

Shaped by what we love

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] Okay, so the reading this morning is for all of us in here. It's also for all of those in Sunday school, but of course they don't get to hear it. The reading is also for all those who are stewarding out there on the front door. I mean, they have the privilege of a speaker, so they get to hear God's Word. But as we come to the reading this morning, I want us to just receive it as it would have been heard originally, which may be a little bit difficult, but we'll try it anyway. So Psalm 115.

Psalm 115.

That wasn't even my voice, but that was... Someone do that again and I'll pretend to ventriloquist or whatever it was. That was great.

Now, who is that? Because you're in serious trouble now. Sophie? Sophie's getting the blame for it anyway. Okay, Psalm 115.

Psalms, if you're there already, it's sort of bang in the middle of the Bible. I like what Margaret did last week. If you couldn't find Habakkuk, it was, I think, five back from Malachi from the Old Testament. I don't know where Psalms is, but it's somewhere in the middle.

[1 : 49] So Psalm 115. Now hear God's Word. 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 nation say, where is their God?

A God is in the heavens. He does all that he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. Their mouths, 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. 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.

[3 : 04] He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and 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 go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord.

I want, if I can, please preface this message with sort of an introduction before an introduction.

And say that the last line that you have sung, that your hope is in God alone, that I want that to be settled in your heart this morning, even through listening to this message.

[4 : 08] But I want you to listen to it differently. And I think you will because you're all different people. So parents, if I can just address you for a moment.

You've got young children and even grandparents. Eric and Elaine, newly grandparents. Looking a little bit older for it. That was a joke. That was just a joke.

Only Eric is. Sorry, Eric. Now we do, and we'll pray for Cameron and little Finn and the whole family, really, not just those two, and ask that God would bless them all.

But there's a different way to listen to this. Now, when you're dealing with a child, of course, you're not just, when the children go through into Sunday school this morning, they're not just dealing with putting information into their minds that they believe something.

And too often, Christianity is about, what do I believe? And that's true. You ought to believe the right things. But most of you will know, dealing with people or dealing with children, that you're not just dealing with beliefs.

[5 : 18] You're dealing with a will. You're dealing with desires. You're dealing with affections. You're dealing with, I don't want to's. And I'm going to do this instead.

You're dealing with selfishness. You're dealing with a number of other things, which means that belief alone doesn't change a person. And yet, too often, Christians think that they are different because they believe different things.

And yet, what Psalm 115 points out is very, very clearly that the way God forms and shapes a person is by changing them, but not just by belief alone.

It is by loving. It is by trusting. It is by hoping. And so, one of the things that we need to do in this church, both young and old, is to understand clearly how people change and why people don't, in the church or even out of the church.

So, as we begin Psalm 115, I want you to pay careful attention to the fact that when God's people are described, they are often described as people who walk with God.

[6 : 34] But this is explaining more than just direction, and it's most definitely explaining more than just distance. So, your Christian life is not about how much distance you've covered.

It is about direction, and it's about both of those in part, but there's more to it. When you walk with God, you're saying something else.

One of those things is, is that you have a relationship with God. The other thing that you're saying is that you're in agreement with God. Because you are walking with Him, you are naturally in agreement with Him.

How can two walk together lest they be agreed? Well, they don't walk together. Part of walking together is that you are in agreement, that you go at the same place, same direction, you're heading in the same destination, to the same destination.

So, when a person walks with God, they are saying, I'm in relationship with God, I'm in agreement with God, I understand the ways of God. This isn't just about direction, it's not just about what I believe, it's about much, much more than that.

[7 : 44] And so, if you're a Christian here this morning and go, yeah, but I believe, I want to encourage you this morning, great, but that's not enough. Now, this isn't salvation by works, because salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, but what accompanies salvation, what accompanies salvation, the blessings and benefits that come with being saved by grace through faith, is these practices.

And one of those practices is hoping, another is trusting, another is loving. Love is a practice, it's not a feeling, it's something that you practice. So, back in the day, doctors were called doctors' practices, okay, because they practice medicine.

Okay? Love is a practice, hope is a practice, and some people just can't put the paper in their hand that they have and just sit and listen to God and think, right, I'm going to pay attention here, they're busy doing other things, and forgetting that actually waiting on the Lord is a practice.

Okay? They're busy doing other things, and yet actually waiting on the Lord is a practice. So, here's the summary of Psalm 115. As it begins, we are to recognize that glory is to be given to God and not to us.

And the reason why glory is to be given to God is because of what he does for us and what nobody else can do for us. People complain about the God who is in heaven, and they complain about God that they do not know, verse 2.

[9 : 21] But as we go through from verses 3 through to 8, we recognize that people are more than capable of establishing their own kind of God on earth. These are called idols.

And people who love and trust them become like them. But they are reminded all the time, verses 12 through to 13, that blessing only comes from God.

Don't go and look for it somewhere else because it doesn't come from anywhere else. You won't find it anywhere else. You can only find it from God. And yet, too often, people are forever searching, forever looking, thinking that their break is on the next website that they click on, that their break is in the next book that they buy, that their enlightenment will come with the next thing, the next holiday that they have, and yet it never will because as God is declaring here, blessing comes from me.

It doesn't come from anywhere else. The thing that you're looking for is something that I have to give to you. Now, there's the clue. The fact that you're not going to be able to find it is partly due to the fact that God gives it.

He doesn't just lay it aside and say, here are the directions. It is something that God gives in return to you presenting yourself before him. And yet, too often, the Christian thinks, just like the atheist, and think, well, I just need to make my way to the pot of gold.

[10:49] Okay? I just need to figure out how to get it. And that's not the way that it works. God wants us to come to him. He causes us to sit and to wait. And then, he gives us.

Okay? So, even if you've arrived at the right place, God, it's not a case of taking what you like and then moving off in your own direction. No.

You're expected to sit. You're expected to wait upon the Lord and God will bless you. Now, the point here is that the one who belongs to God, loves him, trusts him, and doesn't just believe alone. Okay? The trust is trusting in something that God is, something that God has done. They present their bodies as living sacrifices. They serve God. They walk with God.

and they see and understand that worshipping God is a form of trusting him. That worshipping God is a form of love in practice. That hoping in God is a form of practice.

[11:48] It looks like something out in the world. You don't go start putting your trust and hope in things that are not going to deliver. So, if I was to ask the question, do you love God?

You might say, yes. But your love for God may be nothing more than a belief. You believe that you love God. Okay? But, but what Psalm 115 does is it tests that belief.

Because it's looking for, where's, where's the outcome? Where's the practical outcome of you actually loving God here? I know that you say you do.

I know that you believe you do. But that's not the question being asked. The question being asked here is, where's the practical outcome of you fearing God?

What does it look like on a daily basis? So, walking with God here is not about just direction. It's not just about ending up in a place. It's about practically loving and trusting every single day.

[12:49] It's about not turning to other things when it's so easy to turn to other things to do for you what only, God can actually do. And the principal point here is that whatever you trust and love, your life will become like.

Whatever you trust and love, your life will become like. You will be shaped by the thing that you love the most. You will be formed by the thing that you trust the most.

You will be conformed to the image of that which you hope in and trust in and love ultimately. If it's God, then you will be made to look like Jesus. But if it's not God, then you will be shaped counter to the image of God in you.

Hence, why many Christians have these perpetual battles of trying to become like Christ and not becoming like Christ. Of wanting to become like Christ and then not desiring to become like Christ. And instinctively, you know, right at this point, right, this isn't just about belief. This is about a whole load more. So I want to lay out something that I've laid out to the congregation before by way of introduction into that point of trusting and loving.

[14:04] And the reason it's worth it is because it's worth repeating. In Isaiah 55, we understand the difference between symptoms and solutions. Symptoms and solutions.

In Psalm 115, the same thing is spelled out but in a slightly different way. The point here is this, that when God invites a person who is hungry to come, he meets that person with the necessary food that they need.

Hunger and food, well, they go together. When God invites the person who is thirsty, he provides the correct solution to thirst, which is the water. So there are men and women on earth who are suffering, who are suffering hunger and thirst, spiritually speaking, even physically speaking, and God is able to meet those needs.

But God doesn't meet your need for hunger with a sledgehammer. He meets it with bread. God doesn't meet your need for being thirsty with a paperback book.

He meets it with water. In other words, what we're understanding, what God is trying to demonstrate to us, is that the solutions, the symptoms that you are having are to be met with the correct solution.

[15:16] The hungry person receives bread because hunger and bread, well, they go together. The bread solves the hunger. The thirsty person needs water. Why? Because water solves a person being thirsty.

But as I pointed out, Christians go completely wrong on this. Even though they understand that is so simple, they go completely wrong when it comes to the spiritual things of God. And they treat the

spiritual things of God like they do a headache.

