

Psalm 115

Ancient Words for a New Decade

Ryan Perz, January 5, 2020

If you have not made any New Year's resolutions for 2020 there is no need to fret. You are in good company. According to a survey done in 2018, only 1 in 5 people make New Year's resolutions. New Year's resolutions are just about making a new habit. Most are usually centered around fitness or some self-improvement.

Personally, I believe that one of the best habits we build is regular intake of the Psalms. If I were stranded on an island and only allowed one book of the Bible with me, I'd pick Psalms, hands down.

There are two reasons we are looking at Ps 115, before jumping back into Acts:

1. I hope to whet your appetite for the Psalms if you are not regularly reading them. I can't overstate how vital the Psalms are in cultivating our relationship with God.
2. This Psalm in particular—these ancient words—help us to focus as we enter a new year and new decade with a central theme, God's glory.

The picture is a worship leader crying out, "focus on God's glory. It's all about him, not about us!" Not to us...in case you didn't hear...not to us!!"

When it comes to accomplishments, how often we need reminded, "Not to us" ...more than once!!

- Working through the Psalm helps us answer a question we all should ask:

How can my life be all about His Glory?

We live in a time where "selfie" is a normal word in our vocabulary; we are surrounded with I Devices, we can pull up almost anything on demand. Life is all about us and consuming things that make us believe that it's all about us.

We need a lot of help to shift our focus and see that life is not about me, but all about his glory. The message of Psalm 115 is that help.

I imagine two groups will be helped:

1. Those who have lived, want to live for God's glory, but need a *reminder*. God is pleased with your desire and affirms it. Keep on.
2. Those who are asleep to living for God's glory. May the truth from the Word awaken you!

Question: *How can our lives be all about his glory?*

1. When we see the failure and futility of idolatry (1-8)

- We begin with a skeptical question from unbelievers (v2); Israel does not have anything tangible, visible to represent God.

There are two answers:

- 1) V3—God is in heaven. He does all he pleases.
- 2) (4-6) Answers in biting sarcasm, like when the prophet Elijah mocked the Baal worshipers.

Just compare idols with the Lord.

—Idols don't sit up high in heaven. They are a product of the earth (human hands), and they can do nothing they please.

—Mouths that cannot speak: an idol's words have no power. The Lord's Word has creative power. The Lord reveals who he is by speaking.

—Eyes but cannot see; no oversight over our lives

—Ears but do not hear; can't respond. God hears prayers and responds.

—Hands but do not feel, feet but do not walk; no care and no ability to help

A mute, impotent, unresponsive, non-caring, helpless, lifeless God-substitute. That's what an idol is. Now we need to make application in 2020. Most people I know are not tempted to erect a totem pole. I don't see a lot of people crafting silver and gold statues.

Yet still, idols are the primary threat to God's glory.

One author: “We too may instinctively want to glorify the Lord, yet facing the *sometimes trivial anxieties of life*, we struggle to trust in the Lord.”

Idols compete with the Lord for our trust.

- Idolatry in scripture is broader than just a molten image:
(Col 3:5) Greed is a form of idolatry.
- Also, even God’s children are enticed by idolatry (1 Jn 5:21).
- An idol is anything we look to as our ultimate trust, help, and security.

It can be

- A person, a possession we have, a position, a pleasure we live for/can’t live without.
- But also “little things” can be idols. This includes my will, my agenda, my timing.

Back in 2006 I was wrapping up my time at CIU. At the counsel of the elders, I applied to Southern Seminary in Louisville KY. I felt great, like I had the direction and was in the middle of God’s will. For some reason the admissions process at Southern took forever. We were within a week or so of needing to be moved out of our house here. I didn’t have time to wait anymore. Each day after class I’d go to the mailbox...and nothing. And each day I felt less and less in control, I became more agitated and unhappy. My lovely wife knew how frustrated I was and was patient with me, but my attitude was awful.

One day the Spirit pricked me about how much this admission letter was controlling me. A piece of paper controlled me, one of those “trivial anxieties of life.” I took some time in prayer, confessed, and gave it to God.

When I got home, Emily noticed the change. I can’t remember all I said. But she knew I had identified the idol and wanted it gone. She told me to go over and open a little door inside a piece of furniture. Lo and behold, there was the admissions letter! She had found it in the mail earlier but was not going to let me see it until my attitude changed. I didn’t know I signed up for that kind of accountability on my wedding day!

