

A New Beginning

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of Psalms and Psalm 115.

Psalm 115, and I'd like us just to walk through this psalm, but if we take as our text the words of verse 1, where the psalmist 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.

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. Psalm 115 is a psalm which has made a place for itself in history, not only biblical history but also British history, because in 1415, after the victorious battle, a victorious battle in France, King Henry V, he commanded his army to kneel down before the Lord and sing with thanksgiving the words of Psalm 115, Not unto us, O Lord, not to us, but to thou glory take.

And then just over two centuries later, on the 5th of November, 1605, there was this failed gunpowder plot to blow up the houses of parliament by this Roman Catholic called Guy Fawkes. We're very familiar with that man. And in order to celebrate the thwarted attempt of Guy Fawkes, the Church of England, they added a prayer to their Book of Common Prayer based upon Psalm 115.

[1 : 42] And just to quote the end of the prayer, they said, to celebrate the Lord's faithfulness to his people.

And the celebration of this anniversary, it's probably why we still have a bonfire and fireworks every year on the 5th of November. But you know, there's one other occasion where Psalm 115 is found in our history.

And that was on the 26th of July, 1833. It was the day on which William Wilberforce, after a lifetime of campaigning for the abolition of slavery, he heard that the Abolition Act of 1833 was finally passed.

And William Wilberforce, he quietly retired to his room at the age of 74. By that time, he was blind. He was very unwell. He was actually only three days away from death.

And yet he retired to his room to meditate on this psalm. And he said to the Lord, not to me, not to us, O Lord, but to your name be the glory.

[3 : 15] You've done this, Lord. I've spent my life battling this, but you've done this, Lord. You've done it. And you know, it's clear to see from all these examples of our history that Psalm 115 has had an impact upon the Lord's people.

in which the Lord's people, they have come through battles, they've passed through darkness, they've overcome what seemed to be these insurmountable obstacles. And they now stand on the threshold of this new beginning.

And when they look back over what's happened, all they can say is that it was nothing of themselves. They didn't do it. They didn't have the strength. They didn't have the resources. They didn't have the ability. But the Lord did it. The Lord brought them here. And they say that when the Lord did it, they're to give him the glory. He's to receive the glory and the honor and the praise. Not unto us, Lord. Not to us, but do thou glory take. And you know, as we said, Psalm 115, it's a psalm which made up a place for itself in our history.

[4 : 22] But not only British history, also biblical history. Because Psalm 115, it was written at a time when the Israelites, they were on the threshold of this new beginning.

They had returned from 70 years of exile in Babylon during which the Israelites, they were living in a foreign land under the rule of a foreign king. They were made to worship foreign idols.

Their past was dark. Their past was full of division. It was full of idolatry. There were many years in exile. But now after all these years, the Israelites, they're returning to their land and they're returning

to rebuild and they're returning to repair what has been torn down.

And of course, they were not to forget the past. They were to take lessons from it and see that the Lord brought them through their past experiences to stand on the threshold of a new beginning. And as the Lord's people, they were to move forward together. And you know, this psalm, it's a psalm all about the Lord's people. It's all about the church of God.

[5 : 31] And I want us to apply this psalm to our own situation here this evening. As a congregation, you are a congregation moving forward together.

because what we see on the threshold of this new beginning, what we see in Psalm 115, is that there was praise from the people, there was a plea to the people, there was a promise for the people, and there was a prayer on behalf of the people.

Praise from the people, a plea to the people, a promise for the people, and a prayer on behalf of the people. So we look first of all at praise from the people.

It says 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 is their God?

Our God is in the heavens. He does all that he pleases. Now this psalm, Psalm 115, it's part of a group of six psalms called the Hallel Psalms.

[6 : 39] And the psalms which are part of this Hallel group, they're numbered between Psalm 113 to Psalm 118. And they're called the Hallel Psalms from the word Hallelujah, which means praise the Lord.

And as a group of psalms, these six psalms, the Hallel, they seek to give the Hallelujah to the Lord. That's their desire, to give praise to the Lord. They seek to exalt and praise the Lord for his wonderful work of salvation.

They are the Hallel. And they were and they still are. They're sung by the Jews during the feast of Passover. And of course, the purpose of the Passover was to recount the past experience of the children of Israel where they were delivered from bondage and slavery in Egypt.

When the angel of the Lord, he passed over the houses of the Israelites. because their doorposts and their lintels were covered in the blood of a lamb. But you know, when we sing these Hallel psalms and when we meditate upon them, you know, it's remarkable to think that these Hallel psalms, they were some of the last words that Jesus sang before his trial and crucifixion.

And that even though the horrors of Calvary, they were looming for Jesus, he was still singing, still singing, that the work of salvation would be to the glory and the honour and the praise of God.

[8 : 10] But what's interesting about this Hallel psalm is that it was not only sung by Jesus, but also the fact that it was written and sung in the face of those who worshipped dumb idols.

Because when the Israelites, when they returned from exile in Babylon, they returned with praise in their hearts and praise upon their lips because they were going to rebuild their lives, they were going to rebuild the temple, they were going to rebuild the city walls around Jerusalem.

They were on the threshold of this new beginning, this new chapter in their lives and there was praise from the people. But when the other nations considered what was going on, they questioned the Israelites and they said, where is your God?

what is your God doing? How could your God allow this to happen to you anyway? How could your God allow the divisions and the darkness and the destruction?

How could your God allow this to happen to you? Where is your God? But the resounding testimony of the Lord's people in the face of a world that worships dumb idols is what he says in verse 3.

[9 : 18] Our God is in the heavens. He does all that he pleases. And in that statement alone there is so much because there is the acknowledgement that God is sovereign.

God is in control. Despite the uncertainty of the past, he's still working all things together for good to those who love him. But more than that, in these words, there is submission to God's will.

He does what he pleases. That's why there is praise from the Lord's people on the threshold of a new beginning because they are acknowledging that the Lord should have all the glory.

It's not unto us. Not to us, but do thou glory take? Pointing away from ourselves, they are saying. But you know, this is what I love.

There is praise from the Lord's people and there is this desire to give glory to the Lord. He says in verse 1, for the sake of, all because of his steadfast love and faithfulness.

[10 : 23] Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness. And I love that because those words, steadfast love and faithfulness,

they're translated in the New Testament as grace and truth.

And that's how the Apostle John, he described Jesus. He describes him as the one who is full of grace and truth. He is the eternal word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us and he says, we have beheld his glory, the glorious of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, full of steadfast love and faithfulness.

And so what we ought to see here is that there is this praise coming from the people and they're giving all the glory to Jesus because they know that despite all that they've been through as a people, Jesus has done in them and for them exceedingly, abundantly, above all, more than they could ask or even think.

And is that not your testimony tonight as a people? And is there not praise from you as a people? Because despite all that you've been through as a congregation and all the changes you've experienced as a congregation, the one constant you have had is this Jesus who never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And he promises to his people that he will never leave you and never forsake you.

[12:09] And so on the threshold of a new beginning, we see in Psalm 115 that there was praise from the people, but there was also a plea to the people.

A plea to the people. Look down at verse 9. He says, 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. And this threefold plea to trust the Lord, it's said in contrast to trusting all the false idols of this world.

And the psalmist describes these false idols of the world, he describes them in verses 4 to 8, because he says that these idols, they're not like the God who is in the heavens, who does what he pleases.

They're not like our God who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. They're not like our God, who is in control of all things and sovereign over every aspect of creation.

[13:15] Because he says these idols, they are the work of man's hands. They're made of silver and gold and wood and metal and stone. They're the gods of their imagination. And the world claims that if you pray to these gods and if you offer sacrifices to them, they will give you whatever your heart's desire is.

But the psalmist says they are the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they don't speak. They have eyes, but they don't see. They have ears, but they don't hear. They have noses, but they don't smell.

They have hands, but they can't hold anything. They have feet, but they can't walk. And what the psalmist is saying about these idols that the world is clinging to is they're dead.

They're dead idols. He's saying that in contrast to our God who is in the heavens, who is the living God, the consuming fire, in contrast to him, the gods of this world, they're dead.

Completely dead. They're dead idols. But then the psalmist says in verse 8, those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them.

[14:24] Those who make these idols, they're dead. Those who trust in them, they're dead.

They're dead spiritually. They're dead in their trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.

And you know, there are so many today who put their trust in all that they can see. They put their trust in all the things that, well, we all know that they will eventually fade and perish and decay.

And people, they make them their gods and they put them first in their lives and they give all their time to worshipping these idols. But these idols, it doesn't mean that they just bow down to them.

This structure, that's not what he's talking about. No, idolatry, it's far easier than that. Because idolatry is putting anything before God. That's why the first commandment is, thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Idolatry is putting everything before God. Idolatry is giving something else or someone else the place that God deserves. And, well, that can be more than dumb idols.

[15:37] It can be our home, our job, our family, our wife, our husband, our children, our grandchildren. It can even be ourselves. My friend, idolatry happens when we give something or someone else the place that God deserves.

Idolatry happens when we trust in someone or something else. When we should be trusting in the Lord who is our help and our shield, idolatry happens when we stop praying like the psalmist is praying and confessing like the psalmist is confessing.

Not unto us, Lord, not to us, but do thou glory take unto thy name in for thy truth and for thy mercy's sake. And, you know, it might seem obvious to us that idolatry and trusting in idols or anything other than the Lord might seem to us as vanity.

It might seem obvious that trusting in anything other than the Lord is empty and futile. But, you know, we have to remember that idolatry was the means of Israel's downfall because throughout the history of the Israelites, idolatry always led them away from worshipping the Lord.

Idolatry always led them away from giving God the glory. Whether it was the golden calf in the wilderness or repeatedly turning to false idols during the period of the judges or all the Baal worshipped during the period of the kings, Israel's history was tainted and marred by idolatry.

[17:14] Idolatry was, it was even the reason why the Israelites ended up going into Babylon because for decades, the Lord had sent prophet after prophet after prophet to plead with the Israelites to turn from their idols and repent because the Lord was going to bring judgment but they refused to listen.

They did what was right in their own eyes and they continued with their idolatry and they continued until the Lord brought judgment and he sent, he exiled them into Babylon.

And so we can see why the psalmist is issuing this threefold plea to the people because their past had been a past of trusting in other things and not trusting in the Lord.

And with this plea on the threshold of a new beginning, the psalmist is calling the people of God to go forward and not to look back. He's calling them to learn from the past but to prepare for the future.

And he's saying to them, don't go back to your former ways. Don't go back to the darkness and the divisions. Don't go back to your idolatry. Don't look to idols. Don't trust in them.

[18:24] Don't trust in these gods who are seen. Trust in the God who is unseen. And was it not the apostle Paul who reminded us that our ministry is to be a ministry in which we look not to the things that are seen.

But to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporal. But the things that are unseen are eternal. And this is why the psalmist is giving us this plea.

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. And it seems to me that this threefold plea to the people addresses everyone within the congregation of Israel.

Because it seems that the psalmist addresses the Israelites as a people of believing worshippers.

He says, O Israel, trust in the Lord. Then he addresses the house of Aaron as those who held office in the congregation.

[19:37] Because the priests, they were those who helped facilitate the worship, whether that was through the offering of sacrifices or singing or music. And then those who feared the Lord, they were those who were not Jews, but they were part of the congregation.

But regardless of what part of the congregation these people were in, the psalmist plea was the same. Trust in the Lord, for he is your help and shield.

Don't look to idols, don't look to the other gods of this world, don't put your confidence in man. Trust in the Lord, for he is your help and your shield. Trust in the Lord, because he is your provision and your protection.

And you know, I can't help but apply this to you as a congregation. Because like it was for the Israelites, there is a threefold plea being issued to you as a congregation.

And it's being issued to you as members in this congregation. Those who are believing worshippers, those who have professed their faith in Christ. But there's also this plea issued to the office bearers of the congregation.

[20:48] Those who serve the congregation, just like the priests do or did. You facilitate the worship, you serve the people in your office as an elder or as a deacon.

But then there's also this plea to those who fear the Lord. Those of you who are part of this congregation but you wouldn't say that you're a committed Christian. You're committed in your church attendance.

You attend church here regularly and your place is always to be found here because you fear the Lord. You want to be saved deep down. Well this plea is for you too because the plea to the people is to trust the Lord.

Don't trust in man. Vain is the help of man. Trust the Lord as your help and your shield. Trust the Lord as your provision and your protection. My friend like it was for the Israelites the plea to you as a people on the threshold of a new beginning is for you to let go of the past.

Forget your idols, the divisions and the darkness and move forward together trusting in the Lord who is your help and your shield because he's the only one who assures you of his provision and his protection every step of the way.

[22 : 14] So my friend, trust in the Lord because he is your help and your shield. And so on the threshold of a new beginning we see in Psalm 115 that there was praise from the people, a plea to the people and thirdly a promise for the people.

A promise for the people. Look at verse 12. He 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. And in these verses the Psalmist he moves on from this threefold plea to the Lord's people to trust in the Lord and he moves on to this all encompassing promise for the Lord's people to cling to.

And what's so beautiful about this Psalmist that the Psalmist addresses every family. He addresses every individual, every office bearer, every generation within the congregation of Israel.

And he says to them, the Lord has remembered you. The Lord has remembered you. That's what he says. The Lord has remembered us. Now of course when the Psalmist says that the Lord has remembered his people, he's not saying that the Lord had forgotten them.

[23 : 36] It's not that the Lord had slipped out of his mind somehow, or that he had moved on from them to someone else. Not at all. Because this word, remember, it's a covenantal word.

Meaning that when the Psalmist says that the Lord remembered them, he means that the Lord was going to act according to his covenant of grace. And you know, that's what we see throughout the history of the Bible.

When Noah had been in the ark for about five months or more, waiting for the water to subside, we're told in Genesis 8, verse 1, God remembered Noah.

He acted according, the Lord acted according to the covenant of grace. When the Israelites were crying to the Lord in Egypt, asking for the Lord to deliver them from their bondage and their slavery, we're told that the Lord remembered his covenant with Abraham and with Isaac and with Jacob.

The Lord acted according to his covenant of grace. And so, we can see from scripture here that the word remember is a covenantal word. And it emphasizes that the Lord is going to act towards his people, not according to their sin, but according to his covenant of grace.

[24 : 56] And my friend, when the Lord acts towards his people, according to his covenant of grace, he blesses them. That's why the psalmist issues this promise of blessing for the people.

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.

And as we can see, the words he will bless, referring to the Lord, they're repeated four times in only two verses. And they clearly emphasize to us this all-encompassing promise, this promise of blessing to every family, to every individual, to every office bearer, to every generation within the congregation.

And I love this word bless, because it's a word that literally means to kneel. That's what the word bless means, to kneel, in the sense of kneeling before a king in humility and reverence.

And the image which the word bless seeks to portray to us is the image of this king standing up from his throne. And those who are in the king's presence, they are kneeling before the king.

[26 : 12] And they're kneeling before the king with their head bowed and their hand outstretched towards the king. And they're receiving something from the king that they don't deserve.

They're receiving from the gracious hand of the king something that they don't deserve. And yet the king is graciously and freely giving to them what they don't deserve.

He's blessing them. He's blessing them. Because blessing only comes from the gracious and merciful hand of the king. And this is the promise for you as a people.

As you stand on the threshold of a new beginning, the promise is that the Lord, the king of his people, King Jesus, he has remembered you.

He hasn't abandoned you. He hasn't forsaken you. He hasn't left you. The Lord has remembered you and he's going to act according to his covenant of grace by blessing you.

[27 : 18] He's going to give to you what you don't deserve. What none of us deserve. He's going to bless you with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.

He's going to do in you and for you exceedingly abundantly above all more than you could ask or even think. And this is what's so beautiful about this promise of blessing.

It's all encompassing. It's a promise of blessing for every home, for every family. It's a promise of blessing for every office bearer.

And it's a promise of blessing for every generation in the congregation, both young and old. My friend, even though the past has been difficult and dark for you, you can rejoice tonight on the threshold of a new beginning, that the Lord has remembered you and that he promises to bless you according to his covenant of grace.

But you know, the psalmist, he doesn't leave it there because having expressed in Psalm 115 that when the Lord's people stood on this threshold, that there was praise from the people, a plea to the people, and a promise for the people, he says lastly and briefly, a prayer on behalf of the people.

[28 : 48] A prayer on behalf of the people. Look at verse 14. He says, 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 has 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. And as the Lord's people begin this new chapter in their lives, the psalmist brings this hallel psalm to its close by praying for them.

And what he prays for is that the Lord's blessing would be upon them. He prays that the covenant promise of God's grace will be realized in their experience.

He prays that they will grow as a congregation. He prays that they will grow in the grace and in the knowledge of their saviour. He prays that they will increase in number by families and individuals of every generation coming to worship in the congregation.

[29 : 55] My friend, the psalmist prays that the people will be blessed by the Lord, the one who keeps covenant. That's what the title Lord means.

It's used throughout the psalm. The Lord. He's the one who keeps covenant. The one who keeps covenant. And that's what the psalmist's prayer for the Lord's people is.

That the Lord, the one who keeps covenant will bless his people according to his covenant of grace.

And you know this prayer of blessing that the psalmist concludes with, this you could say benediction, it reminds me of what Aaron was commanded to say to the Lord's people when they were on the threshold of a new beginning.

When the children of Israel, they were on their way towards the promised land, Aaron was commanded to bless the congregation. And he said to them, he pronounced this benediction over them.

And he said, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

[31 : 12] He gave this great benediction over the Lord's people. God will make a place for itself in history.

Not only British history, but also here in biblical history. But our prayer for you as a congregation is that Psalm 115 will make a place for itself in the history of Garibust Free Church.

And that the Lord will bless you as you stand on the threshold of a new beginning. And that he will bless you in the life of this congregation. And that you'll respond to the Lord's blessing.

Just like the Israelites did. Because having expressed that there was praise from the people, a plea to the people, a promise for the people, and this prayer on behalf of the people, the people responded in verse 18, the last verse.

They said, we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord. May that be your response as you begin this new chapter in your lives as Garibust Free Church.

[32 : 35] May your response be, we will bless the Lord from this time forth and even forevermore. Praise the Lord.

May the Lord bless you and may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Thank you. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us