So when you have a headache, you take a paracetamol. But it's not because your body's lacking paracetamol. When you're hungry, you eat food. Right?

Because you know your body's lacking food. When you're thirsty, you have a drink because you know your body's lacking water. And when you have a headache, you take a paracetamol. But you know that your body's not lacking paracetamol.

Why are you doing the very opposite when you have a headache that you do to when you're hungry or when you're thirsty? And why do you treat your spiritual condition before God like a headache?

That you understand the symptoms, but you treat it completely counter to what you actually need.

[16:25] That's the point that Psalm 115 points out. They're not denying that you're unable to understand the symptoms that you're going through or that you're feeling as a Christian.

But the issue that you have is that you're not feeling, you're not seeing the correct solution. And too many people spiritually treat their spiritual life in the same way they treat a headache.

They take the wrong thing for the wrong symptoms. When they're hungry, they know they go to the cupboard and they make themselves a sandwich. When they're thirsty, they take a glass and put it under the tap and pour themselves some water.

But the moment they have a headache, they take a tablet. Now, when you do that spiritually, you never address the need. You never address the need.

And too many people, and it's easy to see this in people's, Christians' lives because, and the reason we can see it is because God explains it to us.

[17:24] It's not that we've got any kind of special perception as we look at each other, but anyone who's read the Bible and then look at a person's life can go, yep, I can see what the issue is there.

They're treating their spiritual life like they treat a headache. They're not addressing the symptoms with the right solution. They're just dealing with pain. They're just trying to get it out the way and then the next time they have one, they'll deal with it in exactly the same way again.

Now, this gets even more complicated when the symptoms are located in a different place than the problem is. And this is something, again, which Christians ought to understand is fairly simple, but the moment we apply it to the Christian life, it all seems to go wrong.

They have symptoms and they go, well, the problem must be here somewhere, but actually the problem could be somewhere else and that's what we need to understand. So I want you to think about it this way. You go to the doctor because you're not feeling very well.

Okay? Like these here, they don't go to God when they're not feeling well. They go and make themselves some idols. Okay? Now imagine in this case that the doctor is clearly not God.

[18:36] Okay? And you go to the doctor because you're feeling well and the doctor says, look, I can't seem to find all too much wrong with you, but however, take these tablets and in a couple of days you feel worse.

And after two weeks of taking the tablets, you feel terrible. Just day after day, more symptoms start occurring, things that you didn't have before, now you have, and you've got all these problems.

And at the end of a couple of weeks, just say worst case scenario, not worst case scenario if you're a Christian, but worst case scenario, you die. And you've gone. One of the things that we need to understand is that the symptoms is not always the location of the problem.

When the doctor gets it wrong, the patient dies, not the doctor. When the doctor gets it wrong, the patient dies, not the doctor.

And those who cling to worthless idols are clinging to that which gets it wrong, but those idols don't die because they're already dead, you die. When you put your trust in something and you've got all of these symptoms, I need this person to sort me out, I need this, I need, I'm trusting in these things to solve my problem, okay, those solutions that you've been provided with, well, they remain as they are.

[19:59] When the doctor gets it wrong, the patient dies, not the doctor. And God is pointing out here in Psalm 115 that those who make these idols become like them, dead.

Those who trust in idols, those who bow down to us, those who trust in love, something other than God and put their trust in them, become like them, verse 8. Those who make them, those who trust in them, those who love them, as though this is the solution, become like them, dead.

The ultimate end of trusting and loving something other than God is death. God is the only one who can give life. And yet, too many people turn to the spiritual equivalent of a headache tablet other

than God.

They're turning to other things other than God and don't recognize that the symptoms that they are having are caused by what they're turning to. Like the person whose symptoms got worse after two weeks because of the tablets they were given by the doctor.

Okay? The symptoms are showing up in one location, but the problem is somewhere else. And the problem that you can experience in your Christian life or in your life generally may turn up in your life, but it could be because you're trusting in someone else.

[21 : 19] It could be because you're trusting in something else. It's not God. And the reason you're experiencing a worsening of symptoms over here is not because the problem is inherent to you, but it's because you're loving and trusting something that cannot actually solve the problem.

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs, as Jonah said. And as it says here in Psalm 115, those who make idols as solutions to their problems become like them. Dead. When the doctor gets it wrong, it is the patient who dies, not the doctor. And this is what God is saying here.