I wanted something that I could hold, see, trust in.

I forgot that I had a God in heaven who does all he pleases.

If he pleases to delay something in my life, it's ok. It's all for his glory anyhow.

Idols are glory thieves. They sap and drain the spiritual life out of us. The more trust we give to them, the less glory we give to God.

- The biting sarcasm of v8—if you make or trust an idol you become like it—lifeless.

Are you able to identify which ones are enticing?

Gospel: If you are in a lifeless pursuit of idols, turning to Jesus changes everything!

(1 Thess 1:9)

“how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

- This Psalm is part of the Hallel Psalms, sung at Passover. It was sung by Jesus and his disciples before the cross. It is a song of Jesus!
 - The Psalm fortified Jesus's faith in his final hours, down to the key words: "The Lord is in heaven, he does all that he pleases"
- It sounds similar to (Is 53:10 CSB), "Yet the Lord was pleased to crush him".

In contrast to idols, Jesus,

—Has a mouth that speaks the very truth of God

—Had eyes that look to and take pity on sinners

—Has ears that hear those who cry out to him for mercy

—Had hands that touch with healing, the same hands that were pinned to a cross, and bled to secure our forgiveness

God gets the glory from our lives when we identify our idols and bring them to the foot of the cross. He gets glory when instead of trusting in an idol we turn to Jesus for help and security.

2. When we seek a deep love for the Lord (9-15)

- The nature of idols is that they need to be identified, forsaken/avoided, and replaced.

- The only worthy replacement of a lifeless idol is the Lord himself.
- (9-11) It's written in a liturgical way. Picture a responsive song.

It has 3 calls to trust in the Lord, followed by three affirmations that he does indeed help.

- I want to draw our attention to words that describe our relationship to God: trust, help, fear. They all describe the way we seek a deep love for the Lord, and he blesses.

Trust—That's really the main theme and main question of this Psalm. Who will you trust? The answer determines if God gets the glory.

(Rom 4:20) Abraham "grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God" .

Growing in trust is an avenue of giving God the glory.

Help—As we trust, God helps. The help is really his protection over us
 "He is our help and shield"—the Lord offers security that idols never can!

Fear—Twice (v11, 13) the Psalm identifies the faithful as those who fear the Lord.

Trust the Lord, fear the Lord—by doing so, we seek a deep love for the Lord.

Our love for the Lord is not just when we are on an emotional high and love. Our love for the Lord is seen in acts of trust and fear.

- Finally, there is very important point in (v12-13) *The Lord remembers and will bless!*
- This is the fruit of seeking a deep love for the Lord.
- "The Lord remembers us" is equal to "the Lord has acted on our behalf"
- God has unlimited resources to bless his people with (v15)

*Yet one of the greatest areas God wants to bless us is often overlooked

(V14)—May the Lord give you *increase*

—Under the old covenant, this would be the increase of children. But after Pentecost, the increase is seen in *conversions* and *disciples multiplying*.

(Acts 6:7)

Think about it. If your main goal for 2020 was to lose 20lbs, that's great. With a lot of discipline, you can get it. But in 80 years, will it really matter?

But if your goal for 2020 was to take many opportunities to sow gospel seeds, invest spiritually, and disciple others. If God blesses that increase, in a billion years it will still matter!

3. When our purpose is his praise (16-18)

- The way this Psalm is structured is the beginning and end go together.
- V 16 reaffirms what we saw in v3
- But it also expands it. Creation is a gift given to mankind. We are stewards, trustees, guardians. But our attention is not to be on the gift (creation) but the giver and what we *owe him ... Praise*.
- The South Carolina set Motto: "While I Breathe, I Hope." The disciple's motto: "While I Breathe, I Praise".

Two things about praise:

1. Enthusiasm. Every new year I'm reminded that human beings can be very enthusiastic—New Year Eve celebrations and NFL playoffs, for example.

How much does the praise of God light our enthusiasm?

2. Eternal (v18). We are not made for temporal praise, but eternal.

The principle is this: If you praise God in this life—you get the joy of doing so for eternity.

Conclusion:

Spurgeon, on his sermon on Psalm 115 said:

"The glory of God is the jewel of the universe, of which all else is the setting".

Is the glory of God the jewel of your life? Are you committed to destroying idols and growing in trust in the Lord? We can do a lot of good with our lives in a year and also a lot of bad. But nothing will be wasted if these ancient words direct us in all we do. "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory."