

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School
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A Christmas Meditation on Psalm 115:
O LORD, to Your Name Be the Glory!

1.0 Introducing Psalm 115

- After the Battle of Agincourt in France, October 25, 1415, King Henry V commanded his victorious troops to kneel and sing *Non nobis, Domine, sed tibi sit gloria* (Psalm 115):
“This note doth tell me of ten thousand French
That in the field lie slain: . . .
Where is the number of our English dead?
Edward the Duke of York, the Earl of Suffolk,
Sir Richard Ketly, Davy Gam, esquire:
None else of name; and of all other men
But five and twenty. O God, thy arm was here;
And not to us, but to thy arm alone,
Ascribe we all! . . .”
“Let there be sung ‘Non nobis’ and ‘Te Deum’ . . .”
— William Shakespeare, “The Life of King Henry V,” 4, 8.111-13, 127-28.
- Rudyard Kipling, “Non Nobis Domine!” (written for “The Pageant of Parliament” at Royal Albert Hall, London July 1934):
NON nobis Domine!—
Not unto us, O Lord!
The Praise or Glory be
Of any deed or word;
For in Thy Judgment lies
To crown or bring to nought
All knowledge or device
That man has reached or wrought.
- Psalm 115 is the third psalm in the “Egyptian Hallel” (Pss 113–118, see notes on Ps 113), traditionally recited at Passover.
 - ✓ Christmas is not Passover, but the Passover could not be fulfilled without Christmas. Before the Lamb of God could be the sacrifice for our sins, He had to become the Lamb of God with a body that could be sacrificed.

2.0 Reading Psalm 115 (NAU)



- 115:1** Not to us, O LORD, not to us,
But to Your name give glory
Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth.
- 115:2** Why should the nations say,
“Where, now, is their God?”
- 115:3** But our God is in the heavens;
He does whatever He pleases.
- 115:4** Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of man’s hands.
- 115:5** They have mouths, but they cannot speak;
They have eyes, but they cannot see;
- 115:6** They have ears, but they cannot hear;
They have noses, but they cannot smell;
- 115:7** They have hands, but they cannot feel;
They have feet, but they cannot walk;
They cannot make a sound with their throat.
- 115:8** Those who make them will become like them,
Everyone who trusts in them.
- 115:9** O Israel, trust in the LORD;
He is their help and their shield.
- 115:10** O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD;
He is their help and their shield.
- 115:11** You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD;
He is their help and their shield.
- 115:12** The LORD has been mindful of us;
He will bless *us*;
He will bless the house of Israel;
He will bless the house of Aaron.
- 115:13** He will bless those who fear the LORD,
The small together with the great.
- 115:14** May the LORD give you increase,
You and your children.
- 115:15** May you be blessed of the LORD,
Maker of heaven and earth.
- 115:16** The heavens are the heavens of the LORD,
But the earth He has given to the sons of men.
- 115:17** The dead do not praise the LORD,
Nor *do* any who go down into silence;
- 115:18** But as for us, we will bless the LORD
From this time forth and forever.

Praise the LORD!

3.0 Understanding Psalm 115

3.1 Outline

- I. The Prayer of Israel (vv. 1-2)
- II. The Powerlessness of Idols (vv. 3-8)
- III. The Preservation of Israel (vv. 9-11)
- IV. The Power of Israel's God (vv. 12-15)
- V. The Praise of Israel (vv. 16-18)



3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “Not to us”
 - This psalm alone begins and ends with an emphatic “us.”
 - In a psalm that depends so much on responding to the ridicule of unbelievers (“Where, now, is their God?”, v. 2), this opening denial is striking.
 - The spotlight should be upon God, not upon us.
 - Likewise, at Christmas we ought to focus on the *EL* in *IMMANUEL*, not on *IMMANU*.
- v. 1 “But to Your name give glory”
 - “Name” refers to the character and reputation of Yahweh. He is the covenant-keeping God who cares for His people.
 - Cf. Isaiah 42:8.
 - At the birth of Jesus, the angels made just such a proclamation (Luke 2:13-14).
- v. 2 “Where, now, is their God?”
 - Post-exilic Israel heard the derisive and mocking questions of pagan peoples who gleefully reminded the Israelites of their defeat at the hands of Babylon and their dependence on Persian power and wealth for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple.
 - ✓ Compare Psalm 79:10; Joel 2:17.
 - Over four centuries of mockery (cp. a similar number of years that Israel spent in Egypt) would end with God taking up residence among His people. *Immanuel* walked among the Israelites (Matt 1:23).
- v. 3 “He does whatever He pleases”
 - God is absolutely sovereign. This will be the great contrast: He Who can, does; those who can't, don't.
 - ✓ The idols have to be made, because they cannot make anything.
 - ✓ Which would a sane person trust?—the sovereign Creator of all things or manufactured idols?
 - God was pleased to send Christ in human flesh as incarnate deity (Col 1:19-20; cp. John 1:14, 18).

- **vv. 4-8** Idolatry
 - See Exodus 20:4-6 and Psalm 135:15-18 (which reproduces the first four of the seven physical characteristics of idols and the seven emphatic negations of their abilities). Other such texts include Isaiah 44:9-20 and Jeremiah 10:3-15.
 - Jesus is not a lifeless idol; He is the living God. Note Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16).
 - ✓ Compare 1 Timothy 4:10 and Acts 14:15.



