

The Name of Glory

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- [0 : 0 0] Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. It's fitting that at the end of our series, sermon series on glimpses of God's glory, that we end with Psalm 115.
- Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. From beginning to end, it's a song of unbridled and unhindered praise.
- Look at verse 18. We will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord. It's a song of praise.
- And it's a song of praise that has been important to the people of God down through the centuries. This song, along with four or five others, was traditionally sung at the Passover meal by the Jewish people.
- They would look back at the Exodus and how God, with an outstretched arm and a mighty hand, saved his people from Pharaoh, delivered them from the domain of darkness, and transferred them into the kingdom of glorious light.
- [1 : 1 4] And they would look forward to the day when God would once again visit his people, and he would redeem, and he would restore, and he would renew the entire face of the earth. And they would say, not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory.
- And it's most likely that Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper sang the same song. The night that he was betrayed, the night before he was crucified, the night when he took bread and broke it and said, this is my body for you.
- This is the cup of the new covenant. And they sang, not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. And so what a privilege it is to come now, in 2016, and join hundreds of generations of God's people in saying, not to us, but to him be glory.
- And it is a psalm that through and through is triumphant and celebratory and confident. But that's where the difficulty for us lies, isn't it?
- Because if we're honest with ourselves, we don't often feel triumphant and celebratory and confident. We know about the changes and chances of this life.
- [2 : 4 0] We know they can wear us down. We know they can beat us up. And we know that even the greatest joys that this life has to offer are still tinged with the sting of sorrow and death.
- And all too often we find ourselves silent in the presence of Almighty God. Having a difficult time knowing how in the world we're going to praise.
- And so in that context, there are two major questions that arise that our psalm addresses. The first is this, what impedes our praise? What holds us back?
- And the second is, what's going to restore our praise? How are we going to praise again? So the first, I want to look with you, is what impedes our praise?
- And I think Psalm 115 points us to two impediments. An internal one and an external one. The internal impediment, I think, comes in the first line.
- [3 : 3 7] It's hinted at. In that not to us is implied a sickness of the soul, which I think we can call selfishness.

And selfishness, I think, in the Bible, is the major internal impediment to praising God. It's the selfish habits of the human heart that are not easily tamed.

And so it has to be repeated at the very beginning, not to us, not to us. See, sin can be described as a sort of gravitational force that's within the human soul.

Where we seek to organize and orchestrate all the details of our life around ourselves and not the living God. And so our final guideline and authority for living ends up being my needs and my comforts.

My dreams and my desires. My boundaries. And my plans. And we see this at a whole bunch of levels. We see it at the individual level.

[4 : 43] We see the same fundamental principle at the organizational and corporate level. And we see it, my goodness, we see it at the national level. But it's all the same fundamental sickness and it's horribly damaging.

And it holds us back from praising God and giving him the glory that is due his name. There's a sickness of the soul and its selfishness. And it impedes our praise.

But there's also an external impediment. Internal and then external. And we see that in verse 2. God's people say, why should the nation say, where is their God?

The external impediment is the questioning of the surrounding culture and nations. See, God's people have often lived in exile. They've often lived in neighborhoods and cities and nations where the people around them do not recognize their God.

And the people around them actually feel quite cynical towards their God and will question the reality of their God. And in the place of that weakness and in the place of that vulnerability, the nations ask, where is their God?

[6 : 01] And this is a question that reverberates throughout our own culture as well. It's in the university classrooms. It's in the business offices. It's in the private homes. It's everywhere.

And what happens is when God's people are in a culture where there's widespread questioning and they feel like they're in the minority, they can get a bit rattled. It can wear down on them over time and they can start doubting things that they once thought were clear and things that they once held dear.

And they can start becoming increasingly and unwittingly silent about the God whom they confess and the God who they think is so worthy of praise. You see, there's internal and there are external impediments that keep us from opening our lips and declaring the praise of our God.

And the question that is laid before us at that point is what are the people of God to do? What or who will restore praise to their lips?

Who will give them to the joy of their salvation once again? And that's luckily what the rest of our psalm is about. In verses 4 through 15, the psalmist takes us through a liturgy of praise and he highlights for us different aspects of God's character that will unleash grace in our hearts and stir us to praise him once again.

[7 : 30] Because the only fuel for praise is the goodness and the beauty and the glory of the one who is worthy of praise. So we just have to look and we have to gaze and let him stir our hearts once again.

And there are two things that our psalm looks at. In verses 3 to 8, it looks at God's power compared to the idols of our world.

And then in verses 9 to 15, it looks at God's power for the good of his people. So first, God's power compared to the idols. Verse 3. Our God is in the heavens.

In the Bible, the heavens are the place of ultimate authority and power over the whole entire universe. It's the place of kingship and rule.

And that's why then the psalmist goes on and says, And God does all that he pleases. Nothing holds him back. Nothing frustrates his plans.

[8 : 32] Nothing thwarts his purposes. Because he is alive and he is active and he is powerful and he is purposeful. And this God and all of his sovereign freedom and matchless glory is radically different than the idols that are in our surrounding culture and the idols that we find so alluring.

And so he compares them in verses 4 to 7. It uses very vivid imagery. It's sensual imagery.

Look at it. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of the human hands. They have mouths but do not speak. Eyes but do not see.

Ears but do not hear. Noses but do not smell. Hands but do not feel. Feet but do not walk. And they do not make a sound in their throats.

It's engaging all the human senses. And this language is far from politically correct. It's almost taunting the idols that we cling to as being utterly hollow and shallow.

