

Introduction

Last week I brought your attention to the reality that this nation is pressing forward intensively in the direction of open hostility toward biblical Christianity. As cultures follow the prince of the power of the air, they plunge deeper and deeper into the passions of the flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. Consequently they become increasingly hostile to light that would expose the wickedness of their lives and pursuits. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and the extraction of God from the fiber of the country and its government marked a turning point in this nation. The move toward freedom FROM religion rather than freedom OF religion has gained significant ground. We see an increasing determination to shame and vilify those who are not on board with the so-called progress that is being made.

When people exchange the truth of God for lies and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator, God will give them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity. They will dishonor their bodies among themselves in all sorts of degradation. Paul wrote the Romans that "since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless." These aspects of darkness are becoming more and more pervasive in our society and culture.

The culture increasingly is exchanging the truth about God for a lie. It worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator. In essence the culture is scorning biblical Christians as though to say, "Where is your God?" "The wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart." The question is "what can the righteous do?" And the answer of the one who wrote Psalm 115 is that we must behold the compelling glory of God. We must keep our eyes on him. So let us turn our eyes there and read the psalm together.

[Read Text and Pray]

As I pointed out a week ago, Psalm 115 is the message of a worship leader. He calls the congregation to worship and to praise the Lord. It is apparent that God's people are experiencing a time of persecution. The nations are saying to them, "Where is your God?" They are questioning the power, the presence, even the very being of the God of Israel.

And yet the message of the worship leader is for the people of God to look beyond their circumstances and beyond the mockery to look to God himself. The central point is that God's people are to make much of his glory. It is the right thing in light of who God is, but it is also the very thing we need in these distressing days.

Last time we saw the glory of God as the consuming passion of the psalmist in verse 1. Then we began to consider the glory of God displayed in the fact that "our God is in the heavens and does all that he pleases."

We continue moving through the psalm and the psalmist presents: The Glory of God Magnified. Smart jewelers know how to display their merchandise. They rely upon backgrounds and stands and lighting that enable customers to better see the quality of the craftsmanship and the sparkle of the facets. Jewelry always looks its best and brightest in the jewelry case. Likewise, the psalmist knows

how to highlight the glory of God so its magnificence is better seen. Having just displayed God's glory in that he is the God who sovereignly rules from heaven, the psalmist now turns up the volume, so to speak. He magnifies God's glory by setting the Lord against the backdrop of the gods of the nations. The nations may be saying "Where is your God?" But do not be intimidated by their audacity. The derision of the nations simply displays how blind and foolish they are. Just consider the gods they worship. The only things those gods can do is to help us further see how great is the one true God who is our God.

First we note

I. The Material of the False Gods

Their gods are idols made of silver and gold. They are material. Silver and gold may be costly materials, but at the end of the day, they are materials of this world. These false gods subsist as matter. They exist within the bounds of time and are subject to outside influences. Temperature, for example, has an effect upon matter. You can heat gold and silver thus melting the metal and changing its shape. Pressure is another force within the material world that can affect these precious metals. Gold and silver are highly malleable. With heat or pressure you can literally turn one god into another. Moreover, these metals are not strong. They must be merged with other materials to be useful. The merging process adds impurities.

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. Strikingly gods of gold and silver stand in pathetic contrast to the one true God and serve to highlight his glory. He is not material. He is not subject to the ebbs and flows of the material world. Neither temperature nor pressure can affect God. He is constant and unchangeable. We refer to this attribute as immutability. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever! With him there is no alteration or shifting shadow. He does not change and his definition of righteousness does not change. He is perfect. He can't be more or less than what or who he is. There is no room for improvement and no possibility to diminish.

By nature God is Spirit. He is non-material. Matter is his creation not his substance. He is eternal, immortal, and invisible by his nature. He is incorruptible. He infinitely exceeds any and every so-called god which exists as matter. That which is material is a reflection of his creative genius but is no threat to him. He spoke matter into existence and he can evaporate it out of that same existence. Our God transcends matter; the better we know this fact the better grasp we will have of his glory.

And he wants us to have this grasp. To reject this grasp is sin. God is zealous to be recognized and worshiped in accord to his glory. The second commandment prohibits the making of a carved image for the purpose of worship. The Lord says, "You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord am a jealous God." He is jealous for who he is, for his reputation, for how his creatures see him. It is a violation of his law for his creatures to imagine his essence in material terms. If we settle for less than he is, we diminish his actual glory. In diminishing his actual glory, we create a god of our own who is not the true God. But in refusing to minimize him, in holding him as beyond the material world of time and space, temperature and pressure, we behold him as he is. And we would proclaim with the psalmist, "Why should the nations say, 'where is their God?' Our God is in the heavens." He is really God. And we would proclaim with the Apostle Paul when he wrote to Timothy, "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever."

People in certain places in the world today still literally bow down before idols. They worship statues of gold and silver and other materials. Others do not bow their knees but they bow their lives before

items made of matter. Their lives revolve around the material world as though nothing greater exists. They too exchange the truth of God for a lie and they worship and serve that which is created rather than the Creator. The results are catastrophic because they miss out on the wonder and magnificence of our glorious God, and he is inclined to turn them over to the debased and destructive desires of their hearts.

The psalmist takes us from the material of the false gods to

II. The Maker of the False Gods.

Not only are their gods silver and gold, the gods of the nations are the work of human hands. They derive from human design and human thought and human fabrication. They are the result of human ingenuity and human strength. Yet humans fall down before these gods as though they are made by the gods. It is complete folly.

The gods of the nations are not divine at all. Neither are they human. They are not even alive. Just think, which is greater, the maker or that which is made? The watchmaker or the watch? The rocket scientist or the rocket? Charles Spurgeon makes the point that "inasmuch as the maker is always greater than the thing that he has made, these idols are less to be honored than the artificers, who fashion them. How irrational that men should adore that which is less than themselves! How strange that a man should think that he can make a god! Can madness go further?" I would add that by definition a god is supernatural and therefore greater than man, but when man makes the god, he violates the definition. It is lunacy to think the natural can create the supernatural. So in worship of a god he himself has made, humanity bows before what is even less than himself as though it is greater.

And yet human beings shield themselves from the fact of their folly and convince themselves they are wise. Claiming to be wise god-makers, humans bow before that which is no god at all. And why do they stoop to such unconscionable depths of foolishness? Because, their ultimate goal is to replace the One True God with deities more suited to their darkened minds and fleshly pleasures and desires. They would rather believe a lie and worship a deceptive figment of their imagination than to reckon with the truth. This darkness is wilful. They possess deluded hearts that have led them astray.

But those who fear and worship the one true and living God can see the folly. It is like lightening across the sky. Against the backdrop of idols fashioned in gold and silver, created by human hands, behold the glory of your God! He is not bound to this earth but is Spirit. He is made by no one but has himself made the heavens and the earth. He is not conceived within the mind of a man but He has conceived of man and has made him in his image, a little lower than the angels. This God is great beyond our minds and thought. He must reveal himself to us that we might know him. And to know him is everything. This is eternal life that we know him.

The day and the culture in which we live is not populated by idols made of precious metals. But it is full of idols. They are conceived in the mind of man. Contemporary American humanity manufactures idols as mental constructs. Within their own minds and in the context of their own experience, human beings form their own idea of what a god should be. And since they know themselves to be so brilliant, they believe in the idea of God their minds have formed. And they reject God's revelation wherever it stands in contrast to the idea they have concocted. These gods are of no more value than the false gods of gold and silver. Spurgeon rightly declares that "A god who can be fashioned by our own thoughts is no more a god than the image manufactured or produced by our own hands. The true God must of necessity be his own revealer." That is to say

that given the fact that human beings are creatures, made by God, if we are to know God, it is necessary that God show us who he is. If we think we know God by virtue of our intelligence, we are gravely mistaken; we are creating an idol. Left to ourselves we will create a god far diminished from what he really is. And that is the story that is told by the idols of the nations.

The true God has revealed himself to be in the heavens and to do all that HE pleases. He is not material nor can we as humans fully comprehend him. The message of the psalmist is that we should give glory to God and we have no reason to be alarmed by the mockery of the nations, who say, "Where is your God?" And the basis is the magnificence of our God. That magnificence stands in complete contrast to the pitiful gods whom the mockers worship.

The false gods are material; they are made by humans. Next, notice . . .

III. The Makeup of the False Gods.

What I mean by makeup is not cosmetics but the makeup of the idols—how they are made. You see, the psalmist points out that the metallic figures have features—humanesque features. They have mouths and eyes. They have ears and noses. They have hands and feet. These features suggest the idols possess abilities. They APPEAR capable of the same abilities which humans possess. But, says the psalmist, it is a delusion. They do not actually possess those abilities. Abilities are ascribed to them, but in fact the idols are completely powerless. They will never speak or see or hear or smell. They will never feel or walk. They will never even make a sound in their throats.

Against the backdrop of these hopeless, helpless, and useless idols, our God, who is in the heavens, can do everything they cannot do and so much more! The one true God in his essence possesses none of the features of the false gods, but he can do everything they cannot. God is invisible. He does not possess a mouth as such or eyes or ears or a nose or hands or feet. But he possess the abilities that are marked by these features at a level incomprehensible to us.

Just think. The idols are silent, but our God speaks. He speaks within himself. He speaks creation into existence. He speaks instructions. He speaks his testimonies. He communicates comfort and assurance as well as judgment. Why, it is GOD's idea to make his creatures with mouths so that we are able to speak. Hebrews 1:1 says, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." It is a reason to praise our God and stand in awe of him that he speaks but also that he speaks to us to declare to us his glory and instruct us for our good and assure us with his promises.

