

Psalm 115 AM

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Preacher: Rev. Chris Ley

[0 : 00] Not to us, O Lord, and not to me, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You can be seated. Amen. Well, I get the pleasure of discussing faith with a lot of people who are exploring.

And one of the questions that often comes up in those conversations is, if you could ask God one question, what would it be? We like to imagine ourselves interrogating God, questioning Him like a lawyer challenging a witness in court.

But I imagine none of us have ever wondered about the exact opposite scenario. If God could ask you one question, what would He ask?

If the roles were reversed, what would God ask of me? Well, that's exactly what happens in the reading we just heard.

[1 : 16] Two young men hear incredible claims about who Jesus is, and they want to explore it for themselves. So they start following Jesus anonymously from a safe distance, walking behind Him subtly.

Jesus knows what they're doing. He turns around, and He asks them one question. What are you seeking? God's one question for you this morning is this.

What are you seeking? What are you searching for? What do you want? There's a brilliant book called *You Are What You Love* by James Smith, and it begins by reflecting on Jesus' question. Smith writes, The first, last, and most fundamental question of Christian discipleship. Jesus does not encounter people and ask, What do you know?

Or what do you believe? But what do you want? Smith continues, This is the most incisive, piercing question Jesus can ask of us, precisely because we are what we want.

[2 : 28] Our wants and our longings and our desires are at the core of our identity. They are the wellspring from which our actions and our behaviors flow. So Jesus asks, What are you searching for?

Because what you are seeking in this life defines who you are. Your heart, your desires dictate your behaviors and motivate your actions.

Proverbs 4 verse 23 counsels us, Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Or, to quote Martin Luther, Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God. So what are you seeking?

What are you longing for today? Because we are defined by our desires. Now maybe like me, you're not very introspective, and you have no idea what you're searching for.

[3 : 31] So I'm going to give you two clues on how you can figure that out. If you don't know what you're seeking, look at how you spend your time and how you spend your money. Did you know that all of us, many of us right now, have a heart-tracking device sitting in our pockets?

It's called a smartphone. And it has an info page that is hidden deep within the settings that tells you what you're seeking by showing you what apps you're looking at and how much time you spend on them.

It's a helpful window into your heart. Why is it that the average teenager looks at their smartphone every five minutes? They seek something on it over 200 times a day, averaging an incredible nine hours on their phones.

And these numbers sound unbelievable until I opened my phone and dug into my settings and saw my numbers and nearly fell over. Why do we spend so much time on our phones?

It's because we're seeking connection, acceptance, affirmation, validation, humor, knowledge, or we just want to escape from the challenges of our life.

[4 : 49] So look at your time. How do you spend it? That's likely where your heart goes. Or look at your last credit card statement. Look at where your money went. How much did you spend on yourself?

How much did you spend on clothes, on entertainment, on travel, or beauty, or gadgets? How much of your hard-earned cash did you give to bless others?

Or to glorify God? Where we spend our time and our money reveals what our hearts cling to. You are what you love.

David Foster Wallace pushes it even further. He was an influential American author and scholar. He was the child of two atheists, and he didn't hold to any particular religion.

But this is what he said to a room full of undergraduate students at a commencement address at their college. He said, quote, In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is no such thing as atheism.

[5 : 55] There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. And so the only choice we get is what to worship.

If you worship money and things, you'll never have enough. You'll never feel like you have enough. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure, and you'll always feel ugly.

And when time and age start showing, you'll die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.

Worship power, and you'll end up feeling weak and afraid. And you'll need even more power over others to numb you to your own fear.

Worship your intellect. Being seen as smart, and you'll end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful.

It's that they're unconscious. They are our default settings. Everybody worships. We are what we worship.

[6 : 55] And we worship what we love. So what are you worshipping today? What are you seeking? Our text this morning is Psalm 115, and it lays out the three options for what a person can worship.

You can worship yourself. You can worship a man-made God. Or you can worship the Lord. That's it. That's the list.

To worship yourself is the predominant worship of the West. We're told to be true to ourselves, to search our own hearts for our desires, and then to give our lives to achieve them.

Nothing matters more than your own longings and pursuing them at all costs. To worship a man-made God is the predominant worship of the East.

Idol worship is practiced by billions of people today. Mostly from Eastern countries like Nepal or Japan. To worship God is the counter-cultural call that confronts the self-worship of the West and the idol worship of the East.

[8 : 06] But it's in worshipping God and Him alone that we truly discover what it is to be human.

Because all of us are made in God's image and can only experience life to the full by knowing and loving and worshipping Him.

So to finish this little series on what it means to be human, we are going to look at a psalm that tells us that everybody worships something and then invites us to direct our worship to the Lord.

So look at Psalm 115 beginning at verse 1. It says, Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory for the sake of your steadfast love and faithfulness.

Why should the nations say, Where is 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.

Everybody worships. Everyone is searching for something. And whatever it is they are looking for is what defines them. And the human default is to worship ourselves.

[9 : 10] This is why this counter-cultural psalm begins by praying, Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory. Human nature is to long to make ourselves great.

And left to our own devices, we want to do the exact opposite of what Psalm 115 prays. In our natural state, we think, Not to you, Lord, not to you, but to my name may people give glory.

We naturally want to make a name for ourselves to achieve security or comfort or pleasure or power. Left to our own devices, we seek our own glory, not God's.

This is what the Bible calls sin. And it's the default human nature. Sin is saying, Hallowed be my name, my kingdom come, my will be done.

Sin is grasping at God's status and striving to choose for ourselves what's right and wrong and how we shall live, irrespective of what God says or how it affects other people.

[10:15] And this is what it looks like to worship yourself. And today, this sin of self-worship is presented to us as a virtue. We're taught to let our hearts be our guide, to search within ourselves, to find our true desires and identity, and then to act upon these impulses no matter the cost.

You're told to be true to yourself, and anyone who tells you otherwise is an enemy who does not have your best interests in mind. The first option we have is to worship ourselves.

It's our default setting. This is what all of us will always choose to do, left to our own devices. To make ourselves and our desires our God, to seek our own glory.

And Psalm 115 very subtly warns what happens when you worship yourself right at the end in verse 17. It says, The dead do not praise the Lord. If you praise yourself instead of God, one day you will die and you will go down into silence.

All the things you gained in this world you will immediately lose forever. All the praise and accolades you may have received will end and ultimately you'll be forgotten.

[11:29] In the end, it isn't going to matter how much money you made or how many homes you owned or what kind of car you drove or what neighborhood you lived in or what titles you held or how famous you were. If you live life seeking your own glory, you'll ultimately lose everything.

To live life to glorify yourself is like building a house on sand. And when the storms come and the storms always come, nothing will remain.

So, the first thing you can worship is yourself. And there's a warning there. Some people figured this out and so instead of living to glorify themselves, they live to glorify gods of their own making.

Look at verse 4. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths that 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, and so do all who trust in them. The worship of idols is prevalent in our world today, even in Vancouver.

[12:38] Last Sunday, I was walking our dog down by the Fraser River and the tide was really low last Sunday. So, I could see these muddy sandbags that I can only see kind of three or four times a year.

And I saw in this bank, in the muck and the mire, a large plastic idol of an Eastern religion, face down in the slime.

And the paint was peeling to expose cheap plastic on the idol's back. And it struck me. People worshipped this image as if it were a god, this piece of cheap plastic.

More than that, one of my neighbors, maybe a teacher at my kid's school, or a soccer parent, or some friendly acquaintance I've interacted with, may have once bowed down to this piece of plastic. And now it lies face down in the slime underwater most of the time, ignored, unknown, discarded, like a piece of garbage.

[13:42] This statue obviously couldn't save itself from this disgraced fate. Didn't cry out in anger, summoning heavenly help or retribution. This so-called god didn't stand up or speak or do anything because it can't.

It's nothing but a cracked, peeling piece of plastic discarded into a dirty riverbank. It had a mouth but couldn't speak. Eyes but didn't see.

Ears but didn't hear. A nose but couldn't smell. Hands that couldn't feel. Feet that could not walk or swim or even float, apparently. It didn't make a sound in its throat. This thing is not a god.

It's not even a living being. It's nothing. Discarded as worthless, useless, powerless, and certainly not worthy of worship.

And yet, millions, if not billions, of people do worship man-made idols. Even here. And verse 8 warns us bluntly.

[14:47] Those who make idols become like them. And so do all who trust in them. I want to let that image of that plastic idol discarded face down on the muddy shore say, stay with you today.

And remember that those who make idols become like them. And so do all who trust in them. So far, we've heard about living to worship yourself is the human default and it'll end in death and silence.

We've now heard about the futility of worshiping idols and how those who trust in them will become like them, powerless and lifeless. And so this leaves us with only one option and it's the prayer of Psalm 115.

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. You can live like many people in the West today, worshiping yourself, seeking to bring yourself glory, but your life will end in death.

You can live like many people in the East today, worshiping something man-made and you'll become like the thing you've created, lifeless and impotent. Or you can live to glorify God, the one who dwells above the earth and the heavens and can do all that he pleases.

[16:04] Most of this psalm, this prayer, reminds us why it is that we worship the Lord. It tells us why we should spend our lives seeking God.

Look again at verse 1. Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. Why? For the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

God has proven himself to be worthy of our worship because of his steadfast love and his faithfulness. You may notice God is referred to as Lord in Psalm 115 and notice it's in all capital letters in our Bibles.

Before printing presses or computer screens and photocopiers, human hands wrote out the words of Scripture when they wanted to make duplicates. And when a human scribe or copier came to God's personal name in the text, the name God introduced himself to, to Moses, the name Yahweh, the human copier would write out in all caps the letters for Lord instead of writing out Yahweh because they felt unworthy even to write God's name.

So in our text you see the name Lord in all caps twelve times and it's to be understood that the actual word in the original version of the text is God's personal name Yahweh.

[17:35] And this matters to us because it shows us the God of the Bible does not want to be known as some distant deity, unreachable and unapproachable and generic.

He wants us to know His personal name because He wants us to know Him personally. He wants relationship and so He reveals Himself.

Yahweh is God's name that He gives His people to establish His covenant with them. The word God is generic and impersonal but Yahweh is God's personal name and gives it because He desires personal relationship with each of us.

The God of the Bible is a personal God who wants you to know Him as He knows you. And that's the basis for our worship. To your name be the glory because of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

Steadfast love is used constantly in the Psalms to refer to God. Steadfast love means unending, unchanging love, covenant love, permanent love.

[18:49] God is worthy of our worship because He is constant, permanent, unending in His love toward us. He is a personal God who wants us to know Him.

And God is faithful to us. He will never abandon us nor forsake us. He is for us. He has made promises through Scripture to bless and to save, to unite Himself to His people forever.

And He is faithful to these promises. Verse 2 tells us that God is in heaven. He dwells above the earth, reigning as Lord over all. And He does whatever He pleases.

So in verse 1 we're told God is all-loving and in verse 2 now we're told He is all-powerful. And that's why He is worthy of worship. In verse 9 God's people are called upon to trust in the Lord for He is our help and our shield.

God helps us in this life. He's not absent from you. He loves you. He's with you. He's faithful and forever will not fail you.

[19:54] He's our shield. God protects us. He hides us under the shadow of His wing. Faith in God and His faithfulness is our shield in this life which extinguishes all the flaming darts of the evil one.

God helps us. God protects us. God is with His people. We can trust Him because He is faithful and His steadfast love will never fail. And then in verse 12 we see that God has remembered us.

He will bless us. My first teacher when I studied at Regent College was Bruce Waltke who I consider the wisest man alive.

And the reason I consider him the wisest man alive is he's the most knowledgeable person of the books of wisdom in the Bible. He's the expert on Psalms and Proverbs. And whenever Bruce would talk about the word remember he would define it by defining its opposite.

Bruce would say the opposite of remember is not forget. The opposite of remember is dismember. The opposite of remember is amputate, cut off, cleave.

[21 : 08] So in verse 10 when we're told that God has remembered us what this psalm is saying is that God has left heaven to reconnect Himself to His people who have cut themselves off from Him.

Through sin we've severed our connection to God. We have cut ourselves off from God and therefore from life and blessing. It's like of a tree branch cuts itself off from its trunk.

Imagine the branch of an apple tree decides I'd be better off on my own. This trunk is impeding my freedom and my glory. So I'm going to amputate myself and become a bigger better tree on my own.

Well what would happen to the branch? It would quickly die. Well humanity has cut itself off from God who is the source of all life and all love and all blessing.

We've said to God you don't deserve our glory. So we're going to give glory to either ourselves or to idols that we are going to create. We've sinned. And yet God's response to our dismembering ourselves from Him cutting ourselves off from Him is to remember Himself to us.

[22 : 25] The Lord has remembered us. God has left heaven. He has drawn near. He has revealed Himself to us. He has shown us His steadfast love and faithfulness.

This is all said in the past tense in verse 12. But it's already happened. The psalm was written thousands of years ago and it's likely recalling stories of God through history saving His people and making covenants with them to be with them and bless them and save them.

But the words of this psalm are fulfilled for us in the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus, who is God Himself, has come to remember us, to reunite us to God by connecting us to Him.

He's come that He might be our vine and we might be His branches, that we might be reunited with God, with His goodness and His life and His mercy and His blessing.

God has remembered us in Christ. And so through Him, together, we become members of Jesus' body, remembered to God.

[23 : 40] This has already happened in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. And this work of remembering, reuniting us to Christ, continues through the present by the ongoing, indwelling work of God's Holy Spirit.

God has remembered us, verse 12 says. He's taken upon Himself our sin and the punishment of our rebellion. He has entered our world to remember us to Himself.

And through faith in Christ, we are grafted into the life and love of God. And because this has all happened in the past, because we're reunited to God through Christ and His Holy Spirit, we can say with the psalmist in verse 12, He has remembered us, therefore He will bless us.

We pivot from what God has done in the past to what we can now say in faith He will do in the future. Because of what God has done in the past, we can trust Him with our future.

Because He 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.

[24 : 59] God will bless those who fear Him. Those who glorify His name, He will remember and bless. We can trust Him. 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. God has given us His world and we are to reign over it in His name as His regents, His stewards of this incredible creation.

And so what should we do? What should we seek? How should we live? Verse 17, The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any who go down into silence.

But we will bless the Lord, for this time forth and forevermore. We exist to praise the Lord, to worship God, and to enjoy Him forever.

If you live to glorify yourself or your own man-made idols, you will die. And the praise directed toward you or your idols will stop. But if you live to glorify God, to bless the Lord with your whole life, then you will sing His praises from this time forth and forevermore.

[26 : 19] Your life of being blessed by God and blessing God will never end. So a choice is set before you. Praise God, praise yourself, or praise an idol.

What will you do with your life? What do you seek? You become who you love. So let us praise the Lord. Amen.