- **v. 7** "their throat"
 - "The first word of v. 5 ('mouths') and the last word of v. 7 ('throats') in the MT form an inclusion, to emphasize that the idols, unlike the God of Israel, do not speak, reveal, promise, or utter any spoken word. Ultimately divine revelation is the difference between the religions of man and the true religion of the Lord."—Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 5:720-21.
 - The silent idols could not even grunt, peep, or whistle; the human cry of baby Jesus surpassed all that the idols could do.
- **v. 8** "will become like them"
 - The ultimate curse to befall idolaters is that they will become just as mute, blind, deaf, and dead as the idols they worship.
 - Such a description sets up the blessing of those who serve the living God.
 - ✓ The idolater is already dead; the believer is already alive forever.
 - ✓ The idolater does not praise God either on earth or in Sheol; the believer praises God of heaven and earth both on earth and in heaven.
 - In contrast, the believer shall become like Jesus (1 John 3:2).
- **vv. 8-11** "trust"
 - The repetition of "trust" in these verses is one of the repetitions highlighting Psalm 115.
 - ✓ The first occurrence of "trust" is negative (v. 8) and sets up the contrasting triplet (vv. 9-11).
 - ✓ Mention of three groups, representative all believers.
 - ✓ Repetition of a mini-refrain: "He is their help and their shield."
 - Trust must ultimately reside in Christ (Heb 2:9-18).
- **v. 9** "their help and their shield"
 - The Lord delivers and protects His people.
 - See Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalm 33:20.
 - Note the theme in Mary's "Magnificat" (Luke 1:46-55, esp. v. 54).

- **vv. 12-18** “bless”
 - Six references to “bless” close out the psalm with a focus on the result of trusting faith and the covenant faithfulness of God.
 - ✓ The first four are all “He will bless” (vv. 12-13).
 - ✓ The fifth summarizes the prayer of blessing tied to the Abrahamic Covenant (vv. 14-15). “Bless” with God as subject and man as object refers to God gifting man with the fulfillment of divine promises. See Acts 3:25-26.
 - ✓ The sixth turns to the believers blessing God. “Bless” with God as the recipient refers to acknowledging the LORD in His position of power with all the respect due Him. See Zacharias’ words in Luke 1:68.
- **v. 17** “The dead do not praise the LORD”
 - “Silence” is a euphemistic way to refer to Sheol, the abode of departed spirits whose voice is no longer heard on earth among the living (cf. Ps 94:17).
 - ✓ See Psalms 6:5; 30:9; 88:10-12.
 - ✓ Compare Luke 19:37-40.
- **v. 18** “we will bless the LORD”
 - Such blessing, in contrast to that which is non-existent for the dead, is qualified as “From this time forth and forever.”
 - ✓ “But in fact it looks ahead to endless praise (18); and while this may mean no more than an undying Israel to offer it, it may well be saying that we who serve the living God will ourselves live on, unlike the worshippers of lifeless objects If so, this stanza adds its witness to an after-life to such passages as 73:2ff. and others listed at 11:7; and it has every reason to end, like a number of its neighbours, with a Hallelujah.” — Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 407.
 - Compare Romans 16:25-27; Hebrews 13:20-21; 1 Peter 4:11.

4.0 Singing Psalm 115

Chorus: Not to us, to Your name be the glory, O Lord.

Idols of gold, have eyes that cannot see,
Have ears that cannot hear,
But You see all the earth,
You hear every cry, You are the Lord.

You are our help, You are our strength,
You are our shield.

We praise the living God, who reigns forevermore;
You are the Lord.



— Ryan Boys (2001)

Not Unto Us, O Lord of Heav'n

(Tune: "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" or "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"
or "Faith of Our Fathers" or "And Can It Be That I Should Gain?")

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| <p>1 Not unto us, O Lord of Heav'n,
But unto Thee be glory given;
In love and truth Thou dost fulfill
The counsels of Thy sovereign will;
Though nations fail Thy pow'r to own,
Yet Thou dost reign, and Thou alone.</p> <p>3 Let Israel trust in God alone,
The Lord Whose grace and pow'r are
known;
To Him your full allegiance yield,
And He will be your Help and Shield;
All those who fear Him God will bless,
His saints have proved His faithfulness.</p> <p>5 The heavens are God's since time began,
But He has given the earth to man;
The dead praise not the living God,
But we will sound His praise abroad,
Yea, we will ever bless His Name;
Praise ye the Lord, His praise proclaim.</p> | <p>2 The idol gods of heathen lands
Are but the work of human hands;
They cannot see, they cannot speak,
Their ears are deaf, their hands are weak;
Like them shall be all those who hold
To gods of silver and of gold.</p> <p>4 All ye that fear Him and adore,
The Lord increase you more and more;
Both great and small who Him confess,
You and your children He will bless.
Yea, we will ever bless His Name;
Praise ye the Lord, His praise proclaim.</p> |
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— *The Psalter* 1912

5.0 Praying Psalm 115

- To Your Name be all the glory, Lord. [v. 1]
- Father, I praise You because You speak, You see, You hear, You feel, and You move. [vv. 5-7]
- Increase my trust in You, O God. [v. 11]
- Thank You, Lord, for Your blessings upon me. [v. 15]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 115

- Give all the glory to God alone—He has saved us.
- We become like what or whom we trust.
- 1 Peter 1:3-9.