The idols are blind, but our God sees. He perceives just as clearly when it is dark as when it is light. And he looks from the material realm into the immaterial. He even looks upon the heart. He sees all. Nothing escapes his sight.

The idols are deaf but God hears. Psalm 94:9 asks, "He who planted the ear, does he not hear?" And think, what does he hear? He hears every lie, every curse, and every wicked word ever spoken. He hears it every time someone takes his name in vain. But he also hears the desperate cry of his people for help.

The idols of the nations have anosmia. They can't smell and covid is not the reason. But our God can! He does! He made smells. He prescribed incense to be burned at the tabernacle. The scripture tells us that the prayers of God's people go up as incense to our God. 2 Corinthians 2:15 says that believers "are the aroma of Christ to God."

The idols of the nations can't feel, but feeling is the idea of our God. He senses pain and he administers comfort. Jesus felt the nails. Jesus touched the hurting. The Bible intimates that God is touched—he feels the burden of our weaknesses. The writer of Hebrews says, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). He feels.

The idols of the nations have feet but cannot walk. Our God does not have literal feet, but he does not need to walk because he is omnipresent. He is amazing. W. S. Plummer writes, "How vain must be the help of gods, who can neither speak, nor see, nor hear, nor smell, nor feel, nor walk, nor resent the greatest insult offered to them, nor avenge the greatest wrong done to their devotees." How completely different is the true God! Not only does he possess all these abilities, he also loves! He is gracious and merciful and He forgives all who will draw near to him in Christ Jesus! He GIVES! He gave his only begotten Son so that whoever will believe in him will have eternal life! This God is our God—the God of those who have turned from sinning against him and trusted in his Son for salvation.

We would be silly to fear when the nations rage. Sure they can harm us physically. They can even kill us, but they cannot separate us from our God. Our God is so great and so glorious that "neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus." To him be praise!

Lastly, I want you to see . . .

IV. The Impact of the False Gods.

Verse 8 states, "Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them." The psalmist sounds a strong note of assurance for the people who fear the one true God. Having pointed to the foolishness of the false gods, he now points to those who make them and who trust in them and he says, they become just like them.

A. We have seen that the false gods are worthless. They may be made from precious metals, but they are of no more value as gods than mud. Plummer says, "A man might as well expect help and salvation from an old shoe or from a tattered garment as from an image made from anything, however costly the material or curious the workmanship" (Psalms, 995). Those gods are worthless to help their worshipers. And their worshipers are just like them; they are worthless to help you. When the nations rage against the true God, don't stop trusting God and don't put your trust in the ungodly. As incapable as are their gods to help them, even so are they who worship them incapable to help you. Do not compromise to please the ungodly or you will become like them. Plain and simple, do not be conformed to this world. It cannot help you. But behold your glorious God. He will not be overcome. He IS ABLE to help you.

B. Now, here is a second way in which the worshipers and makers of false gods are like them. They aren't what they appear. They are false in every way. They appear to have capability, but in actuality, they are powerless. They have mouths but cannot speak, feet but cannot walk. These gods are powerless. They may appear threatening, but they can do nothing. So it is with those who trust the false gods. They appear indomitable and threatening as they undauntedly cry out, "Where is your God?" But like the gods they make and worship, they are powerless to threaten you who worship the one true God. Do not fear them who can merely kill the body. They can only test your faith according to the will of God, but they cannot kill the soul. Rather fear the one true God who can destroy both body and soul in hell. The world may rage loudly and proudly, but do not be fooled

by its appearance. Do not fear. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Fear not to acknowledge Jesus Christ no matter what. Do not be afraid of their appearance or their volume. It is a delusion.

Conclusion

The greatness of the glory of our marvelous God assures us and enables us to hold on with hope no matter what is going on around us. If we seek his glory, then we can rest assured. We must seek to know him.

My mind has been on Ephesians 1 over the last several weeks. Here is where Paul tells the saints how he prays for them. He prays that they will know the hope to which they are called, the riches of God's inheritance, and the great power which is theirs in Christ. Present hope, future hope, and power—we desperately need these in this day. But that's not where Paul started in his prayer. He shows the saints that there is a prerequisite which is necessary for them to know the hope, the riches, and the power. And that prerequisite is what he prays for. Do you know what it is? Paul prays first that the saints will know God. Essentially he says, "I pray that God will give you wisdom and unveiling to know God, in order that you may know hope, riches, and power." That is where we are in Psalm 115 this morning. Knowing God better and better, we will stand in hope and assurance when the nations rage and ask, "Where is your God?"

We can assuredly reply, "Our God is in the heavens. He is doing his will. He speaks. He sees. He hears your assault. He hears our plea. He saves from sin and he will save from our enemies." We can respond like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when Nebuchadnezzar threatened to throw them in the furnace unless they bowed down before his golden image. Undaunted, they said, "our God whom we serve is ABLE to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he WILL deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

May God give us the courage and conviction of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as we know him better and better.