[9 : 44] And what it's saying, what it's trying to highlight for us is that these idols have all the appearance of life. And they have all the appearance of promise. But in reality, they're utterly lifeless.

And they can't provide anything that they promise. They have ears but they cannot hear. And eyes but they cannot see. And mouths but they cannot speak. And the really sobering reality for those that worship these lifeless idols is that they start to become lifeless like the idols they worship.

Verse 8 would send chills down your spine. Those who make them become like them. And so do all who trust in them.

We become like what we trust and what we worship. And in this case, we become desensitized to God and people. We become hollow and lifeless.

And we become silent. No energy to praise God anymore. And it wouldn't take long for us to find many examples in our own lives.

[10 : 55] And in the city in which we live. And there's a bunch of obvious ones we could look at. We've already talked about money in the prayer. It's worth talking about again.

Money promises to fulfill all our desires for security and comfort. But in the end, it fails to provide. We're left insecure and more afraid that we'll lose what we have.

The allure of power promises to fulfill all our desires for significance and influence and control. We want to leave our imprint on this world.

But in the end, it fails us and we're left angry and resentful and not trusting anyone. And sexual endeavors promise to fulfill all our desires for intimacy and belonging.

But it's a rabbit trail that doesn't provide. And we end up left more ashamed and more isolated than ever before. You see, what Psalm 115 is saying to us is that our God is not like these idols.

[12 : 00] Which promise so much and provide so little. Rather, our God is in the heavens and he does all that he pleases.

And the wonderful good news that the psalmist goes on to explain to us is that God is pleased to use his power for the good and enrichment of his people.

We see it in verses 9 to 11. God uses his power to save. Oh, Israel, trust in the Lord.

Why? He is their help and their shield. Once again, oh, house of Israel, of Aaron, trust in the Lord. Why? He is their help and their shield.

And all you who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord. Why? He is their help and their shield. It's repeated three times because the psalmist wants us to get the language of salvation.

[12 : 59] That God is one who rescues in times of trouble and he shields in times of attack. And so he highlights it.

And friends, we see throughout the scriptures that this protecting does not mean that God protects us from the trials and tribulations of this life. We know that. They come.

The storms come. But what I think this is saying is that God promises to be our protector in the midst of the storm. Right in the deep places. And the psalm that we all know and love so well is the classic and abiding example.

Psalms 23. Listen to a couple verses. It says, And so what we see here is that we're able to trust the one who is our help and our shield.

And that allows us to praise even in the shadow of death. Even in the presence of enemies. And this God, he uses his power to save in verses 9 to 11.

[14 : 23] We see in verses 12 to 15. Then uses his power to enrich. The Lord has remembered us.

The Lord has remembered us. Says the psalmist. How wonderful it is to know that God does not forget his people. He doesn't forget us.

And this act of remembering by God doesn't mean just cognitive awareness. It means compassionate action. And that's why the psalmist goes on to repeat five times this blessing activity of God.

He says, 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 then verse 15. May you be blessed by the Lord who made heaven and earth. I.e. who has infinite resources to bless us. Now this blessing word is absolutely central.

[15 : 28] But it's lost some of its gravity and dignity in our day. I don't know where you hear this word. But for me, it's normally when I sneeze. Somebody says, bless you. Or I reminded my childhood when my grandma used to say, bless your little heart.

Or something goes well for somebody and they say, Oh, that. That was what a blessing. That was a blessed time. These are all good. But in the Bible, this blessing word is much deeper.

It's much richer. And it's got so many more layers than that. And you got to reach all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Where this word, I think, takes shape first.

As blessing means the potentiality and the presence of life. The potentiality and the presence of life. And we see it in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis chapter 1. God creates all the animals. The fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the cows of the field. And then God creates human beings in his own image. And he looks at all of it and he says, It is very good.

[16 : 32] And then he blesses them and says, Be fruitful and multiply and fill. Those are the words that come right after. It is an action of giving life.

And when humanity, because of the fall, is cursed and cast out of the garden. And knows sin and death and futility. God then comes to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12.

When they are experiencing the horrors of curse. And he says to Abraham, I am going to bless you and your family. Why? So that through you, the whole entire world will be blessed again.

God is intent on restoring blessing to his world. And so it is no mistake that Paul, When he is trying to describe the inexhaustible riches of what God has done in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He grabs on to the blessing word. And he says in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because he has blessed us in Christ.

[17 : 39] With every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And in it he goes on with a long litany of spiritual blessings that come on in Christ. And that is why Paul in one of his first letters, Galatians chapter 3.

He says Christ has taken the curse for us on the tree. So that we do not have to take the curse anymore. And he says what is the result of that? The blessings of Abraham, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Can be poured out on God's people. And so when we go to the New Testament. We discover that this promise in this psalm.

He will bless us. Is fulfilled most deeply and most profoundly when God gives us himself. When he pours his own holy and life-giving presence into our lives.

So I think it's fitting. For us to end. With a poignant little prayer.

[18 : 42] From Augustine. From his confessions. He invites us to pray this. The house of my soul. Is too small for you to come to it, O Lord. So may it be enlarged by you. May the Lord enlarge our hearts to receive more of him.

Brothers and sisters. May the Lord bless us with fresh fillings of his holy and life-giving presence. May the Lord cause rivers of living water to flow from our hearts once again.

May the Lord open our lips that our mouths may proclaim his praise. Not to us, O Lord. Not to us. But to your name give glory. I speak these things to you.

In the name of the Father. And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit.