longing for more. They never bless, they only deaden.

They never grant grace, only condemnation. The only logical response we have is to trust in the Lord. All right, let's look at 16 through 18.

Here at the end of the Psalm, we are shown where trust in God leads to. In verse 16, we read, the heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth, He's given to the children of man.

The heavens are the Lord's heavens. He's reigning. He's ruling. That's again His sovereignty. But the earth, He's given to the children of man, to us.

[27 : 04] While God is in heaven, we are here on earth. We live, and eventually, we die. And when we do die, that's it. Look at verse 17.

The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any who go down into silence. Or is it the end? Now the psalmist doesn't have a full understanding of what the eternal state is, what life after death looks like, but this, he does know, that for those who do not know and trust in the living God, when they die, that's it.

They don't get a second chance. They will not worship God afterwards. The dead do not praise the Lord. But he also knows something incredible. Something that is only possible when we trust in the trustworthy God.

What does Romans 6.23 say? It says, for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And look now at verse 18 in our psalm.

It says, but we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord. But we, who know and trust in the sovereign God, we will praise him forever.

[28 : 23] Those who are in a relationship with God will worship him eternally. So this whole psalm in conclusion is saying, trust in God.

That's the message of the psalm. And ultimately I'm going to say, that's the message of the Bible. In fact, I believe you can summarize the entire Bible in just two words.

What the Bible is saying to you, saying to me, God is saying, trust me. Trust me. What was he saying to Adam in the garden?

Essentially, trust me. What was he saying to Abraham when he called him? He was saying, trust me. What did he say to Noah when he was building the ark?

Trust me. What is he saying to Israel over and over and over again? Don't look to other nations for help. Don't put your trust in chariots and horses, but trust in the name of the Lord your God.

[29 : 25] What is Jesus saying when he says, I'm the bread of life? I'm the living water. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth and the life.

And all these things he's saying to us, believe on me. Trust me. Repent of your sinful ways and your idols that you trust in to save you.

Trust instead in me. And even now, we who do believe, are being called to persevere in trusting God in all our ways until one day our faith turns to sight.

So in 2023, whatever we find before us, may the Lord increase our faith. May we learn to trust him no matter the circumstance.

May we learn that he is trustworthy. I'll end with this. How do you know you can trust him?

[30 : 28] How can you know that God is always good when it really gets down to it, when life is really feeling bleak? And the answer is that we look to the cross of Christ.

The cross is a constant reminder that God is good. It's a constant reminder that God is faithful. It's a constant reminder that God loves us.

It's a constant reminder that we can trust in God. We just celebrated Christmas, and at Christmas, we celebrate that Jesus came as a real, historical, physical person to live and die for you.

To solve your greatest problem, to save you from your sins, and to pour out upon you the love of God. That is why we can trust him.

And so may God grant us grace to trust him today and into this new year. Let me pray for us, and then we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

[31 : 34] Heavenly Father, this morning, we just want to say thank you. Thank you that you've proven yourself faithful to your people throughout all of history, that you have made promises, and that you have kept those promises.

And Father, the greatest promise that you gave to us is that you would save us, Lord. And you did that at the cross. Jesus Christ came and lived a perfect life, and he took our place, dying for our sins.

So Father, I pray that you will help us to cling to the cross of Christ, that we would trust you even when it seems like everything is falling apart, when our family is struggling, when we can't seem to land the job that we need.

Lord, we trust you. Help us to trust you more. So be with us this day. Help us to make much of you. We pray all these things in Jesus' name, amen.

We're going to sing a Revelation song now, and as we're singing, the ushers are going to pass out the elements, and then we'll take communion together.