

“Powerful Person Forever”

Psalm 115

¹Not to us, O LORD, not to us
but to your name be the glory,
because of your love and faithfulness.

²Why do the nations say,
“Where is their God?”

³Our God is in heaven;
he does whatever pleases him.

⁴But their idols are silver and gold,
made by the hands of men.

⁵They have mouths, but cannot speak,
eyes, but they cannot see;

⁶they have ears, but cannot hear,
noses, but they cannot smell;

⁷they have hands, but cannot feel,
feet, but they cannot walk;
nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

⁸Those who make them will be like them,
and so will all who trust in them.

⁹O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—
he is their help and shield.

¹⁰O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD—
he is their help and shield.

¹¹You who fear him, trust in the LORD—
he is their help and shield.

¹²The LORD remembers us and will bless us:
He will bless the house of Israel,
he will bless the house of Aaron,

¹³he will bless those who fear the LORD—
small and great alike.

¹⁴May the LORD make you increase,
both you and your children.

¹⁵May you be blessed by the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

¹⁶The highest heavens belong to the LORD,
but the earth he has given to man.

¹⁷It is not the dead who praise the LORD,
those who go down to silence;

¹⁸it is we who extol the LORD,
both now and forevermore.

Praise the LORD.

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HOPE
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I. Introduction

No wonder the world thinks we're weird. Everybody likes comfort; there's nothing odd about that. What's weird about us, is where we derive our comfort. This psalm makes us Christians look weird. But I find it to be one of the most viscerally comforting portions of text in the Bible. The psalm is great in glory. This psalm emblazons the Great Ground of Glory, the Great God of Glory, the Great Good of Glory, the Great Grace of Glory, and the Great Gratitude of Glory.

II. Great Ground of Glory

Why is all this greatness so weird? The writer, whoever it was, starts off by giving an account for the weirdness that is in us. I am not sure you can find a clearer statement in all the Bible on what distinguishes the Christian from the unbeliever. I am no "Jesus Seminar"-ian, but even if you drew a red line through all the rest of the words in the Bible, you'd still have the Gospel in v1. "Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness."

To the world this is weird. It has been ever since the fall of Adam. The song of the world is: "To me, O world, be the glory." Of course, the life that goes with such a song invests itself with getting as much glory as possible. Getting respect, getting acceptance, getting love, getting security, getting influence, getting control, getting more; this is the way to get comfort.

Then He comes near. And suddenly the new believer realizes that he or she has been released from the greatest nemesis of all real comfort. The greatest nemesis of all real comfort... is getting glory for yourself. Before the fall of Adam, Eden was a *very* comfortable place. As soon as Adam decided to get glory for himself, God sent him out of Eden and into a place that would be very, very uncomfortable. Namely, the world as we now know it. A world full of people trying to find comfort in getting glory for themselves.

Then God came near. He saw how uncomfortable fig leaves were. Fig leaves still left you feeling naked before the eyes of God. So God gave them blood. He gave Adam and Eve skins of an animal. He had told them that in the day they tried to get glory for themselves by eating the fruit God forbade them, they would surely die. He told them the wages of getting glory for yourself is death. But now He came near, and gave them skin and blood with which to cover themselves. That is to say, God covered them with the reality that the wages of getting glory for yourself had been paid by another. Another had to die, to cover their death-deserving self-glorifying.

Now Adam and Eve again found comfort in God's presence. They knew that the God who loved them was not conflicted by unfulfilled justice. He was free to love them and they were free to love Him. They were free to repent and renounce their former song: "To me, O creatures, be the glory." Now they were free and willing to sing, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness."

Every son and daughter of Adam and Eve, except One, has been not only born, but conceived, singing the song, "To me, O world, be the glory." But when God comes near, your tune changes. It changes so radically that you seem quite weird. Now your tune becomes, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness." As time goes on, you find that the more you mean what you now sing, the more comfort you know. You also shun and pity the new kind poverty that now upsets you so—the poverty of discomfort that fills you every time you revert to your old song.

Yet in your new song is the great ground of glory. "Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, *because of your love and faithfulness.*" Deep within the heart of even the

loudest, most raucous singer of "To me, O world, be the glory," lies a dreadful terror of the power of God, the justice of God, the Law of God. A dreadful terror of the day when God will come to exact justice lies in every soul still singing that ugly song. But there is no knowledge in their heart whatsoever of the merciful love and faithfulness of God. Such knowledge comes only from the Scriptures, and must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit coming near.

It is by God's love and faithfulness that He comes near to those whom He has covered with Jesus' blood and skin. Jesus was the one—the only one—who never sang "To me, O world, be the glory." Everywhere and always Jesus sang only, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness." In his love for his Son, God the Father had promised to give the new song to every soul whom Jesus covered with his skin and blood. God's faithfulness to this promise of everlasting love is the great ground of glory in this psalm.

