

To Him Be the Glory

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! But to your name give glory.

For the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness, why should the nation 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. 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 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. May the Lord bless the preaching and the hearing of his word.

Well, it was around midnight on November 5th, 1605, in a cellar underneath Parliament's House of Lords, there was a man with matches in his pocket, leaning on 36 barrels of highly explosive gunpowder that was stacked next to him. The man, many of you may know the name, Guy Fox, along with a group of radical English Catholics, tried to assassinate King James I. The mission was to destroy the Protestant rulers of Britain and to bring back Roman Catholicism. But a search party found Fox and all the conspirators were executed. Had the plot succeeded in 1605, we may never have had the revolutionary work of King James with the commissioning of the King James Bible in 1604 and its publishing in 1611. It shaped the English-speaking world. Well, to celebrate the foiling of the plot, the Church of England put a new section in the book of common prayer, and it's based on, you guessed it, Psalm 115. And it reads like this, talking about the conspiracy. Not our merit, but thy mercy. Not our foresight, but thy providence delivered us. And therefore, not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be ascribed all glory and honor in all the churches of the saints from generation to generation through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. It was put in there because of this conspiracy. And that section stayed in the book of common prayer for the Church of England until 1859. It was used regularly on the anniversary of that occasion. Crisis averted. Massive victory. Well, you fast forward a few hundred years, and the famous

[4 : 39] British statesman, William Wilberforce, fought. He fought for 46 years to abolish slavery.

And after Parliament finally passed the bill to abolish the slave trade, Wilberforce went home to meditate on this verse. Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness. What an appropriate response to a major victory. Well, this psalm has been used on many notable occasions of victory, just like these and many others.

However, you may be thinking, that's not where I am. I'm not really celebrating great victory in my life. In fact, I find myself in the middle of a great battle, and I don't feel like I'm winning. Maybe there's uncertainty in your life, and things feel outside of your control, and you don't know what's coming next. Well, I want to let you know that this psalm has good news for you.

So even though this psalm has been used on many notable occasions of victory, it's actually a psalm written for people who are in the middle of the battle. The announcement of the victory in verse 1 is not the context in which this song is sung. It is the goal to which the song aspires. So the song is actually sung in the context of God's people being mocked, and taunted, and persecuted by their enemies.

Verse 2 asks why the nation should be able to say, where is their God? And in verse 9 through 11, it refers to the Lord as their help and shield for his people. So it appears that the psalmist wrote against the backdrop of a need for deliverance. The nations that opposed Israel were asking where he was. They didn't see any evidence that God cared for or would defend his people. The psalmist saw his people in a desperate situation and wrote this song as a prayer for deliverance. It was written to be sung by God's people when the enemy surrounds us, when our faith is shaken and we wonder if we should keep trusting God. But the psalmist is going to call us to a place where we put our trust where it will not be disappointed. I believe that the main point this psalm is calling us to is this, to trust the living God who gives us life and praise his name forever. Trust the living God who gives us life and praise his name forever. We're going to break this into three points. And our first point, verses 1 through 3, glorify our sovereign God. Glorify our sovereign God. The psalm actually begins with a protest.

If you look at it, more often than not, protests are really done to try and to gain something. But in this case, the protest is an attempt not to gain something, but to give something. Glory!

Glory! Not to us, but to your name, give the glory. Now, glory is such a weird, strange word. We don't use it very often, but the word literally means heavy or weighty. If you put gold on a scale, I think this is the most helpful way to think about it. The heaviness would indicate its value. Glory literally means heavy, but metaphorically it refers to value. So the psalmist protests any glory or value being attributed to the people. Rather, he insists that all glory, all value, all honor, all fame goes to Yahweh.

[8 : 46] This is the God of Israel who has a history rooted in the words, steadfast love and faithfulness.

Steadfast love and faithfulness. It's right there. These two words, they often work together and are used again and again to describe the rescuing works of God as he continually did the impossible to keep his promises. It's not just in the lifetime of one individual, but it's over the course of generations to thousands and thousands of people. God, if you remember, he called Abraham. He called him out of all the people on the face of the earth and he promised to make him into a great nation even though his wife was barren. God brought about the birth, miraculously, of Isaac. And then he maintained his promise to grow his family through Isaac's son, Jacob. And Jacob experienced God's blessing in spite of being a really terrible dude. He was always tricking people. And in spite of that, God continued to bless him. Genesis 32 10. This is Jacob speaking. I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of what?

Steadfast love and of all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant. He's attributing this to the God of his salvation. Jacob's family ended up in Egypt where God grew them into a great people.

Then he arranged, God arranged for them to be released miraculously again from slavery through the powerful signs and wonders, culminating in what? The parting of the Red Sea. And as God's people set foot on the other side and their enemies were swallowed up by the sea, they look back and they sing this line.

Exodus 15 13. You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed. You have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

[11 : 01] And then, while they're in the wilderness, the very next thing, they're wandering around. God gave the people his law and he made them a nation set apart for himself.

And it was at Mount Sinai that God revealed himself to his people saying in Exodus 34 6, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Steadfast love and faithfulness are not arbitrary words that just kind of pop up in a Scrabble game. They are deeply connected with the character of the Lord who consistently and unceasingly works good for his people.

This is why the psalmist begins this way. He's scraping the frost from the windshield of their memory so that they are not stuck and that they can see clearly.

this is the Lord who is deserving of glory not us we were the ones in need of rescue and he did the rescuing why it's because he's abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness this is a bold declaration isn't it to begin with if God does not act his reputation for faithful love for his people will be called into question it's his character it's in question here this is exactly what's anticipated with that rhetorical question if you look at verse two why should the nation say where is their God he's anticipating accusation and mockery and you can see why God's people probably felt it they were surrounded by pagan nations who worship other gods and these nations seem to be prospering while they are suffering I can imagine God's people asking why is it that we are experiencing slavery and loss and weakness and meanwhile all the pagan nations around them look on at God's people and think they look pathetic where is your God we have real gods we can point to them and we can touch them what do you have an invisible God well to ask where is your God

[13 : 41] God shows that they thought Israel Israel's God was one of two things either he's unable to help or he's unwilling to help so which is it is your God weak or just apathetic God's people feel like they have been beaten to the ground and this question comes like a foot on the neck have you ever been there have you ever felt this way have you looked at the world and you just wonder why they seem to thrive and yet you seem to suffer have you ever wondered where your God is

I think we can take comfort in knowing that this is not a new question many many saints who've gone before us have wondered these exact same things in fact this question really it echoes the struggle of God's people in Egypt in Exodus 5 verse 2 Pharaoh one of these nations standing over them he says who is the Lord that I should obey his voice and let Israel go I do not know the Lord and moreover I will not let Israel go he's saying where is your God where is he well not much later God's people are in the wilderness and they're on the verge of being destroyed because of idol worship but Moses intercedes for the people and he calls out to the Lord this is Exodus 32 he says oh Lord why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand why should the Egyptians the nations the Egyptians why should they say with evil intent did he bring them out to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth did God just save you just so he could kill you later out in the wilderness where is your God that's the question where is your God well the psalmist he inserts this question in order to offer a follow-up a corrective for those who would scoff at the Lord I remember in the early 2000s one of the most popular Super Bowl commercial series of all time came out Terry Tate office linebacker I don't know if you've seen these 2003 I think is when they came out the halftime show that featured an American football player who would Superman tackle anyone in the office who was out of line if they did anything if they didn't refill the coffee bam here he comes Terry Tate office linebacker Superman tackle lays them out he kept things in order it it was it was wonderful I wonder what offices would be like if we had Terry Tate in there anytime there was an injustice he would just fly across the screen and take down the perpetrator boom well that that is exactly what the psalmist is doing here the nations have a foot on the neck of God's people and they're scoffing with the question where is your God is he too weak or just apathetic and the psalmist flies in from the side with a Superman tackle you've got this all wrong our God is not weak and he is not apathetic our God is in the heavens and he does everything that he pleases and what's more he's working good for all of his people that's what he's doing right now that's where he is the psalmist is setting things back into a proper perspective your God

Trinity Grace Church is not absent he's not a no show he's in the heavens he is powerful he is sovereignly ruling over every facet of creation as it's written in Acts 17 24 through 25 the God who made the world and everything in it being Lord of heaven and of earth does not live in temples made by man nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything our God is in the heavens and he does all that he pleases the psalmist is lifting us up from the ground and brushing the dirt off of us our God is living and he is active he is high above the world he is powerful and he is free God's people should not be the ones on the defensive here so the psalmist wants us to have a word with those who scoff let's take a look at their gods shall we point two don't worship worthless idols verses four through eight essentially put the nations in the hot seat the lights turned up verse four the interrogation begins with this observation their idols are silver and gold the work of human hands you see pagan idols they were often carved out of beautiful wood or they were cast with precious metals like silver or gold and typically they were made from the finest things the world had to offer but the psalmist is

drawing out the fact that these so-called gods are just the work of human hands and even though they are made of beautiful metals they were forged from the things of the earth this verse is intended to begin drawing out a contrast with Israel's

God he is the God who is above creation in the heavens he is unbound by the things of this world he is independent and he is sovereign over all of it however these idols down here they are made by people out of the things of the earth in other words the creatures are creating things to worship out of the creation instead of an all-powerful God creating man in his image the creaturely man is creating a powerless God in his image you see you see that contrast it's deceptive because the gold and the silver they look magnificent but both silver and gold are material from God's creation he goes on then in verse 5 to begin inspecting the idols from head to toe look at verse 5 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 throats the psalmist is wanting us to push beyond the surface to see the impotence of these idols these idols no matter how beautiful how impressive they may appear are ultimately powerless they too are simply just a part of God's creation this is a theme that comes up over and over again in the Bible

[22 : 06] Isaiah this is great this is sarcasm at his finest Isaiah the prophet describes idol worship like this in chapter 44 he cuts down cedars or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest he plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it then it becomes fuel for a man he takes part of it and he warms himself he kindles a fire and he bakes his bread and he makes a god and he worships it he makes it an idol and then he falls down before it half of it he burns in the fire over the half he eats meat he roasts and insatiable also he warms himself and says aha I am warm I have seen the fire and then the rest he takes and he makes it into a god his idol and falls down to it and worships it he prays to it and says deliver me for you are my god they know not nor do they discern for he has shut their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts so that they cannot understand so both

Isaiah and the psalmist are calling out the absurdity of hoping in idols they can do nothing for themselves and they can do nothing for their worshipers I remember when I was in middle school I had a neighbor and a good friend named Andrew who was ethnically Indian he and his dad were Christians but his mom was a Hindu and I remember every time we'd go over to hang out at his place we'd eat curry and stuff and drink raspberry soda I don't know why I always had that it was really good though we'd go to their house and his mom had this small shrine filled up with these little golden gods all sorts of golden elephants and monkeys with jewels on them sitting on this on this mantle my friend hated those things he did not like them sometimes when his mom wasn't around he'd take them off the mantle!

and he'd hide them in random places around the house kind of like an elf on the shelf he'd just move them in different spots and watch his mom try to find them it was really terrible but his mom would get so so mad but the reality was that those gods were defenseless against this skinny teenage boy with acne they were powerless they couldn't do anything couldn't do anything but we need to be careful not to think of idolatry as simply just a pagan thing with wood and gold and silver idolatry is far more than the worship of of an image at its core idolatry is really a heart problem it's a heart problem look at the way that Paul identifies idolatry in Colossians 3 verse 5 therefore put to death the members which are upon the earth sexual immorality impurity passion evil desire and covetousness which is idolatry isn't that interesting

I didn't see any gold or silver in there saying put these things to death this is idolatry it's a sobering reality all of these forms of idolatry stem from a godlessness it's a vacuum in which we the creatures begin to try and to find fulfillment in the creation just take sexual immorality as an example God created sex a good design but when stripped of the god who created it we're left with sex on its own terms and sexual immorality fills the vacuum using pornography engaging in casual hookups broken marriages because of infidelity and unfaithfulness same-sex relationships the creature engages the creation without reference to the creator and then recasts the creation in his own image that's what's happening we take covetousness for for instance

God created the material world he created the material world but when stripped of the god who created it we are left with materialism and an unceasing desire for more stuff bigger vacations better gadgets more junk to fill our garages and we're always looking over the fence or on our phones at what someone else has that we don't have and covetousness kicks in you see the

creature engages the creation without reference to the creator and recasts the creation in his own image pastor Ligon Duncan said that idolatry is about worshiping anything other than the one true god trusting in anything for protection and blessing other than the one true god and valuing anything more than or as much as him it was interesting to note at the end of that quote that he includes valuing anything as much as the lord a number of years ago i had the opportunity to go to india with some missionaries and one of the things the missionaries told us was it's very difficult to overcome when sharing the gospel with hindus is this communicating the exclusivity of jesus because jesus claimed to be the way the truth and the life not just an option but the problem is hinduism has millions of gods so often if hindus thought that jesus could help them in some way they would just add them into the mix of their other gods i remember visiting a home and seeing on the wall just this huge jesus calendar it was massive but on either side of the calendar were these shelves filled with idols on both sides flanking it they did not trust in jesus alone they had other trusts on the shelf trinity grace church do you have other trusts on the shelf are there created things in your life that you are trusting in as much or more than your creator verse eight tells us something very fascinating if you look at it with me those who make them become like them so do all who trust in them idolatry is not harmless here here is the great principle that the psalmist wants us to hear you become like what you worship you become like what you worship to the degree you commit yourself to something that doesn't have

[30 : 26] God's spirit to that degree you will be unspiritual extracting God from his rightful place as the creator over his creation leaves us wrongfully relating to his creation this is exactly what Paul explains in Romans chapter one for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened claiming to be wise they became fools and they exchanged the glory there's that word the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things therefore God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth about

God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature nature rather than the creator who is blessed forever amen occasionally we like to get outside at night and we enjoy looking up at the stars and the moon and one of the coolest things about the moon in my opinion is that it's basically just a giant reflector not amazing it doesn't create its own light it just reflects the light of the sun so if the light from the sun is blocked then the moon grows dark that's what happens when we have a lunar eclipse the earth literally sun moon the earth comes between the sun and moon the light is blocked so the moon has nothing to reflect which makes it look dark to our eyes it's been said that people are like the moon we are reflectors we are intended to reflect the glory of our creator but when the world comes between us and our

God we grow dark this is the great truth of idolatry this is what Paul and the psalmist are both saying G.K. Beale a wonderful theologian captured this truth when he said what you revere you resemble either for ruin or for restoration what you revere you resemble either for ruin or for restoration so the psalmist the office linebacker has tackled the issue of idolatry here but now he calls our attention away from the creation towards the creator and the song explodes in verse nine with a call to the people trust in the Lord point three trust in the

Lord the psalmist addresses all those that are gathered oh Israel and then again in verse 10 oh house of Aaron these names are even a reminder of what he's trying to communicate Israel Israel would not be a people unless God acted and made them a people oh Israel trust in Yahweh your God he saved you out of slavery regardless of what the nations are saying now look back to what he's done he promised to make you into a people and now oh Israel oh people of God oh Israel trust in the Lord who keeps His promises do you remember the story of Aaron that name drops in there Aaron was the one who at one time led the people to make a golden idol to worship it's the same guy he was numbered among those who made idols and he encouraged others to worship that which was made by human hands and yet

God acted to save Aaron and gave his descendants the job of leading people into the presence of the creator rather than the creation that's the job he assigned to the house of Aaron God redeemed the house of Aaron so the psalmist calls to those from the house of Aaron to trust the Lord look what he's done look at who you are and the psalmist calls all who fear the Lord to trust the Lord I read that I thought that sounds like a really weird pairing fear him and trust him really fear him and trust him I remember at one point coming up on what I thought was a dead bee on the ground now

if something's dead then I think it's kind of cool to get really close to it and check it out like those are opportunities you gotta seize you know those moments but when I got my face near this particular bee to get a good look at him all of a sudden his wings!

[36 : 17] Whipped into motion and took flight flies up right next to my face and I also took flight I was like nope I am dead there's this laying there I am not scared of that but when that baby popped up you better believe I was out of there when it's lifeless it's powerless but if it's alive it's got power it's alive and I'm gone we fear God because in a much greater way he's alive our God is the living God and he is worthy to be feared he's active and he has all power but the difference is that God is not looking to sting us he's actively working for the good of his people he is their help and their shield that's what he's up to so why should they trust him he has acted for

Israel he has acted for the house of Aaron he has acted for those who fear him this God stands in contrast to the idols they are lifeless but our God is alive they have to do everything for their gods but our God has done everything for us this is further established you look at verse 12 when the psalmist says the Lord has remembered us God's remembering isn't some kind of mindfulness where he's just meditating and thinking about good thoughts somewhere!

God's remembering refers to his working his action the psalmist is calling attention to the reality that the living God has pursued and acted for them in the past and as a nation they have experienced his faithful saving presence so in light of this they can know that he will bless them he did that for us in the past he will bless us in the future we can bank on it verse 12 he will bless us he will bless the house of Israel he will bless the house of Aaron verse 13 he will bless those who fear the Lord verse 14 may the Lord give you increase another way to speak of blessing!

does he just help those who help themselves no verse 13 says that he will bless those who fear the Lord both the small and the great Trinity Grace Church it is not a matter of your status or your bank account your personal discipline your talents your experience both the small and the great will be blessed not based on anything in yourselves but based on the one whom you fear verse 15 reassures us that our trust is well founded on the Lord who made the heaven and the earth he is not made from the earth like the idols are instead he made the earth and the heavens above the earth he does one better he is even above that in verse 16 it just punctuates his power saying that the heavens are his heavens his dominion is above everything on earth and it is without limit this great and powerful

Lord has sovereignly given the earth to the children of man the psalmist is reappropriating the relationship of man to both the creator and the creation in proper perspective God is supreme but he has graciously given the things of this earth to be received as a gift with gratitude that's the proper perspective this is the way that God intended for us to relate to the things of this earth I love 1st Timothy 4 it's very clear this is what it says about God's creation for everything created by God is good it's good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving thanksgiving recognizes the goodness of the creation as coming from the creator that's what's happening there that's the dynamic it's recognizing God as supreme it's glory going to the rightful place where glory is due we are not intended to worship creation apart from the creator but we are to enjoy creation with thankfulness to our creator so in light of this reality the psalmist says in verse 17 the dead do not praise the

[41 : 31] Lord nor do any who go down into silence the dead the dead the dead who go down into silence these are people that are portrayed as being utterly disconnected from the world of the living this is a reference to this shadowy existence in the life to come for unbelievers they are lifeless they are unable to make any sound well strikingly this really does it aligns with the attributes that we talked about of the idol earlier remember in verse 5 if you look up verse 5 they have mouths and do not speak in verse 7 says they do not make a sound in their throat they are lifeless that's what it's saying they do not make a sound they are silent and verse 8 remember it says those who trust in them become like them they become like them they too those who trusted them go down into silence as many of you remember the famous boat the

Titanic was thought by some to be unsinkable it was a magnificent work of human hands like they never seen before but it was also a magnificent tribute to human pride the unsinkable did the unthinkable when it hit an iceberg!

And it went down down into silence into silence so too will all who refuse to place your trust in the Lord the reality is that we all have tried to live apart from the creator we all have trusted and created things rather than the Lord who created everything!

We all have sinned and fallen short of His glory but there's one more verse in the song verse 18 says but we we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forever more those who worship the created things become like them lifeless and silent however those who worship the creator become like him full of life and able to speak notice that the Lord did all of the blessing in verses 12 through 15 if you glance through that all the blessing the

Lord did but now look who's doing the blessing verse 18 his people are blessing him trusting in the Lord brings life and causes his people to reflect him what you revere you resemble either for ruin or restoration so don't place your trust in created things your creator is calling you this morning he's calling to you for all who sinned and are sinking down into silence the Lord offers you life through Jesus Christ he descended from heaven on high to be brought low for you he had eyes that wept for sinners like you he had ears to hear the cries of prayers from sufferers just like you he had hands and he had feet that were nailed to the cross for rebels like you he embraced silence like a sheep led to the slaughter so that your mouth might be filled with thankfulness where you failed at giving glory to

[45 : 56] God he succeeded in giving God glory perfectly! in Jesus Christ you will be saved from the death you deserve and you will receive the life that Jesus earned he tasted death so that you might have eternal life he went down into silence so that praise might be on your lips he was isolated so that we might be gathered as a people for God to marvel at him forever because of Christ we will never be separated from our good no matter what comes we can always look back at the cross we can always look there and know with confidence that our God cares for us when the foot of the world is on our throat we can take them off and say our Lord is in the heavens he does all that he pleases and he was pleased to die for me Trinity Grace Church trust in the Lord trust the living

God who gives us life and praise his name forever let's praise his name from this time forth and forever more not to us oh Lord not to us but to your name give the glory for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness may God help us to live in response to his word father we are creatures and we happily admit that you are our creator so Lord we do not give glory to the created things we do not give glory to us you are the one who is faithful and full abounding with steadfast love thank you for your mercy thank you for your grace thank you for your pardon in Jesus Christ we know that you are working all things together for good for those who love you and are called according to your purpose and so Lord we cast ourselves to you and say to your name be glory and honor from this time forth and forever more in

Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com