If you are loving and trusting and hoping in something else other than God, you're loving and trusting in something that will eventually bring your life to naught.

Cannot give you life. Can only take it away. What does this mean? Well, one of the things it means is you need to understand right from the very beginning how God shapes you, how God forms you, how God changes your children and how your children won't change, how you will change or not change.

[22 : 39] And one of the things that we see in Scripture is very plain over and over again, Psalm 115, Jeremiah 2, Matthew 13, Isaiah 6, Isaiah 44, countless passages is simply this, that people create idols that is something that they love and trust in other than God as a means of a solution.

They look for causes, how could this happen to me, why is this happening to me, perhaps it's something in my past, perhaps it's something that I've done, but it must be genetic, it must be, you know, someone's got something against me.

They look for causes and then they try and create a solution. Well, if I do this, if I do that, if I love and trust in these things. This is how Habakkuk 2 puts it.

What profit is an idol when its maker is shaped it? A metal image, a teacher of lies. For its maker, trust in his own creation when he makes a speechless idol.

He says to the wooden thing, awake, to a silent stone, wake up. Well, you know that that doesn't make any sense. Okay, it doesn't make any sense at all to take a stone off a beach, which you're not allowed to do, okay, and you set it up on your mantelpiece and every morning you come down to it and rub it and go, awake and speak to me.

[24 : 04] It's utter foolishness. And yet, what God is saying is to trust in anything other than him is the equivalent of doing that. It's the equivalent of doing that.

Do you know, back in the day, I can remember when it was fashionable, I don't know who started it, but I don't think it was a Christian. It was fashionable for this idea for married couples to have what was called a date night.

I didn't even know what a date night was before I got married, let alone after I got married, which was to no advantage to my wife whatsoever. But I managed to steer the ship because I understood Habakkuk 2.

Now, the idea of a date night was something like this. If you've been married for a long time or if you're married with children, you need some time alone. And yeah, okay, there's nothing wrong with that per se.

There's nothing wrong with a man and a husband and wife just having a break and having time on their own, but it doesn't deal with the pressure of family life. And it doesn't deal with the pressure of a marriage that's going south.

[25 : 11] And yet, too often, this is put forward as a solution. It's a man-made creation that doesn't seem to involve God at all. Okay? Have a date night. Okay?

This will solve this will solve all the problems. But because it is a creation of man that's looked to as a solution and doesn't involve God, it's never, ever going to pay off the goods.

It's never, ever going to cut. Why? Because it's a creation of man to solve an issue that cannot be solved by man's creation. Okay? There's nothing wrong with date nights if you want to...

There's... I don't even think it's biblical to call it a date night because scriptures doesn't support dating in any way, or at least the modern version of it. But the point here is is that it's easy for people to come up with solutions.

Now, unless your date night is, of course, going to a prayer meeting, right? That might do some good. But anything else that leaves God out of the picture isn't going to do anything at all.

[26 : 15] And people in the church, just like people in the world, and this is where church people God's people ought to be really, really different because we should know better, is that we should not come up with the endless creations we do to solve problems.

We shouldn't come up with solutions to then trust in them. This is what's need. This is what I need. This will do it. Right? I'm highly strong. I need a break. I need a holiday. I need a holiday. Well, okay, it may be nice to have a holiday, but the holiday ain't gonna cut it. Why? Because anything that is a creation of man fails to deliver because they're not the solutions which God provides.

Anything that you love and trust other than God cannot make you better. The man in Isaiah 44 puts it this way. He goes out into his forest, he chops down a tree.

One half of the tree, he cooks his dinner on it. He burns the wood and lights a fire. The other half of the tree, he carves it and bows down and worships it. And he says to the tree, he warms himself over one side of the tree and on the other side he bows down and worships it and says, deliver me.

[27 : 29] He's created something that he is then asking, this will do the trick, deliver me, save me. This has to work this time.

Okay? This has to, this is my last option. It has to work, this, but it's not going to work. Why? Because it's a creation of man that man is now trusting in and loving in that doesn't involve God. In fact, the man himself is now being shaped by the very thing that he worships. So he says, ah, I'm warm, I've seen the fire and the rest, he makes it into a God, his idol and he falls down to it and worships it and he prays to it and says, deliver me for you are my God.

No. There's a real warning here of seeking a solution by the creation of your own hands. This is the warning in Isaiah 44.

The danger of seeking a solution by the creation of your own hands and then the added danger of you actually becoming like the very thing that you're trusting in.

[28 : 39] You'd be better off cancelling the holiday and coming to prayer and Bible study. You'd be better off changing your date night from the cinema to the prayer meeting or at least pray together.

You'd be better turning these problems and the apparent solutions that the world offers and goes, that's the creation of man that doesn't seem to involve God. You're better turning to God.

Why? Because if you don't, you become like the things that you trust in. And if you trust and you love God and you practice trusting and loving God every day, you will become like him.

But if you don't and you practice and love something else other than God, then you will be formed counter to the image of Christ. You will be changed, but you will not be changed to look like God or to feel like God or to be like God.

You'll be changed counter to the image of God. Here's the exhortation then as we sort of wrap it up. People are inclined to look for causes and solutions.

[29 : 46] And they do this at the same time that they forget that it is in God that we live and move and have our being. Okay? When people look for a solution in the world, they are forgetting that everything is held together by Christ.

Okay? Because if you remember that everything is held together by Christ, you understand the foolishness of your own way of then to go and look for it somewhere else. But you go read Colossians 1.

All things were created through him and for him and in him all things are held together. All things are held together. The moment you start looking for solutions elsewhere, you're going to become like the things that you're then trusting in.

Useless. Dead. To an end at some point. When people have the correct understanding, they then are able to practice the right things.

But when people practice the wrong things, they are shaped by those wrong things. So I want you to think about this as your own life long before you think about it about anybody else's life.

[30 : 49] We need to demonstrate to each other and to children and to the world how it's done. We need to demonstrate what it means not just to believe but what it means to practice what we

believe.

to practice loving God, to practice trusting God, to practice hoping in God. We don't want to become like the idols. The real danger to idolatry as we see here is the idols are those who have mouths but don't speak, those who have ears but don't hear, those who have hearts but don't feel, right?

So they have all of these sort of carved qualities that a person has or at least parts of the body that a person has but they can't see and so the inherent danger to idolatry is this, that those who worship those type of images become deaf and dumb and blind to the things of God.

This is why Jesus is constantly saying in the New Testament let him who have ears to hear, hear. Why? Well the problem is is their ears have become like the ears of their idols.

they retain the shape but they don't work. They don't actually hear anything and so the very thing that you're trusting in this morning, the very thing that your children are trusting in and loving in, anyone trusting and loving in something more than God, that is what their life will turn out to be.

[32 : 21] Okay? We're able to understand the path of each other and children by looking at the things that they love, by looking at the things that they trust in.

So here's the final consideration as we close. Adults like children and children like adults are simply not shaped just by what they believe. It's not enough to simply say here this morning I believe as though Christianity is a purely educational aspect.

if I ask you are you a Christian you are able to say five things that you believe that somehow then qualify you. I don't think that's the point of Christianity at all.

I think the point of Christianity is what God said at the beginning love me. To love God. To put him first. To trust him first.

When the children go out into Sunday school one of the things that happens out there is yes they receive information but more importantly what they should be receiving and what they are receiving is that they're learning how to sing.

[33 : 31] They're learning how to pray. They're learning how to read the Bible. They are practicing these things so that they would be shaped by them. They are trusting in the things of God and God himself through them that they would become like the very things that they do rather than counter.

So think about it this way. Divvy up your life this morning. Divvy up the life of your children this morning and decide how much is actually devoted to God in love and trust and then how much is actually devoted to love and trusting and desiring other things.

God has actually provided a way to shape the desires of children. To shape the will of children. Because he's provided the way to shape the will and desires of adults.

But too often we miss this because we concentrate on simply believing the right things. Psalm 115 teaches us it's not simply enough just to believe the right things because you will be shaped by what you love and trust.

You will look like what you love and trust the most. So as you leave here this morning understand that you may believe the right things. but understand that you will become what you're loving and trusting the most.

[34 : 51] Understand that as your children tell you that they believe in Jesus that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave. Right? That that alone isn't going to protect them from the temptations that are going to come their way as they get older in the same way it doesn't protect you from the temptations you have right now.

More is required and what's required is this practice of love and trust in God and God alone. And that's simply called worship.

That's what we do on a Sunday morning and a Sunday evening. That's what we do to establish the week ahead of us. Church isn't about attendance it's about practicing loving and trusting God alone so that we continue to do it when we leave here.

Amen. Amen. Amen.