You can't find comfort like this in getting glory for yourself. But there is a gushing fountain of comfort coming from our God of love and faithfulness.

III. Great God of Glory

The psalmist has launched himself like a diver on a springboard. He now exults in a comparison that can delight your soul in the ballistic arc of exhilaration and the deep water of distress.

I remember a few particular instances of demented bullies picking on me as a child. One of those was in elementary school. I planned to take a long detour home from school to avoid the probable entanglement. Just then, I see my big brother walking home from high school. Suddenly all fear dissipated as together we walked bee-line right through the danger zone. My brother was much bigger than the danger. I had schemed to comfort myself with a detour... but real comfort had to come from another.

Again, it was a year later in junior high school. I was enraged by an enemy's relentless pin-pricking tactics as I waited after school for wrestling practice to start. I stormed home and secured my Swiss army knife, which I fully intended to apply to my defense if not a little offense. Once again, my big brother recognized my urgent need for comfort—comfort that I probably was not going effectively to procure with my steel. So he simply said "I'll go back with you." Comfort from another. Bigger than my enemy and my steel.

The psalmist here enjoys a comfort not altogether different. He senses and fears the bullying of enemies bigger than himself. These enemies mock him and they mock his invisible God. ²"Why do the nations say, 'Where is their God?'" They comfort themselves with their visible gods—gods represented by idols they've made with their own hands. So the psalmist does a very simple thing. He starts comparing his enemies with his God. My big brother was a lot bigger than my enemies in grade school, and our God is a lot bigger than the biggest enemy this world can ever muster.

Each of the following statements implies a comparison between our God and their gods. ³"Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him." Our God is not remote or confined to heaven; the psalmist simply means that our God is above all things and greater than all things, and nothing can stop Him from doing whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth.

Note well, God does whatever pleases him. Everything that he does pleases him, and everything that pleases him he does. If it pleases him to make you comfortable in his compassion, he will make you comfortable in his compassion. If it pleases him to make you tremble in conviction, he will make you tremble in conviction.

We seem to think God is on a seesaw. Either he is up on justice or he is up on mercy at any point in time, but not both. Not so. With us who believe, God is being just *and* merciful *all* the time. ^{Ps111.4}He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate... ⁷"The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy."

The comparison is simple: their gods can't do *anything*. Our God is a living Person, their gods are lifeless silver and gold. Their gods can't speak; our God has *spoken* through the prophets, and ^{Heb1.2}"in these last days he has *spoken* to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." Their gods can't see; our God sees all things. ^{Heb4.13}"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's *sight*. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." You can't keep things safe by keeping them secret from God.

Their gods can't hear; but ^{Ps34.17}"The righteous cry out, and the LORD *hears* them; he delivers them from all their troubles." ^{Ps10.17}"You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, ¹⁸defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more. Yes, ^{1Jn5.14}"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he *hears* us."

Their gods can't smell; our God did not miss it when Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a *fragrant* offering and sacrifice to God. Now, ^{2Co2.15}"we are to God the *aroma* of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing."

Their gods can't feel; but ^{Ps103.13}"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has *compassion* on those who fear him." Their gods can't walk; our God came and walked upon the earth. And ^{Isa52.7}"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" In fact, they and their gods will be made the footstool under our Savior's feet. ^{Ps110.1, Heb1.13}

Their gods can't make any sound come out of their throat; ^{Joe3:16}"The LORD will *roar* from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel." ^{cf1Th4.16}

Look, their gods are stupid and weak. They can't do anything. What does that say about those who trust in them? Calvin, in his special way with words, says the psalmist "deservedly severely reprehends men naturally endowed with understanding, because they divest themselves of reason and judgment, and even of common sense. For those who ask life from things which are lifeless, do they not endeavor to the utmost of their power to extinguish all the light of reason? In a word, were they possessed of a particle of common sense, they would not attribute the properties of deity to the works of their own hands, to which they could impart no sensation or motion." ^{V6p350}

Their gods are stupid and impotent; those who make them are like them. Those whom God remakes will be like Him. Remember that, next time you find yourself expecting something other than God to be the source of your happiness. All happiness comes from God alone. It may come from Him *through* something as water comes through a pipe. But as soon as you think the pipe itself produces the water, you'll find it gets quickly clogged and there is no joy. Disconnect the pipe from God, and you'll get no water from the pipe.

Think of your new tool or your new toy (there *is* a difference, isn't there?) as the source of happiness, rather than a means by which you can produce something to honor God... and you'll be tired of it in a few weeks or less. Think of your fiancée or spouse as the source of happiness

rather than as a precious gift from God, and you'll be waging intramarital war the rest of your days.

Think of nature's beauty as the source of happiness rather than as a revelation of God's powerful creativity, and you'll soon start to think the mountains and hills and rivers and seas and amoebas and apes have more of a right to be here than you do. Think of your child's education as the source of happiness rather than as a necessary instrument to know God and to serve Him, and one day you'll find you've led them astray and it would have been better for you to have been cast into the sea with a large millstone tied around your neck.^{Luk17.2}

Think of history and heroes as the source of happiness rather than as demonstrations of God's faithfulness, and soon you'll be in a slough of despond regarding your own evil day.

The Lord is the great God of glory. Implore Him not to let *anything* tempt you to find your happiness in it, unless it is clearly evident how *God* would give you happiness *through* that thing. Tell me... is there *anything* in the world that can lay its life down for you and thereby satisfy God's justice for your sins, and mercifully cover you with its love? Clue: NO. Not even the greatest mountain or martyr.

You need Christ. It is that simple. Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. Nothing pleases him so much as to apply the sacrificial obedience, death, and resurrection of his own Son to the souls for whom he sent his Son to walk on this earth.

IV. Great Good of Glory

Great ground of glory, great God of glory. Next, great Good of glory. Church, trust in the Lord—he is your help and shield. Our God is good.^{Isa64.4} "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him." God cannot stand to be deprived of any honor or worship due to Him.

Last week we asked why the mountains, hills, rivers and seas do the things they do? They tremble, melt, flee, and hop because God comes near. Why, then, does God do the things He does? For the glory of His name. So what is the point of asking Him to do anything other than for the glory of his name? Clue: No point. The purest of prayers will be those most purely grounded on the glory of his name. It is our only hope of salvation... that saving us brings honor, glory, and praise to His name.

^{Ps23.3}"He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for *his name's sake*."
^{25.11}"For the *sake of your name*, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great."^{106.8}"Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known."^{143.11}"For *your name's sake*, O LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble."^{Isa43.25}"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, *for my own sake*, and remembers your sins no more."

Therefore trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Follow his precepts with great delight in his commands. This is the greatest way you can bring honor, glory, and praise to His name.

V. Great Grace of Glory

Next, great Grace of glory.¹²"The Lord remembers us and will bless us." *Blessing* us, when for our sins we deserve *cursing*. That is *grace*. Whether you are great or small, if you follow his precepts with great delight in his commands, he will *bless* you. In fact He already has, for you would not follow his precepts to love him and one another had he not called you. You would not delight in his law had he not first loved you, and set you free to get glory for him rather than for yourself.

Do you ever wonder what it feels like to be dead? Clue: verse 14. God created us to be creative, to multiply, to increase. When you don't, that's what it feels like to be dead. It feels like the Lord is giving no increase. What kind of increase does the Lord give that makes you feel alive? This is what kind: ^{Ps71.14}"But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more." Literally, I will add praise over all. I will add and add and add. *That's* what it feels like to be alive. Increasing forever in praise. One way that happens is that your children—natural and spiritual—add and add and add praise.

As God promised to Abraham, ^{Gen13.16}"I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted." That is increasing a lot of praise! As Peter preached, ^{Act2.39}"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." Naomi went to Moab with her whole family and ten years later came back with only one daughter-in-law. Without Ruth, there would have been no Christ. Ruth's descendant is the source and the object of all true praise the world has ever uttered. God used one miserable missionary named Naomi to increase a lot of praise!^{Ruth}

Why else do you think God has us here in Portsmouth? By his grace, he intends to make our praise increase—to add and add and add to the praises of this church. What greater blessing is there for believers, than to see more and more and more glory given to God's name—not ours—because of his love and faithfulness in redeeming the souls of lost sinners as he did ours? Great Grace of glory.

VI. Great Gratitude of Glory

Finally, great Gratitude of glory. ¹⁶God owns all things. He has given to us dominion over his creatures on the earth. He has given to us life. Why did he give us life? Clue: ¹⁷"It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to silence; ¹⁸it is we who extol the LORD, both now and forevermore. Praise the LORD." He has given us His own life, that we might praise the Lord. He gives us the delight in praising Him, that we might live. He gave Himself to be near us, that we might live. He gave Himself to make us increase, that we might live.

How, then, do we live? Simple: by praising him, staying near him, and increasing praise unto him. Portsmouth has no shortage of gods. Stability, security, scenery, and self-sufficiency are among the current gods. Such gods come and go. Such gods have no power to make anyone happy. Such gods serve those who sing, "To me, O world, be the glory." Such gods are dead and are gods of the dead.

Our God is the God of the living. Are you glad to be alive, or would you rather be dead? Your praise of God in church, in your home, at work, at school, or on vacation, will tell you the answer to that question. It would serve you well to listen to the answer.

VII. Conclusion

I've run out of time for a proper conclusion. No, wait... When in the Psalms, do as the psalmists do. What more proper conclusion than...: "Praise the Lord!"